

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF SAINT ISAAC THE SYRIAN.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Summer and spring hast Thou fashioned (Psalms 73:18 [74:17 KJV]).

When a sailor voyages in the midst of the sea, he watches the stars and in relation to them he guides his ship until he reaches harbor. But a monk watches prayer, because it sets him right and directs his course to that harbor toward which his discipline should lead. A monk gazes at prayer at all times, so that it might show him an island where he can anchor his ship and take on provisions; then once more he sets his course for another island. Such is the voyage of a monk in this life: he sails from one island to another, that is, from knowledge to knowledge, and by his successive change of islands, that is, of states of knowledge, he progresses until he emerges from the sea and his journey attains to that true city, whose inhabitants no longer engage in commerce but each rests upon his own riches. Blessed is the man who has not lost his course in this vain world, on this great sea! Blessed is the man whose ship has not broken up and who has reached harbor with joy! [Homily 48.]

Bestower of Grace, loving Saviour of mortals,
O Christ God, be pleased to accept this oblation,
Of the prayers, deeds, and writings of wondrous Mar Isaac,
Which arise like the fragrance of spiritual incense.

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On Hidden States and the Powers and Operations Therein.

What the power of spring customarily does to the earth's nature, this also does grace do to the soul through purity. The power of springtime causes even the delicate roots that grow in the valleys to sprout, warming the earth like a fire does a cauldron, so that it sends forth the treasures of verdure that God has planted in the earth's nature to gladden creation and for His own glory. In like manner grace causes the manifest blossoming of all the splendor that God has concealed in the soul's nature, and it shows this to her and causes her to rejoice in its beauty. [Appendix A. IV.]

FORWARD.

As the light breezes of springtime, as that gentle breeze wherein God spake to Elias at Horeb (III Kings 19:12 [I Kings 19:12 KJV]), so also are the Ascetical Homilies of Mar Isaac the Syrian to the thirsty soul which, like the psalmic hart, panteth after the living waters. Bitter winter is passed, and springtime has dawned which invigorates all creation, followed by summer wherein the fruit ripens and the crops are harvested. And even as the Lord has fashioned the natural seasons, so has he fashioned spiritual spring and summer wherein grace abounds like unto gentle showers, which drench the earth till she sprout forth all the good things which are unto life. In like manner our God and Fashioner, the Father of Lights, and our Lord and Saviour Jesus the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Spirit of Truth, has by the hand of Saint Abba Isaac, the vessel of election, given us this present volume of homilies as a springtime and summertime for our souls, unto 'the manifest blossoming of all the splendor that God has concealed in the soul's nature' and that we might 'rejoice in its beauty'.

For many centuries now this holy book, in manuscript and in printed form, has been a guide to monastics. It was written primarily for hermits and inhabitants of the desert who dwell in stillness. In the words of Saint Isaac himself, the aim and purpose of these homilies and instructions is that one may—

—learn what is the life of stillness, what is its work, what mysteries are concealed in this discipline [[mysteries that are hidden from many, but after the discovery of which strenuous men run, seeking to attain them in stillness]], and why some men belittle the righteousness that is practiced in the society of men and prefer to it the tribulations and struggles of a silent and solitary abode. [[From the understanding of these things and because of what they find in this epistle, men will call blessed the solitaries who pass their lives in this world by remaining concentrated and by themselves. But to those who have no acquaintance with these matters this instruction, with all its admonitions, about the stages that are in stillness will be superfluous. I write here to wise men, and I offer advice with love]] (Homily 65).

Since the primary purpose of this book is the instruction of those in the desert, one may rightly ask why the great labor and personal cost in translating and preparing such a

work was undertaken, since there are so few, if any, desert-dwellers and workers of stillness in the world today? The answer can be found in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by Saint John Climacus, who writes: 'Angels are a light for monks, and the monastic life is a light for all men' (Step 26:31).

Thus, both monastics living in *coenobia* (monasteries or convents of communal life and rule) and lay people can glean words of instruction for salvation from those living the angelic life in stillness.

PEARLS.

Short Quotations Gathered From the Ascetical Homilies.

A man who craves esteem cannot be rid of the causes of grief. [Homily 1.]

Spiritual delight is not enjoyment found in things that exist substantially outside the souls of those who receive it [[and are promised to us for the restitution to come]]. If it were, then the words, 'The Kingdom of the Heavens is within you' and, 'Thy Kingdom come' would mean that we have acquired matter of a palpable nature within us as the earnest of the delight found in that Kingdom. [Homily 2.]

Through the toil of prayer and the anguish of your heart commune with those who are grieved at heart, and the Source of mercy will be opened up to your petitions. [Homily 2.]

Beware of reading the doctrines of heretics for they, more than anything else, can arm the spirit of blasphemy against you. [Homily 4.]

It is just as shameful for lovers of the flesh and the belly to search out spiritual things as it is for a harlot to discourse on chastity. [Homily 4.]

Whenever you wish to make a beginning in some good work, first prepare yourself for the temptations that will come upon you, and do not doubt the truth. [Homily 5.]

He who is able to suffer wrong with joy, though having means at hand to rebuff it, has [[consciously]] received from God the consolation of his faith. [Homily 5.]

The man who endures accusations against himself with humility has arrived at perfection, and he is marveled at by the holy angels, for there is no other virtue so great and so hard to achieve. [Homily 5.]

When temptation overtakes the iniquitous man, he has no confidence wherewith to call upon God, nor to expect salvation from Him, since in the days of his ease he stood aloof from God's will. [Homily 5.]

Before the war begins, seek after your ally; before you fall ill, seek out your Physician; and before grievous things come upon you, pray, and in the time of your tribulations you will find Him, and He will hearken to you. [Homily 5.]

Before you stumble, call out and make supplication; and before you make a vow, have ready what things you promise, for they are your provisions afterwards. [Homily 5.]

The ark of Noe was built in the time of peace, and its timbers were planted by him a hundred years beforehand. In the time of wrath the iniquitous perished but the ark became the shelter for the righteous man. [Homily 5.]

Love the poor, that through them you may also find mercy. [Homily 5.]

Do not disdain those who are deformed from birth, because all of us will go to the grave equally privileged. [Homily 5.]

Love sinners, but hate their works; and do not despise them for their faults, lest you be tempted by the same. [Homily 5.]

It is better to elude the passions by the recollection of the virtues than by resisting and disputing with them. For when the passions leave their place and arise for battle, they imprint on the mind images and idols, and this warfare has great force, able to weaken the mind and violently to perturb and confuse a man's thinking. But if a man acts by the first rule we have mentioned, when the passions are repulsed they leave no trace in the mind. [Homily 6.]

Just as the dolphin stirs and swims about when the visible sea is still and calm, so also, when the sea of the heart is tranquil and still from wrath and anger, mysteries and divine revelations are stirred in her at all times to delight her. [Homily 15.]

That which befalls a fish out of water, befalls the mind that has come out of the remembrance of God and wanders in the remembrance of the world. [Homily 15.]

Just as fish perish from lack of water, so the noetic movements that God causes to blossom forth vanish from the heart of the monk who loves to dwell and pass his life in company with worldly men. [Homily 15.]

The more a man's tongue flees talkativeness, the more his intellect is illumined so as to be able to discern deep thoughts; for the rational intellect is bemuddled by talkativeness. [Homily 15.]

Who does not love a humble and meek man? Only proud men and slanderers, who are foreign to his work. [Homily 15.]

Flee from discussions of dogma as from an unruly lion; and never embark upon them yourself, either with those raised in the Church, or with strangers. [Homily 17.]

The saints of the age to come do not pray with prayer when their intellects have been swallowed up by the Spirit, but rather with awestruck wonder they dwell in that gladdening glory. [Homily 23.]

The cell of a solitary is the cleft in the rock where God spoke with Moses, as the Fathers say. [Homily 25.]

I also maintain that those who are punished in Gehenna are scourged by the scourge of love. Nay, what is so bitter and vehement as the torment of love? I mean that those who have become conscious that they have sinned against love suffer greater torment from this than from any fear of punishment. For the sorrow caused in the heart by sin against love is more poignant than any torment. It would be improper for a man to think that sinners in Gehenna are deprived of the love of God. Love is the offspring of knowledge of the truth which, as is commonly confessed, is given to all. The power of love works in two ways: it torments sinners, even as happens here when a friend suffers from a friend; but it becomes a source of joy for those who have observed its duties. Thus I say that this is the torment of Gehenna: bitter regret. But love inebriates the souls of the sons of Heaven by its delectability. [Homily 28.]

On that day God will not judge us about psalmody, nor for the neglect of prayer, but because by abandoning them we have opened our door to the demons. [Homily 32.]

Stillness mortifies the outward senses and resurrects the inward movements, whereas an outward manner of life does the opposite, that is, it resurrects the outward senses and deadens the inward movements. [Homily 37.]

What is the sign that a man has attained to purity of heart, and when does a man know that his heart has entered into purity? When he sees all men as good and none appears to him to be unclean and defiled, then in very truth his heart is pure. [Homily 37.]

Whenever in your path you find unchanging peace, beware: you are very far from the divine paths trodden by the weary feet of the saints. For as long as you are journeying in the way to the city of the Kingdom and are drawing nigh the city of God, this will be a sign for you: the strength of the temptations that you encounter. And the nearer you draw nigh and progress, the more temptations will multiply against you. [Homily 42.]

Faith is the door to mysteries. What the bodily eyes are to sensory objects, the same is faith to the eyes of the intellect that gaze at hidden treasures. [Homily 46.]

Paradise is the love of God, wherein is the enjoyment of all blessedness, and there the blessed Paul partook of supernatural nourishment. [Homily 46.]

Until we find love, our labor is in the land of tares, and in the midst of tares we both sow and reap, even if our seed is the seed of righteousness. [Homily 46.]

The man who has found love eats and drinks Christ every day and hour and hereby is made immortal. 'He that eateth of this bread', He says, 'which I will give him, shall not see death unto eternity'. Blessed is he who consumes the bread of love, which is Jesus! He who eats of love eats Christ, the God over all, as John bears witness, saying, 'God is love'. [Homily 46.]

Love is the Kingdom, whereof the Lord mystically promised His disciples to eat

in His Kingdom. For when we hear Him say, 'Ye shall eat and drink at the table of My Kingdom' what do we suppose we shall eat, if not love? Love is sufficient to nourish a man instead of food and drink. This is the wine 'which maketh glad the heart of man'. Blessed is he who partakes of this wine! Licentious men have drunk this wine and felt shame; sinners have drunk it and have forgotten the pathways of stumbling; drunkards have drunk this wine and become fasters; the rich have drunk it and desired poverty; the poor have drunk it and been enriched with hope; the sick have drunk it and become strong; the unlearned have taken it and been made wise. [Homily 46.]

As it is not possible to cross over the great ocean without a ship, so no one can attain to love without fear. This foetid sea, which lies between us and the noetic paradise, we may cross by the boat of repentance, whose oarsmen are those of fear. But if fear's oarsmen do not pilot the barque of repentance whereby we cross over the sea of this world to God, we shall be drowned in the foetid abyss. [Homily 46.]

The man who chooses to consider God an avenger, presuming that [in this manner] he bears witness to His justice, the same accuses Him of being bereft of goodness. Far be it, that vengeance could ever be found in that Fountain of love and Ocean brimming with goodness! The aim of His design is the correction of men; and if it were not that we should be stripped of the honor of our free will, perhaps He would not even heal us by reproof. [Homily 48.]

A mind that has found spiritual wisdom is like a man who finds a fully equipped ship at sea, and once he has gone aboard, it brings him from the sea of this world to the isle of the age to come. In like manner, the perception of the future age while in this world is like an islet in the ocean; and he who approaches it toils no longer amid the billows of the appearances of this age. [Homily 48.]

A swimmer dives naked into the sea until he finds a pearl; and a wise monk, stripped of everything, journeys through life until he finds in himself the Pearl, Jesus Christ; and when he finds Him, he does not seek to acquire anything else besides Him. [Homily 48.]

A serpent guards its head when its body is being crushed, and a wise solitary guards his faith at all times, for this is the origin of his life. [Homily 48.]

A dog that licks a rasp drinks its own blood and does not know its own harm because of the sweetness of the blood; and a solitary who stoops to drink vainglory, consumes his life and does not perceive his harm because of the fleeting sweetness. [Homily 48.]

Worldly glory is a reef in the sea covered by water; for as this lies unknown to the sailor until his vessel strikes it, bottoms out, is filled with water and sinks, so vainglory does to a man until it drowns and destroys him. [Homily 48.]

Do not approach the words of the mysteries contained in the divine Scriptures without prayer and beseeching God for help, but say: Lord, grant me to perceive the power in them! Reckon prayer to be the key to the true understanding of the divine

Scriptures. [Homily 48.]

A small but always persistent discipline is a great force; for a soft drop falling persistently, hollows out hard rock. [Homily 48.]

As children are not born without a mother, so passions are not born without distraction of the mind, and sin is not committed without converse with passions. [Homily 48.]

Ease and idleness are the destruction of the soul and they can injure her more than the demons. [Homily 48.]

If you compel your body when it is weak to labors that exceed its strength, you will instill darkness upon darkness into your soul and bring greater confusion upon her. [Homily 48.]

Mercy and justice (This can also be translated 'just judgment') in one soul is like a man who worships God and the idols in one house. [Homily 51.]

As grass and fire cannot coexist in one place, so justice and mercy cannot abide in one soul. [Homily 51.]

As a grain of sand cannot counterbalance a great quantity of gold, so in comparison God's use of justice cannot counterbalance His mercy. [Homily 51.]

Be persecuted, but persecute not; be crucified, but crucify not; be wronged, but wrong not; be slandered, but slander not. Have clemency, not zeal, with respect to evil. [[Lay hold of goodness, not justice.]] [Homily 51.]

Be every man's friend, but in your mind remain alone. [Homily 51.]

If you cannot be merciful, at least speak as though you are a sinner. If you are not a peacemaker, at least do not be a troublemaker. If you cannot be assiduous, at least in your thought be like a sluggard. If you are not victorious, do not exalt yourself over the vanquished. If you cannot close the mouth of a man who disparages his companion, at least refrain from joining him in this. [Homily 51.]

No man has understanding if he is not humble, and he who lacks humility is devoid of understanding. No man is humble if he is not peaceful, and he who is not peaceful is not humble. And no man is peaceful without rejoicing. [Homily 51.]

We should not be exceedingly grieved when we make a slip in some matter but when we persist in it; for even the perfect often slip, but to persist therein is total death. [Homily 51.]

There is no knowledge that is not impoverished, however rich it should be; but heaven and earth cannot contain the treasures of faith. [Homily 52.]

Verily, confusion should be called (if permissible) the chariot of the devil, because Satan is ever wont to mount upon it as a charioteer, and bearing with him the throng of the passions, he invades the wretched soul and plunges her into the pit of confusion. [Homily 54.]

The recompense is not given for labor but for humility. He who maltreats the latter loses the former. [Homily 57.]

Christ demands not the doing of the commandments, but the soul's amendment, because of which He gave His commandments to rational beings. [Homily 57.]

A gift free of trials is a disaster to those who receive it. [Homily 57.]

To choose what is good belongs to the good volition of the man who desires it; but to realize the choice of the good volition belongs to God. [Homily 58.]

His path has been trodden from the ages and from all generations by the cross and by death. But how is it with you, that the afflictions on the path seem to you to be off the path? Do you not wish to follow the steps of the saints? Or have you plans for devising some way of your own, and of journeying therein without suffering? [Homily 59.]

The path of God is a daily cross. No one has ascended into Heaven by means of ease, for we know where the way of ease leads and how it ends. [Homily 59.]

In truth, without afflictions there is no life. [Homily 60.]

The carnal man fears [death] like a beast fears slaughter. The rational man fears the judgment of God. But the man who has become a son is adorned by love and is not taught by the rod of fear; he says, 'But I and my father's house will serve the Lord'. [Homily 62.]

A merciful man is the physician of his own soul, for as with a violent wind he drives the darkness of the passions out of his inner self. [Homily 64.]

Conquer evil men by your gentle kindness, and make zealous men wonder at your goodness. Put the lover of justice to shame by your compassion. With the afflicted be afflicted in mind. Love all men, but keep distant from all men. [Homily 64.]

As long as you have feet, run after work, before you are bound with that bond which cannot be loosed again once it is put on. [[As long as you have hands, stretch them out to Heaven in prayer, before your arms fall from their joints, and though you desire to draw them up, you will not be able.]] As long as you have fingers, cross yourself in prayer, before death comes [[loosing the comely strength of their sinews]]. As long as you have eyes, fill them with tears [[before that hour when dust will cover your black clothes and your eyes will be fixed in one direction in an unseeing gaze and you will not know it. Nay, fill your eyes with tears as long as your heart is controlled by the power of discernment and before your soul is shaken by her departure from it and the heart is left like a house deserted by its owner. [Homily 64.]

Silence is a mystery of the age to come, but words are instruments of this world. [Homily 65.]

The passions are like dogs accustomed to lick blood in butchers' shops. When these are barred from what their habit feeds on, they stand in front of the doors and howl until the force of their previous custom is spent. [Homily 67.]

A man who sits in stillness and who receives experience of God's kindness has little need of persuasive argument, and his soul is not sick with the disease of unbelief, like those who are doubtful of the truth. For the testimony of his own understanding is sufficient to persuade him above endless words having no experience behind them. [Homily 68.]

Know with certainty, therefore, that to stand is not within your power, nor does it pertain to your virtue, but it belongs to grace herself which carries you upon the palm of her hand, that you may not be alarmed. [Homily 69.]

Humility, even without works, gains forgiveness for many offenses; but without her, works are of no profit to us, and rather prepare for us great evils. [Homily 69.]

Not every quiet man is humble, but every humble man is quiet. [Homily 71.]

Walk before God in simplicity and not with knowledge. Simplicity is attended by faith; but subtle and intricate deliberations, by conceit; and conceit is attended by separation from God. [Homily 72.]

When you fall down before God in prayer, become in your thought like an ant, like the creeping things of the earth, like a leech, and like a tiny lisping child. Do not say anything before Him with knowledge, but with a child's manner of thought draw near God and walk before Him, that you may be counted worthy of that paternal providence which fathers have for their small children. [Homily 72.]

A man cannot receive spiritual knowledge except he be converted, and become as a little child. For only then does he experience that delight which belongs to the Kingdom of the Heavens. By 'Kingdom of the Heavens' the Scriptures mean spiritual divine vision. [Homily 72.]

It is not possible without temptations for a man to grow wise in spiritual warfare, to know his Provider and perceive his God, and to be secretly confirmed in his faith, save by virtue of the experience which he has gained. [Homily 72.]

A man can never learn what divine power is while he abides in comfort and spacious living. [Homily 72.]

Just as a man whose head is submerged in the water cannot breathe the subtle air which is poured upon the [atmosphere's] empty gulf, so he who immerses his mind in the cares of the present life cannot take in the breath that is a perception of the new world.

[Homily 74.]

It is a spiritual gift from God for a man to perceive his sins. [Homily 74.]

This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits.
[Homily 74.]

The cross is the door to mysteries. Through this door the intellect makes entrance into the knowledge of the heavenly mysteries. The knowledge of the cross is concealed in the sufferings of the cross. And the more our participation in its sufferings, the greater the perception we gain through the cross. For, as the Apostle says, 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ'. Now by *consolation* he means *theoria*, which, being interpreted, is vision of soul. Vision gives birth to consolation. [Homily 74.]

Prayer offered up at night possesses a great power, more so than the prayer of the day-time. Therefore all the righteous prayed during the night, while combating the heaviness of the body and the sweetness of sleep and repelling corporeal nature. [Homily 75.]

There is nothing which even Satan fears so much as prayer that is offered during vigilance at night. And even if it is offered with distraction, it does not return empty, unless perhaps that which is asked for is unsuitable. [Homily 75.]

He who despises the sick will not see light, and the day of him who turns his face from a man straitened by affliction will become darkness. The sons of the man who scorns the voice of one suffering hardship will grope their way, being struck with blindness. [Homily 76.]

For unless those who travel on the road go forward day by day, shortening their journey—and, on the contrary, should they stand in one place—the road before them will never diminish and they will never arrive at their destination. So it is with us also. If we do not constrain ourselves little by little, we shall never have the strength to abstain from bodily things so as to gaze toward God. [Appendix A. II.]

Apologetic.

The Holy Bible addresses itself almost exclusively to recipients of the male gender, in what might be termed an 'economy of speech'. That is; it mostly speaks to the masculine reader in almost the whole of its entirety, although it is manifest when studied in depth that it is speaking in context to both male and female readers simultaneously, and not adults only but readers of all ages, and does so in large part purely to avoid the awkwardness and laboriousness of having to name both genders in every instance.

Whether Saint Isaac copies this form of address and presents his writings to the masculine gender for the same reason only, or also in part to avoid the unseemliness of a monk who has 'made a covenant with his eyes not to look with lust at a young woman' (Job 31:1), and is under a vow 'not to look upon a woman to lust after her' (Matthew 5:28), we hasten to affirm that Saint Isaac's teachings are most certainly not written

exclusively for the edification of male monastics only, but for monastics and lay persons both male and female, and indeed, is profitable for serious study and imitation by monastics and lay people, and adults and children of all ages and both genders. For 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them' (Genesis 1:27), 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28), 'But Jesus said, Suffer (permit) little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 19:14), 'And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer (permit) the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein' (Mark 10:13-15), and 'But Jesus called unto him, and said, Suffer (permit) little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God' (Luke 18:16).

In Homily 64, page 308, paragraph 2, Saint Isaac employs an ancient manner of speech in which any man or woman who shows courage or fortitude is described as 'playing the man' or 'being manful', whereas one who is sinfully weak or cowardly -be it man or woman- is described as being 'womanish'. Such gender distinctions are not intended by Saint Isaac to be taken as personal insults, but as allegories more appropriate to the times in which he lived.

In Homily 75, page 367, paragraph 1, it is said that [[These are all distinctions in the labor of vigil and by them strenuous men put off 'the old man', which is corrupted by deceitful lusts, and put on Christ and are saved (Cf. Ephesians 4:22, 23)], in which our universal 'sin nature' is commonly referred to as the 'old man' or 'old man of sin' and not as the 'old woman of sin'.

Note also that the soul of a man, woman, boy, or girl, which souls collectively constitute the 'Bride of Christ', is always spoken of by Saint Isaac -in the common vernacular- as 'she'. Such a remark is not intended to suggest that only females are saved, and indeed all such remarks may safely be assumed to disparage neither males nor females and should never be taken personally as intentionally negative aspersions to one's own gender or person.

But nowhere does he forbid females, young adults, or children of either gender or any age group to study his writings, nor does Christ our Lord. Those who have made a serious study of these writings would overwhelmingly affirm that Saint Isaac the Syrian's Homilies are inspired writings intended for the profit of everyone, male and female, young and old.

Use of (((double parentheses)) within parentheses) is mostly not done in this digitized text.

Table of OT & Psalms Equivalents.

- 1 Kings (1 Samuel, KJV)
- 2 Kings (2 Samuel, KJV)
- 3 Kings (1 Kings, KJV)
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THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF SAINT ISAAC THE SYRIAN.
With original page divisions & Index.

[3]
Homily 1.

On Renunciation and the Monastic Life.

In order to lay the foundation of virtue, nothing is better for a man than to contain himself by means of flight from the affairs of life, and to persevere in the illumined word of those straight and holy paths, even that word which in the Spirit the Psalmist named a lamp (Psalms 118:105. For *lamp* Saint Isaac uses a Syriac word meaning *a signifier, an indicator*. The Greek has changed it into a verb).

Scarcely a man can be found who is able to endure honor, but perhaps such a one cannot be found at all. This, one might say, is because of a man's sudden receptivity to change, even if he be a peer of the angels in his way of life.

The beginning of the path of life is continually to exercise the 'intellect' (as defined and explained in the GLOSSARY at the end of this book) in the words of God, and to live in poverty. For when a man waters himself with one, it aids in the perfection of the other. That is to say, to water yourself with the study of the words of God helps you in achieving poverty, while achieving freedom from possessions affords you the time to attain to constant study of the words of God. But the help provided by both speedily erects the entire edifice of the virtues.

No one can draw nigh to God save the man who has separated himself from

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the world. But I call separation not the departure of (Syriac; *from*) the body, but departure from the world's affairs.

This is virtue: that in his mind a man should be unbusied with the world. The heart cannot become tranquil and be without imaginings as long as the senses are active. Outside of the desert [[and the wilderness]] the bodily passions do not abate, nor do evil thoughts cease.

Until the soul becomes drunk with faith in God by receiving a perception of faith's power, she ((that is, the soul, which Saint Isaac always refers to in the feminine gender as being a composite part of the Bride of Christ; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7)) can neither heal the malady of the senses, nor be able forcefully to tread visible matter

underfoot, which is the barrier to things that are within and unperceived.

The rational faculty is the cause of liberty (i.e. In the bad sense. The Syriac word also means *freedom* and *free will*. The Greek translates it *free will* or the *faculty of self-determination*. Here, however, liberty in the bad sense is meant) and the fruit of both is aberration. Without the first (i.e. reason) there is no second (i.e. liberty) but where the second is lacking, there the third (i.e. aberration, deviation) is held as with a bridle (this passage is extremely obscure in Greek, but in Syriac it is somewhat clearer. For *is lacking* the Greek has *walks aright*. In the Syriac Estrangela script these words are similar in appearance).

When grace is abundant in a man, he easily scorns the fear of death on account of his longing for righteousness, and he finds in his soul many reasons for the necessity of suffering tribulation for the fear of God. All things that are thought to harm the body and that suddenly attack its nature, consequently causing it to suffer, are reckoned in his eyes as nothing in comparison with what is to be hoped for hereafter. It is not possible for us to know the truth unless temptations are allowed to come upon us. And a man's mind gives him assurance of exactly this, and further, of the fact that God takes very great forethought for men, and that there is no human being who is not under His providence (Syriac; *who is abandoned to chance*) and this especially he sees pointed out as clearly as by a finger in the case of those who go out to seek Him and endure suffering for His sake. But when the privation of grace (Syriac; *lack of faith*; in this section the Syriac MSS have numerous variants) becomes great in a man, then all we have said is found to be nearly the opposite; for him knowledge is greater than faith, since he relies on investigation; trust in God is not present in everything he does, and divine providence for man is understood differently. Such a man is continually waylaid in these matters by those who 'in a moonless night lie in ambush to shoot down a man with their arrows' (Cf. Psalms 10:2).

The beginning of a man's true life is the fear of God. But the fear of God does not consent to dwell in a soul that is distracted over outward things.

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By serving the senses, the heart is turned away from delight in God; for our inward thoughts, they say, are bound by their perception to the sensory organs that serve them.

Doubting hesitation of the heart introduces cowardice into the soul, but faith can make firm her volition even in the cutting off of the body's limbs. In the measure that love for the flesh prevails in you, you can never become brave and dauntless, on account of the host of adversaries that constantly surround the object of your love.

A man who craves esteem cannot be rid of the causes of grief.

There is no man who, with a change of circumstances, will not be subject to a change in his mind with respect to what lies before him.

If desire, as they say, is the offspring of the senses, then let them be silent who profess to keep their mind peaceful in the midst of distraction (this refers to the heretics known as the Messalians, or 'praying people', who claimed to reach such a state of perfection and dispassion that they could walk about in the cities and converse with all men without suffering spiritual harm or even distraction from prayer and peace of mind. In other words, their teaching was directly opposed to that of Saint Isaac, and the Saint repeatedly refutes it. See, for example, Homilies 23, 29, and 69. The Syriac printed text reads here *If, indeed, there is a secondary perception of the senses from which natural*

desire is born...).

Not he is chaste who, in the strain and crisis of combat and struggle, says that shameful thoughts cease within him, but rather he who, by the uprightness of his heart, makes the vision of his mind so pure that he cannot gaze on lewd thoughts without shame. And when the gaze of his eyes is held fast (this verb is added from the Syriac, it being lost in the Greek) thus bearing witness to the holiness of his conscience, then shame is like a veil that hangs over the hidden place of his thoughts, and his purity becomes like a chaste virgin being faithfully kept for Christ.

There is nothing so capable of banishing the inherent tendencies of licentiousness from our soul, and of driving away those active memories which rebel in our flesh and produce a turbulent flame, as to immerse oneself in the fervent love of instruction, and to search closely into the depth of the insights (or *meanings*) of divine Scripture.

When a man's thoughts are totally immersed in the delight of pursuing the wisdom treasured in the words of Scripture by means of the faculty that gains enlightenment from them, then he puts the world behind his back and forgets everything in it, and he blots out of his soul all memories that form images embodying the world. Often he does not even remember the employment of the habitual thoughts which visit human nature, and his soul remains in ecstasy by reason of those new encounters that arise from the sea of the Scripture's mysteries.

And again, if the mind swims on the surface of the waters, that is, of the sea of the divine Scriptures, and its perceptions cannot fathom the great depth so as to be able

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to grasp all the treasures in its deep, yet even this practice in itself, by the power of its fervent love, will suffice the mind firmly to pinion its thoughts by a single thought of wonder, and to prevent them from hastening toward the body's nature, as one of the Godbearing Fathers said. And this [[he says]] is because the heart is feeble and cannot sustain the evils that it encounters from inner and outer warfares. And you know that an evil [[bodily]] thought is oppressive. If the heart is not occupied with study (or *learning*) it cannot endure the turbulence of the body's assault.

Just as the heaviness of weights impedes the quick swaying of a balance in a gust of wind, so shame and fear impede the aberration of the mind. In proportion to the lack of shame and fear, there is an abundance of the dominion of liberty (or *freedom*, but in the bad sense) in the mind. And just as a decrease in the weight in the pans will be a cause for them to sway more easily to and fro, so an increase of liberty through removal of fear from the soul causes the scales of the mind to sway easily from side to side. Therefore the mind's mobility is a consequence of liberty, and mental changes are a consequence of aberration (this entire paragraph is rendered according to the Syriac).

Be wise, then, and lay the fear of God as the foundation of your journey (Syriac; *lay a foundation for your journey*) and in but a few days it will bring you before the gate of the Kingdom with no windings (meanderings) on the way.

[[Do not, like the pupils of teachers, overly scrutinize words that are written from experience for the rearing of your way of life and that help you, by their lofty insights, to elevate yourself.]]

Discern the purport of all the passages (the word *passages* is missing in the Greek. The Syriac word also means *histories*) that you come upon in sacred writings, so as to immerse yourself deeply therein, and to fathom the profound insights found in the compositions of enlightened men (the present Greek text reads *to fathom with great*

understanding the profundity of the insights of holy men).

Those who in their way of life are led by divine grace to be enlightened are always aware of something like a noetic ray (of light) running between the written lines which enables the mind to distinguish words spoken simply from those spoken with great meaning for the soul's enlightenment.

When in a common way a man reads lines that contain great meaning, he makes his heart common and devoid of that holy power which gives the heart a most sweet taste through intuitions that awe the soul.

Everything is wont to run to its kindred; and the soul that has a share of the Spirit, on hearing a phrase that has spiritual power hidden within, ardently draws out its content for herself.

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Not every man is wakened to wonder by what is said spiritually and has great power concealed in it. A word concerning virtue has need of a heart unbusied with the earth and its converse.

The things of virtue do not awaken the mind of a man who travails in cares about transitory things to a longing and a quest to gain them.

Liberation from material things precedes the bond with God, even though often with some, through the oeconomy of grace, the latter is found to precede the former, such that love covers love (the meaning of this seems to be that the love of God covers the love of material things). Oeconomy's usual order is different from the order of the community of men; but you must keep to the common order. If grace comes within you first, that is its own affair; but if not, make the ascent of the spiritual tower by the path common to all men, on which they have journeyed one after another.

Everything that is effected through 'divine vision' (see GLOSSARY) and on account of which a commandment is fulfilled, is wholly unseen by the eyes of the body. Every virtuous action that is effected through righteous activity (*praxis*) is composite; for the commandment, which is but one (i.e. righteous activity) requires both, *theoria* and *praxis*, on account of our corporeal and incorporeal parts. For the combination of these two is one (the Syriac reads here *and the combination of the two is from all*. The Greek translators took *from all* to mean *complete*). [[For this very reason the enlightened intellect understands [the commandment] as formerly the blessed Moses commanded [it], namely, what is simple is understood as well as what is twofold.]]

Works having purity as their goal (or *that are solicitous over purity*; the Syriac printed text has a variant reading here) do not shake off the memory's awareness of past offenses, but take the grief of the recollection away from our mind. Henceforth it happens that when the recollection passes through our mind, it does so to our advantage.

The soul's insatiability for gaining virtue seizes for its own the portion of desire for visible things that belongs to her yoke-mate, the body.

Moderation adorns all things; for without moderation, even things deemed good become harmful.

Do you wish to commune with God in your intellect by receiving a perception of that delight which is not enslaved to the senses? Pursue mercy; for when something that is like unto God (*Vide* Matthew 5:45-48) is found in you, then that holy beauty is depicted by him (this is the Syriac reading; the Greek has *is depicted in you, whereto you were likened*). For the whole sum of the deeds of mercy immediately brings the soul into communion with the unity of the glory of the Godhead's splendor.

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Spiritual unity is an unsealed and perpetual recollection that incessantly blazes in the heart with ardent longing; and from perseverance in the commandments the heart receives its capacity for this bond, not figuratively, nor in a natural way. For there it finds material for the soul's divine vision so as to be sustained in this [union] hypostatically. For this reason the heart comes to awestruck wonder as the eyes of the twofold senses close: those of the flesh and those of the soul.

There is no other path toward spiritual love, which forms the invisible image (the Syriac word is a transliteration of the Greek *icon*, *image*, and refers to a man's likeness to God) but firstly to begin to show compassion in proportion to the Father's perfection, as our Lord said (*Vide* Luke 6:36; Matthew 5:46-48). for He commanded those who obey Him to lay this as their foundation.

A word born of righteous activity (*praxis*) is one thing, and a beautiful speech is another. Even without experience, wisdom is clever at imparting beauty to her words, at speaking the truth without really knowing it, and at making declarations on virtue while the man himself never makes trial of it in his deeds. Speech that comes from righteous activity is a treasury of hope (Syriac; *trust*; the meaning here is probably *a treasury one can trust in*) but wisdom not based on righteous activity is a deposit of disgrace. Just as when an artist frescoes water on the walls and cannot relieve his thirst with it, or just as a man dreams beautiful dreams, even so is speech (that is) not based on righteous activity (*Vide* Romans 2:21-22).

A man who talks of virtue from the experience of his own labor transmits virtue to his hearer just as though he distributes money earned from his own commerce, and as it were from out of his own possessions he sows his teaching in the ears of those who give him ear. Such a man opens his mouth with boldness before his spiritual children, even as the ancient Jacob said to Joseph the Chaste, 'Behold, I have given thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow' (Genesis 48:22).

This transient life is cherished by every man whose way of life is corrupt; and second to him is the man deprived of knowledge. Well has one said, 'The fear of death distresses a man with a guilty conscience (the Syriac printed text reads *a carnal man*) but the man with a good witness within himself longs for death as for life.'

Count no man truly wise who, because of this temporal life, enslaves his mind to timidity and fear.

Let whatever good or evil things that befall the flesh be reckoned by you as dreams. For it is not only with death that you will have release from them, but often before death they retire and leave you alone.

But if any of these things that befall you should have communion with your

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soul, then consider them as your acquisitions in this age, and they will also go with you into the next. If they are good, rejoice and give thanks to God in your mind. But if they are evil, be grieved and sigh; and as long as you are still in the body, seek to be set free of them.

Of everything good wrought within you noetically and in secret, be certain that baptism and faith have been the mediators whereby you received it; through these you were called by our Lord Jesus Christ to His good labors, to Whom with the Father and the

Holy Spirit be glory, honor, thanksgiving and worship unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 2.

On Thankfulness to God, In Which There Are Also Essential Elementary Lessons.

The thanksgiving of the receiver incites the giver to give gifts greater than the first. He that returns no thanks (Syriac; *keeps silent*; the word can also mean *defrauds*, hence the connection with the remainder of the sentence) in small matters is a dissembler and dishonest in greater ones also. If a man is ill and he recognizes his ailment, his healing will be easy. If he confesses his pain, he draws nigh its cure. There are many pangs for the unyielding heart, and the patient who resists his physician amplifies his torment. There is no unpardonable sin, save the unrepented one. Nor does any gift remain without addition, save that which is received without thanksgiving. The fool's portion is small in his eyes.

Ever keep in remembrance those who surpass you by their virtue, so as to see yourself always as inferior to their measure. And be ever conscious of the bitter tribulations of the afflicted and oppressed, so that you may render due thanksgiving for your small and inconsequential troubles, and be able to endure them patiently and with joy. At the time of your defeat, when you are bound both with languor and slothfulness, and subdued by the enemy in the most painful misery and wearisome labor of sin, ponder in your heart on the former time of your diligence, and how you used to concern yourself even over the most minute matters, and the valiant struggle which you displayed, and how you were stirred up with zeal against those who would hinder you in your progress. Furthermore, reflect upon the groans which you used to utter because of the small faults that you committed due to your negligence, and how in all these things you took the crown of victory. For thus, with such and so many recollections, your soul is awakened as if from the deep

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and is clad with the flame of zeal. Then through fervent struggling against the devil and sin she rises up out of her sunken state as if from the dead, she is raised on high, and she returns to her ancient estate.

Remember the fall of the mighty, and be humble in your virtues. Recollect the grievous transgressions of those who of old trespassed and repented, and the sublimity and honor of which afterwards they were deemed worthy, and take courage in your repentance. Be a persecutor of yourself, and your enemy will be driven from your proximity. Be peaceful within yourself, and heaven and earth will be at peace with you. Be diligent to enter into the treasury that is within you (*Vide* Matthew 6:6), and you will see the treasury of Heaven: for these are one and the same, and with one entry you will behold them both. The ladder of the Kingdom is within you, hidden in your soul. Plunge deeply within yourself, away from sin, and there you will find steps by which you will be able to ascend.

Scripture has not explained to us what the things of the age to come are; and yet, how we might receive a perception of their delight here, without a change of nature and a translation to another place (Literally; *a topical translation* or *migration*. The Greek has *departure from this world*, but this phrase refers not to death but to physical rapture),

Scripture has easily taught us. For although it does this by the names of things desirable and highly esteemed, which to us are sweet and precious, in order to stimulate us to a yearning for them, still when it says, 'which eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard', and the rest (1 Corinthians 2:9), Scripture has declared to us that the good things to come are incomprehensible, and have no similarity to any thing here.

Spiritual delight is not enjoyment found in things that exist substantially outside the souls of those who receive it [[and are promised to us for the restitution to come]]. If it were, then the words, 'The Kingdom of the Heavens is within you' (Cf. Luke 17:21) and, 'Thy Kingdom come' (Matthew 6:10), would mean that we have acquired matter of a palpable nature within us as the earnest of the delight found in that Kingdom (*Vide* 2 Corinthians 1:22). For the thing acquired must needs be like the earnest of it, and the whole like its part. And although 'as in a mirror' (2 Corinthians 3:18) indicates 'not substantially', yet it does show clearly, in any case, the acquisition of a likeness. But if, as the true testimony of those who have interpreted the Scriptures says, this perception (This word also means: *consciousness, sensation, awareness*, or in this sense, *experience*. This is the *earnest* of which Saint Isaac speaks) is the noetic operation of the Holy Spirit, and it is a part of that whole [[then—besides that spiritual operation which mediates between the Spirit and the saints through noetic perception—there is no palpable mediation by the senses for the delight of the saints yonder, [but instead of the senses] there are only those receptacles [of the mind] which contain

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everything in a well-ordered manner. And if we should call this (i.e. the operation of the Holy Spirit) a profusion of light, we do not mean [light] that is not noetic]].

The lover of virtue is not he who does good with valiant struggle, but he who accepts with joy the evils that attend virtue. It is not so great a thing for one patiently to endure afflictions on behalf of virtue, as it is for the mind through the determination of its good volition to remain unconfused by the flattery of tantalizing pleasures. No kind of repentance that takes place after the removal of our free will will be a well-spring of joy, nor will it be reckoned for the reward of those who possess it.

Cover a man who stumbles, so long as you receive no harm from him, and give him encouragement; then your Master's loving-kindness will bear you up. Support with a word the infirm and those who are grieved at heart in so far as this lies within your hands, then the Right Hand that sustains all will also sustain you. Through the toil of prayer and the anguish of your heart commune with those who are grieved at heart, and the Source of mercy will be opened up to your petitions. Belabor yourself in constant supplication before God with a heart possessing a pure, compunctionate meditation, and God will protect your mind from filthy thoughts, that His way may not be defamed through you. Continuously apply yourself to the study of reading the divine Scriptures with precise understanding, lest by reason of the idleness of your intellect, your sight be polluted with foreign pollutions (Syriac; *divert your gaze toward the continual study of prudent reading, lest by reason of its idleness, your vision be polluted by some foreign spectacle*). At a time when you think you will not be worsted, do not voluntarily make trial of your mind with lewd reflections which tempt you, because in this way wise men have been darkened and made fools. Do not store a flame in your bosom (Cf. Proverbs 6:27).

Without harsh tribulations of the flesh it is difficult for untrained youth to be held under the yoke of sanctification. The beginning of the intellect's darkening (once a sign of it is visible in the soul) is to be seen, first of all, in slothfulness with regard to the

[church] services (Literally; *service* or *liturgy*. Here the chanted services established by the Church, e.g. the Hours, Nocturns, etc., are meant and they are distinguished from solitary *prayer*) and prayer. For except the soul first fall away from these, she cannot be led in the way of error; but as soon as she is deprived of God's help, she easily falls into the hands of her adversaries. And again, whenever the soul becomes heedless of virtue's labors, she is inevitably drawn to what is opposed to them. A transition, from whichever side it occurs, is the beginning of what belongs to the opposite quarter. Practice the work of virtue in your soul and do not concern yourself with futile matters (Syriac; *and ponder upon it* [i.e. the work of virtue] *and so on*. There are many readings in the MSS for the first part of this sentence). Always lay bare your weakness before God, and you will never be put to the test by aliens when you are found alone, distant from your Helper.

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The activity of taking up the cross is twofold, in conformity with the duality of our nature, which is divided into two parts. The first is patient endurance of the tribulations of the flesh which is accomplished by the activity of the soul's incensive part (See also pages 18, 273, and 357), and this is called *righteous activity (praxis)*. The second is to be found in the subtle workings of the intellect, in steady divine rumination, in unfailing constancy of prayer, and in other such practices. This second activity is carried out through the appetitive part of the soul, and is called *divine vision (theoria)*. As for the first, that is, *praxis*, it purifies the passionate part of the soul by the power of zeal. And the second, *theoria*, through the action of the soul's love, which is a natural yearning, thoroughly filters out the noetic part of the soul. Thus every man who, before training completely in the first part, proceeds to that second activity out of passionate longing for its sweetness (or rather, should I say, out of sloth) has wrath come upon him, because he did not first 'mortify his members which are upon the earth' (Cf. Colossians 3:5), that is, heal the infirmity of his thoughts by patient endurance of the labor which belongs to the shame of the cross. For he dared to imagine in his mind the cross's glory. And this is what was said by holy men of old: 'If the intellect should wish to mount upon the cross before the senses have found rest from their infirmity, the wrath of God comes upon it.' His mounting of the cross which brings wrath upon itself does not result from the first part, that of patient endurance of afflictions which is the crucifying of our flesh, but results from the desire to ascend to divine vision (*theoria*), which is the second part and takes place after the healing of the soul. A man whose mind is polluted with the 'passions of dishonor' (Romans 1:26), and who rushes to imagine with his mind the phantasies of the thoughts, is put to silence by Divine punishment, because he did not previously purify his mind through afflictions, and subdue the lusts of his flesh. But from what he has heard with his ears, and from the ink of his book-learning, he ran ahead of himself to walk in a way filled with gloom, while his own eyes were blind. For even those whose sight is sound and who are filled with light, who have obtained grace as their guide, are in peril both night and day. Their eyes are filled with tears, and they are diligent in prayer and weeping all the day and in the night, because they fear the journey and the great precipices that confront them and the illusions of dissembling shapes found mixed with truth.

The things of God, they say, come of themselves, without one being aware of it. Yes, but only if the place is clean and not defiled. If the pupil of your soul's eye is not pure, do not venture to gaze at the orb of the sun, lest you be deprived of your sight—which is simple faith, humility, confession from the heart and your small labors

according to

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your capacity—and lest you be cast aside in a lone region of the noetic world (which is the 'outer darkness', outside God, a figure of Hell) like that man who shamelessly entered into the wedding feast with unclean garments (*Vide* Matthew 22:11 ff).

From exertions and watching (i.e. the guarding of the mind. In Syriac there is a play on words here: from *zehirutha* springs *zahiyutha*) there springs purity of the thoughts. And out of purity of the thoughts, the light of the understanding dawns. From this the intellect is guided by grace into that wherein the senses have no power, either to teach, or to learn.

Think to yourself that virtue is the body, but divine vision the soul, while both are one complete man in spirit, which is united out of two parts, the physical and the noetic. And just as it is impossible that our soul should come into being and be born without the complete forming of the body with its members, so is it impossible that there be divine vision, that second soul (which is also the spirit of revelation, and is molded in the matrix of the intellect ((Greek; *womb*. The text which the Greek translators employed apparently had this reading since it resembles *intellect* (*mad'a*) in Syriac)) that receives the substance of the spiritual seed) without the completion of virtue's labor; and virtue is the house of knowledge which is a host to revelations.

Divine vision is the perception (reference is repeated here to the earlier footnote on p. 11, which is repeated verbatim: Greek; (This word also means: *consciousness*, *sensation*, *awareness*, or in this sense, *experience*. This is the *earnest* of which Saint Isaac speaks) of divine mysteries which are hidden in things and causes (Syriac; *in things spoken*). Whenever you hear of withdrawal or abandonment of the world, or of being pure from the world, then first you must learn and understand the term *world*, not as common, unlearned men do, but in its spiritual senses, and how many different things this name comprises. Then you will be able to know your soul, how distant she is from the world, and how great an intermingling she has with the world.

World is a collective noun which is applied to the so-called passions. But if a man does not know first what the world is, he will never come to know with how many of his members he is distant from the world, and with how many he is bound to it. Many are the persons that with two or three members have parted from the world, and curb themselves with respect to these, and suppose themselves to be strangers to the world in their way of life. This, however, is because they neither understand nor prudently see that with two of their members they have died to the world, while their remaining members live within the body of the world. Howbeit, they have not even been able to perceive so much as their passions. And since they have no awareness of them, neither have they made an effort to heal them.

By contemplative examination, the world is also called the aggregate of the collective noun which is applied to the separate passions. When we wish to give a collective name to the passions, we call them *world*. And when we wish to designate them specifically

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according to their names, we call them *passions*. The passions are portions of the course of the world's onward flow; and where the passions cease, there the world's onward flow stands still. These are the passions: love of wealth; gathering objects of any kind; bodily

pleasure, from which comes the passion of carnal intercourse; love of esteem, from which springs envy; the wielding of power; pride in the trappings of authority; stateliness and pomposity; human glory, which is the cause of resentment; fear for the body (from here to the end of the paragraph we have followed the Syriac). Wherever these have halted in their course, there, in part, to the extent that the passions are inactive, the world fails from its constitution and remains inactive. Thus it was with each of the saints, that while they lived, they were dead. For living in the body, they lived not according to the flesh.

Examine in which of these passions you are alive, and then you will know in how many parts you are alive to the world, and in how many you are dead. When you learn what the world is, by distinguishing these matters you will also come to know your entanglement in the world as well as your freedom from it. But that I may speak briefly: the world is the carnal way of life and the 'mind of the flesh' (Romans 8:7). Hence, a man's elevation above the world can also be recognized from these two things: from the good transformation of his way of life and from a discernment of his thoughts. Therefore, you may comprehend the measure of your way of life from that which arises in your mind with regard to the things it muses upon in its thoughts: for which things your nature effortlessly longs, what stirrings are aroused continually, and which are caused by an accidental circumstance; whether your mind has any perception at all of incorporeal thoughts; or whether all its motions are of a material sort; and whether the mind's material quality is something passionate, or only that the thoughts are the imprints of the physical aspect of a man's virtuous labor: for the mind involuntarily muses upon the things wherewith it performs the virtues. From these things [last mentioned] the mind, in a wholesome manner, receives the cause of fervor and the gathering of its deliberations, for because of its lack of training (Greek; and western Syriac; *on account of its training*. Bedjan's reading, used above, is preferable) the mind, with a good intention, prefers to labor in a corporeal manner, though it does not do so passionately. Observe also whether your mind remains unaffected by hidden confrontations with the imprints of thoughts because of a mightier ardor for the Divine, which is wont to cut off vain recollections.

The few indications we have provided in this chapter will suffice a man for his enlightenment instead of many books if he lives quietly and has discernment (Greek; *is separated [from all]*). The Syriac could also mean this). Fear for the body is often so strong in a man as to make him incapable of any deeds worthy of honor or praise. But when fear for the soul overshadows bodily fear, then bodily fear wilts before it like wax from the heat of a flame. But to our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 3.

That Without Toil the Soul Enters Into Understanding of the Wisdom of God and of His Creatures, If She Becomes Still to the World and Life's Concerns; for Then She Can Come to Know Her Nature and What Treasures She Has Hidden Within Herself.

When life's concerns do not incur into the soul from without, and she abides in her nature (Syriac; *A soul that does not overpower what belongs to her nature by increased care for amassing possessions*) then she does not require prolonged toil to penetrate into and understand the wisdom of God. For her separation from the world and her stillness naturally move her toward the understanding of God's creatures. And by this she is lifted up toward God; being astonished, she is struck with wonder, and she remains with God.

When water does not seep into the fountain of the soul from without, the natural water that springs up in her incessantly bubbles forth intuitions of God's wonders (Syriac; *the waters from her own nature bubble up, which are wondrous intuitions that ever arise concerning God*). But when the soul is found bereft of these, it is either because she has received a cause for this from some alien recollection, or because the senses have stirred up turmoil against her by means of encounters with objects. When the senses, however, are confined by stillness and not permitted to sally forth, and by its aid the soul's memories grow old, then you will see what are the soul's natural thoughts, what is the nature of the soul, and what treasures she has hidden within herself. These treasures are incorporeal intuitions that are inspired in the soul by themselves, without the exercise of forethought and toil in their behalf. A man, however, does not even know that such thoughts could arise in human nature. For who taught him these things? Or how did he comprehend that which, even when understood, is impossible to make plain to others? Or who was his guide to that which he had never learned from another?

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The nature of the soul is, then, something like what we have described. The passions are, consequently, an addition [to nature] from causes in the soul. Yet by nature the soul is passionless. Whenever you hear in the Scriptures of passions of the soul and body, know that this is said in reference to the causes of the passions. For the soul is naturally dispassionate. Those who prefer outward philosophy do not accept this, and neither do their adherents. But we believe that God created His image passionless (but I do not mean *His image* in reference to the body, but to the soul, which is invisible). For every image is taken from a prototype. And it is impossible for a visible image to depict the likeness of something invisible (Greek; *And it is impossible for a man to depict an image when he has not seen beforehand a likeness thereof*). So you must believe that the passions, as we said earlier, do not belong to the soul [by nature]. But if anyone wishes to challenge what has been said, we shall ask:

Question: What is the nature of the soul? Is it, then, something passionless and filled with light, or something passionate and dark?

Answer: If the nature of the soul was once translucent and pure by the reception of that blessed light, it will be found the same when it returns to its original state. Therefore, when the soul is moved in a passionate way, she is confessedly outside her nature, as the children of the Church maintain. The passions, therefore, entered into the soul afterwards, and it is not right to say that the passions belong to the soul, even though she is moved by them. Hence it is evident that she is moved by things from without, not by what is her own. If passions are said to be natural because by them the soul is moved through (the Greek and the Vatican Syriac MS 124 read *without*, but the Syriac printed text and the context show this to be an error) the intermediary of the body, then hunger, thirst, and sleep would also be natural [to the soul], because she suffers in these things and groans together with the body: in the amputation of its members, in fevers, in diseases, and in what is akin to these. For because of her communion with the body, the soul suffers pain together with it, just as the body with the soul; and the soul is moved to gladness by the body's gladness and she bears its afflictions.

On the Soul, the Passions, and the Purity of the Mind, in Questions and Answers.

(This title is found in the Greek as the beginning of a new homily).

Question: What is the natural state of the soul, what is the state contrary to nature, and what is the state above nature?

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Answer: The natural state of the soul is understanding of God's creatures, both sensory and noetic. The supernatural state of the soul is her movement in (Greek; *the movement of*) the divine vision of the transubstantial Deity. The contranatural state of the soul is her being moved by the passions. And this is exactly what the divine and great Basil has said: 'When the soul is found in accord with her nature, her life is on high; when she is found outside her nature, she is below upon the earth. When she is on high, she is free from the passions; but as soon as her nature descends from its own state, the passions are found in her.' It is evident, therefore, that the so-called passions of the soul are not the soul's by nature. If this be so, then the soul is moved by the body's blameworthy passions even as she is by hunger and thirst. But since no law has been imposed on her in regard to the latter, the soul is not to be blamed, as she is in regard to the former passions which are subject to reproach. There are times when God permits a man to do something apparently improper and he receives, instead of blame and censure, a good recompense: as Osee the prophet, who married a harlot (*Vide Hosea 1:2*); as the prophet Elias, who put men to death in his zeal for God (*Vide 3 Kings 18:40*); and as those who slew their kindred by the sword at Moses' command (*Vide Exodus 32:27*). It is said, nevertheless, that desire and anger (Greek; or *strong feeling*) naturally belong to the soul apart from what pertains to the nature of the body, and that these are her passions.

Question: We ask: is the soul's desire natural when it is kindled by divine things, or by the things of earth and the flesh? And is anger natural when it is said that by anger the soul's nature is excited to zeal on account of bodily desire, envy, vainglory, and the rest, or when it is on account of things opposed to these? Let the disputer reply to us on these points, and we shall follow up (this is the Syriac reading).

Answer: Divine Scripture says many things [[with a special intent]] and often uses names figuratively, as for instance: things which pertain to the body are said of the soul, and things pertaining to the soul are said of the body, making no distinction between them. The sagacious, however, understand [[what they read, that is, the intent of Scripture]]. Likewise things pertaining to the Lord's Divinity (which are not compatible with human nature) are said with respect to His all-holy body; and again lowly things are said concerning His Divinity which pertain to His humanity. Many, not understanding the intent of the Divine words, have stumbled here with a stumbling from which there is no recovery. So too it is with names pertaining to the body and the soul. If, therefore, virtue is the natural health of the soul, then the passions are an illness of the soul which befalls and invades her nature and despoils her proper health. Now it is obvious that in every nature health is antecedent to any disease which might befall it. And if this be so, as indeed it is,

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then [[by necessity]] virtue is in the soul naturally, but that which is an accident (or a *chance occurrence, a contingency*) is external to her nature. [[For it is impossible that

something which is prior should not be natural.]]

Question: Do the bodily passions belong to the soul by nature, or by accident? And are the passions of the soul which she possesses by reason of her connexion with the body said to be hers naturally, or by a figure of speech?

Answer: No one dares say that the passions belong to the body only figuratively; but as for those of the soul, one must be bold and say, inasmuch as it is recognized and confessed by all that purity is a natural property of the soul, that the passions in no wise belong to the soul by nature. For sickness is posterior to health, and it is impossible that one and the same nature be both good and evil. Therefore of necessity, one must precede the other; and the one which is prior is also the natural, because anything which is accidental is not said to belong to a nature, but to intrude from without. And change follows upon every accident and intrusion. Nature, however, does not change or alter itself.

Every passion that exists for our benefit has been given by God. The passions of the body have been implanted in it for its benefit and growth, and the same is true with respect to the passions of the soul. But whenever the body is forced by a privation of what is proper to it to be outside of its own well-being and to follow after the soul, it is enfeebled and harmed. And whenever the soul, abandoning what belongs to her, follows after the body, she is immediately harmed, as the divine Apostle said: 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and these two are contrary the one to the other' (Galatians 5:17). Let no one, therefore, blaspheme God, saying that He has imposed the passions and sin upon our nature. For He has implanted in natures that which causes each to grow. But whenever one nature enters into agreement with another, it is no longer found in what is proper to it, but in that which is opposed to it. For if the passions were in the soul naturally, for what reason is she harmed by them? For that which is proper to a nature does not destroy it.

Question: Why does the [[fulfilling of the]] bodily passions strengthen and make the body grow, while those of the soul harm the soul, if they are proper to her? And for what reason does virtue torment the body but enrich the soul?

Answer: Do you not see how things that are external to a nature harm it? For every nature is filled with gladness when it draws near to what is proper to it. And do you wish to know what is proper to each nature? Observe, that which aids nature is proper to it; but that which is harmful is alien and invades it from without. Therefore, since it is known that the passions of the soul and body oppose one another (Cf. Galatians 5:17), it is evident that

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although the soul should employ something that helps and relieves the body, this thing should not be thought to belong to the soul's nature. For what is proper to the soul's nature is death to the body. But by a figure of speech it is nevertheless attributed to the soul, and because of the body's frailty she cannot be liberated from these things so long as she is clad with the flesh. For through God's inscrutable wisdom, by nature the soul has been made a sharer in the body's griefs, by reason of the union of her movement with the body's movement. But although they are thus partakers of one another, still the movement

of one is separate from the movement of the other, the will of one from the will of the other, the body from the spirit. Nature remains totally unconfused and it does not suppress its properties (Greek; *nature does not change*). Every nature (Specifically, that of the soul and body. The Greek MSS have various readings here) though a man forcibly brings it into agreement with either sin or virtue, will exert its own will and breed its own offspring. When the soul is raised from bodily cares, then by the action of the Spirit she, in her entirety, stimulates her movements to blossom forth and in the bosom of Heaven she swims amidst incomprehensible things. But even when this occurs, the body is permitted to retain a consciousness of what is proper to it. Likewise, if the body is found in sin, the soul's own deliberations do not cease to spring up in the intellect.

Question: What is the purity of the mind?

Answer: The man who is pure in mind is not he who has no knowledge of evil (for that is to be like a brute beast) nor he who is by nature on the level of infants (i.e. a half-wit) not again he who never takes up human affairs (this is the reading of the Vatican Syriac MS 124. The Greek has *nor he who takes face[s]*, that is, shows partiality. Here the Greek translators read the Syriac word *eyes* in place of *affairs*—they being very similar—and translated *eyes* by *face*) [[nor yet is purity of mind that we should not beseech men for any created thing]]. But purity of the mind is this: to be rapt in things divine, and this comes about after a man has practiced the virtues. We are not so bold as to say that anyone has achieved this without experience of evil thoughts, for in such a case he would not be clad with a body. For until death we cannot dare to say that our nature is not warred upon or harmed. And by experience of evil thoughts I mean not to submit to them but to make a beginning to struggle with them.

The movement of thoughts in a man originates from four causes. Firstly, from the natural will of the flesh; secondly, from the imagination of the world's sensory objects which a man hears and sees; thirdly, from mental predispositions and from the aberration of the soul; and fourthly, from the assaults of the demons who wage war with us in all the passions through the causes which we have already mentioned. For this reason, till death a man cannot be without thoughts and warfare so long as he is in the life of the

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flesh (From the beginning of the paragraph until this point the Syriac reads *Struggle with the thoughts is aroused in the mind by four general causes which form a basis for the movement of all the different passions. Hence, in this life, a man cannot be freed from recollections of this world, and though he be a front-line fighter, or even like Paul, he cannot be considered perfect. Still, although he experiences the vexation of the passions through these four causes—namely, the body, through its naturally ordered movements; the world, through its objects with the mediation of the senses; the soul, through thoughts, recollections, and aberrant forces; and the demons, through the activities of the aforesaid—yet even so, when he is troubled by them but briefly, he will be caught away to more excellent things which he perceives by his intuitions*). If, before the destruction of this world or before a man's death, one of these four causes could possibly be done away with, or whether it be possible for the body not to seek its needs and not to be compelled to desire any of the world's goods, judge for yourself. But if it is absurd to suppose any such thing, since our nature is in need of the world's goods, then it follows that the passions move in the man who is clad with a body, whether he wills it or not. Wherefore

every man must guard himself. By the word *passion* I do not speak of one [sort] only—which openly and continually moves within a man—or of two, but of many kinds, since he is clad with a body. Although those who have vanquished the passions by means of the virtues are vexed by thoughts and the assaults of these four causes, yet they are not overcome, because they have power and their mind is caught away into good and divine recollections (Instead of this the Syriac reads *But if a man should grow presumptuous because of the weakness of his thoughts and the fewness of his severe conflicts, we say that whoever it might be, men are not in need of labors but of great watchfulness*).

Question: In what respect does purity of mind differ from purity of heart?

Answer: Purity of mind is one thing, and purity of heart is another [[just as a limb differs from the whole body]]. Now the mind is one of the senses of the soul, but the heart is what contains and holds the inner senses [[:it is the sense of senses]], that is, their root; but if the root is holy, then the branches are holy. It is evident, therefore, that if the heart is purified, all the senses are made pure (Syriac; *But this is not so if only one of the branches is sanctified*). Now if the mind, on the one hand, is a little diligent in reading the divine Scriptures and toils a little in fasting, vigil, and stillness, it will forget its former activity and will become pure, as long as it abstains from alien concerns. Even so its purity will not be permanent, for just as it is quickly cleansed, so too it is quickly soiled. But the heart, on the other hand, is only made pure by many afflictions, deprivations, separation from all fellowship with the world, and deadness to all things. Once it is purified, however, its purity is not soiled by little things, nor is it dismayed by great and open conflicts (I mean dreadful ones), inasmuch as it has acquired, as it were, a strong stomach capable of quickly digesting all the food that is indigestible to those who are weak. For so it is said among the physicians, that all meat is difficult to digest, but it produces great strength in healthy bodies when a strong stomach takes it. Even so, any purity that comes quickly, with little time and slight labor, is also quickly lost and

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defiled. But the purity that comes through many afflictions and is acquired over a long period of time in the soul's superior part (this is the sense of the Syriac) is not endangered by any moderate assault.

On the Senses, and on Temptations Also.

(This title is found in the Greek as the beginning of a new homily).

When the senses are chaste and collected, they give birth to peace in the soul and do not allow her to experience strife (Greek; *things*); and whenever the soul has no perception of anything, victory will be gained without struggle. But (from this point to the end of the paragraph the Syriac of the Vat. MS 124 has been rendered) if the soul should grow negligent in this matter, she will not be able to remain secure; and after a perception has entered, she must fight hard to expel it from herself. However, her first state of *limpid purity*—

(This is the translation of the Syriac term *shapyutha*, which means *clearness, limpidity, transparency, serenity*. A clear sky is also serene. Some say that this term is equivalent to

the Greek; *dispassion*. For Saint Isaac, the soul's primordial state is one of *limpid purity*, and resembles Adam's state before he tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Worldly knowledge and passions cause a man to lose the *limpidity* that is both natural and proper to his soul. Later East Syrian ascetical writers used the term *shapyutha* in a more technical sense, referring to a stage in spiritual life)

—and natural innocence are lost. The majority of men, if not all the world, for this reason (the Greek has *because of their negligence*, explaining the reason) depart from the natural state and that *limpid purity* which is prior to the knowledge of diverse things. On this account, the more men are involved with the world, the more it is difficult for them to regain *limpid purity*, by reason of their knowledge of many evil things. Only one man among many can once again return to his primordial state by another means (instead of *by another means* the Greek has the explanatory sentence: *To attain this each man must always securely guard his senses and his mind from assaults, for there is much need of sobriety, guarding, and watchfulness*). But simplicity is more beautiful (or *better*) than the diverse ways of [obtaining] forgiveness.

Fear is necessary for human nature in order that it might keep within the bounds of obedience to God. But the love of God incites a man to desire the works of virtue and through love he is caught away to the doing of good. Spiritual knowledge naturally comes after the performance of the virtues, but both are preceded by fear and love; and again, fear precedes love. Whoever says with presumption that it is possible to acquire the more perfect virtues before he accomplishes the elementary has, without a doubt, laid the first foundation for the ruin of his soul. For the Lord's way is that the more perfect be born of the former virtues.

Do not exchange your brother's love for the love of any fleeting thing, because love

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conceals within itself Him Who is more precious than all things (The Syriac continues with the following passage: That which a material object is to the eyes of the flesh, the same is passionate behavior to the hidden faculty of sight. And that which the murky passions are to the second mode of natural *theoria*, the same the passions are to the natural, settled state; and they are thus related to one another throughout the range of the diverse *theorias*. When the intellect is fixed in the natural, settled state, it abides in angelic *theoria*, that is, primary and natural *theoria*, which is also called *naked intellect*. But when the intellect is in the second, natural knowledge, it suckles and is sustained by milk from breasts, as it were. This is called the *outward garment* of the degree just mentioned [i.e. the naked intellect]. It is placed after purity, which the mind enters first. It is also prior in existence, for it is the first degree of knowledge, although it is last in honor. For this reason it is also called secondary, and is like certain inscribed letters whereby the intellect is trained and cleansed for the ascent to the second degree, which is perfection of the motions of the mind and the degree that is nigh to divine *theoria*. The outward garment of the intellect is the senses, but its nakedness is its being moved by immaterial divine visions). Abandon what is small, that you may find what is great. Spurn what is superfluous and without value, that you may discover what is truly valuable. Become as one dead during your life and you will not live unto death. Give yourself over to death in your struggles, rather than live in heedlessness. For martyrs are not only those who have accepted death for their belief in Christ, but also those who die

for the sake of keeping His commandments.

Do not become foolish in your petitions, lest you insult God by the meanness of your knowledge. Become wise in your prayers that you may be accounted worthy of glorious things. Seek what is honorable from Him Who gives ungrudgingly, that you may also receive honor from Him by reason of your wise volition. Solomon asked for wisdom and with it he received an earthly kingdom, inasmuch as he asked wisely of the Great King Himself (*Vide* 3 Kings 3:9 ff; Wisdom 7:7 ff). Elisseus asked for a double portion of the grace of the Spirit that abode in his teacher, and by no means failed in his request (*Vide* 4 Kings 2:9). For he that requests contemptible things of a king brings contempt upon the latter's honor. Israel asked for what was contemptible and received the wrath of God. It ceased to marvel at the works of God, His terrible wonders, and made supplication for its belly's lusts: 'But while their food was yet in their mouth, the wrath of God rose up against them' (Psalms 77:30, 31). Present your petitions to God so as to accord with His glory, that your honor may be magnified before Him, and He rejoice over you. For if a man should beseech the king for a measure of dung, he not only dishonors himself by his miserable petition (since he has shown great lack of sense) but also he has heaped insult upon the king because of what he asked for, even so he that seeks earthly things from God in his prayers does the same. For lo, angels and archangels, who are the King's great officials, are gazing steadfastly upon you at the time of your prayer to see what petition you will make of their Master; and they are astonished and exultant whenever they behold one who is made of earth forsake his dunghill and ask for what is heavenly.

Do not ask of God a thing which He Himself, without our asking, has already taken

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forethought to give not only to us, those of His own household and His beloved friends, but also to those who are strangers to the knowledge of Him. 'Be not like unto the heathen', He says, 'who use vain repetitions in their prayers' [Cf. Matthew 6:7]. 'For after all these bodily things do the heathen seek', says the Lord [Cf. Matthew 6:32]. 'But ye, take no thought what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or what ye shall put on' [Cf. Matthew 6:31]. 'For your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things' [Cf. Matthew 6:32]. A son does not ask bread of his father, but seeks the great and lofty things of his father's house. It was on account of the feebleness of the minds of [common] men that the Lord commanded us to ask for our daily bread, for see what He commanded those who are perfect in knowledge and healthy of soul: 'Take no thought concerning food or raiment' [Cf. Matthew 6:28], He says, 'for if He taketh care for the brute beasts, and the birds, and even lifeless things, will He not take much more care for you?' [Cf. Matthew 6:26]. 'But seek ye rather the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you' [Cf. Matthew 6:33].

If you should beseech God for a thing and He is slow to hearken to you speedily, do not grieve, for you are not wiser than God. This happens to you either because you are not worthy to obtain your request, or because the pathways of your heart do not accord with your petitions (but rather the contrary) or because you have not yet reached the measure wherein you could receive the gift you ask for, [Syriac; *or because your hidden measure is too immature for the greatness of the thing*]. We must not rush onwards to great measures before the time [Syriac; *it is not right that great things should quickly fall into our hands*], lest God's gift be debased by our hasty reception of it. For anything that

is quickly obtained is also easily lost, whereas everything found with toil is also kept with careful watching.

Thirst for Christ, that He may make you drunk with His love. Close your eyes to the delights of this life [Syriac; *the precious things of this world*], that God may deem you worthy to have His peace reigning in your heart. Abstain from what your eyes behold, that you may be accounted worthy of spiritual joy. If your works are displeasing to God, seek not from Him glorious things, lest you become a man who tempts God. As your manner of life, so must your prayer be. For it is impossible for someone bound up in earthly matters to seek what is heavenly, and the man who is occupied with worldly affairs cannot ask for what is divine. Each man's desire is revealed by his works, and in whatever matters he shows his zeal, it is for those that he strives in prayer. The man who desires the greatest things does not concern himself with the lesser.

Be free, though you are bound in a body, and for Christ's sake show forth obedience in your freedom. But also be prudent in your simplicity, lest you be plundered. Love humility in all your activities, that you be delivered from the imperceptible snares that are

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always found outside the pathways of humble men. Do not reject afflictions, for through them you will enter into the knowledge of the truth; and do not fear temptations, because therein you find precious things. Pray that you enter not into the temptations of the soul, but with all your strength prepare yourself for those of the body. Without these you cannot draw nigh to God, because divine rest is laid up within them. He that flees temptations flees from virtue. But by *temptation* (The basic sense of the word is *a trial*; it will be sometimes translated in this way according to the context. The Latin equivalent is *tentatio*, *an attack*, also *a trial*: hence the English *temptation*) I mean not that which originates from lusts, but from afflictions.

Question: How does, 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation' (Matthew 26:41) agree with, 'Strive to enter in at the narrow gate?', (Luke 13:24). And again, with 'Fear not them that kill the body' (Matthew 10:28) and, 'He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it?', (Matthew 10:39). Why is it that the Lord everywhere urges us on to temptations, yet here He enjoins us to pray not to enter into them? Indeed, what virtue is without affliction and trial? Or what kind of trial is greater than for a man to lose his very self, a trial into which He has bidden us all to enter on His account? For He says, 'He that taketh not up his cross and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me' (Matthew 10:38). How is it, therefore, that in all His teaching He has enjoined us to enter into temptations, yet here He has commanded us to pray not to enter into them? 'Ye must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God', says Paul (Cf. Acts 14:22). And again, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation' (John 16:33) and, 'In your patience', regarding these things, 'ye shall gain your souls' (Luke 21:19).

O the subtlety of the path of Thy teachings, O Lord! Outside this path is the man who reads without understanding and knowledge. When the sons of Zebedee and their mother aspired to sit at Thy side in Thy Kingdom, Thou didst say unto them, 'Are ye able to drink the cup of temptations that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' (Matthew 20:22). And how is it that here, O Master, Thou dost permit us to pray not to enter into temptation? Concerning what sort of temptations dost Thou command us to pray that we enter not into them?

Answer: Pray, He says, that you enter not into temptations of your faith. Pray that through your mind's self-esteem you enter not into temptation with the demon of blasphemy and pride. Pray that you enter not by God's permission into the manifest temptation of the devil because of the evil thoughts which you have entertained in your mind and on account of which you suffer temptation (Syriac; *the manifest temptations of the senses, which the devil knows how to bring upon you when God permits it because of the foolish thoughts you entertain*). Pray that the angel (Syriac; *witness*) of your

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chastity may not withdraw from you, that you be not warred upon by the fiery war of sin, and be separated from him. Pray that you enter not into a temptation of vexation with someone. Pray that you enter not into temptations of soul through doubts [[and provocations]] by which the soul is violently drawn into great conflict. Howbeit, prepare yourself with all your soul to receive bodily temptations; voyage in them with all your members and fill your eyes with tears, so that the angel who guards you does not depart from you. For without trials God's providence is not seen, and you cannot obtain boldness before God, nor learn the wisdom of the Spirit, nor can divine longing be established in you. Before temptations a man prays to God as though he were a stranger; but when he enters into temptations for the sake of His love and does not permit himself to be deflected, then straightway he has, as it were, God as his debtor, and God reckons him as a true friend, since he has warred against His enemy and defeated him for the sake of His will. This is to 'pray that you enter not into temptation.' And again, pray that you enter not into the fearsome temptation of the devil by reason of your arrogance, but because you love God, and you wish that His power might help you and through you vanquish His enemies. Pray that you enter not into such trials because of the wickedness (Syriac; *folly*) of your thoughts and works, but rather in order that your love of God may be tested, and that His strength be glorified in your patience.

On Our Master's Tender Compassion, Whereby From the Height of His Majesty He Has Condescended to Men's Weakness; and on Temptations.

(This title is found in the Greek as the beginning of a new homily).

But on the other hand, if you pay attention with understanding, our Lord did enjoin us to pray concerning bodily trials also, making provision for us after the manner of His loving-kindness and according to the measure of His grace. For knowing our nature to be frail because of the earthy and unsound substance of our body, and that it, [i.e. our nature] cannot withstand temptations when engulfed by them, and that for this reason we fall away from the truth and we turn our backs, being overcome by afflictions, He therefore commanded us to pray that we should not suddenly fall into temptations, if it be possible to please God without them.

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If, however, we should fall suddenly into terrible trials by reason of our quest for great virtue, and if virtue cannot be accomplished at that time if we do not endure them, then, in such a case, we should spare neither ourselves nor other men. Nor out of fear must we relinquish the gallant and honorable deed in which the life of the soul is treasured up, and employ as a veil for our laxity (Greek; *offer excuses and precepts for*

our laxity, such as. Perhaps the translators read *tahwitha* (*demonstration*) for *tahpitha* (*veil*) the words, 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.' It is said concerning such persons that 'through the commandment they sin in secret.' If, therefore, it befalls a man that temptation comes upon him and compels him to break one of Christ's commandments, that is, to abandon his chastity, or the monastic life, or to deny the Faith, or not to struggle for Christ's sake (Syriac; *not to bear witness to the Word of God*), or to set at naught any one of the commandments, and he becomes afraid and does not courageously resist these temptations, then he will fall away from the truth.

So let us shun the body with all our strength, surrender our souls to God, and in the Lord's name enter into the arena of temptations. May He that preserved Joseph in the land of Egypt and showed him forth as an icon and exemplar of chastity (*Vide* Genesis 39:1 ff), and Who kept Daniel unharmed in the lions' den (*Vide* Daniel 6:16 ff) and the Three Youths in the fiery furnace (*Vide* Daniel 3:20 ff), and Who delivered Jeremias from the pit of mire (*Vide* Jeremias 45 (38):6) and bestowed mercy upon him in the midst of the camp of the Chaldeans (*Vide* Jeremias 47 (40):1), and Who brought Peter out of prison while the doors were shut (*Vide* Acts 12:7 ff) and saved Paul from the synagogue of the Jews (*Vide* Acts 21:30 ff) and, to speak simply, He that always continues with His servants in every place and country (Syriac; *generation*), Who manifests His power and victory in them, Who preserves them with manifold wonders and Who reveals His salvation to them in all their afflictions, may He give us strength also, and rescue us from amid the waves that encompass us. Amen.

Let us, therefore, acquire zeal in our souls against the devil and his commissaries even such as the Maccabees had, and the holy prophets, apostles, martyrs, the righteous, and the just. For these men proved allies of the Divine laws and the commandments of the Spirit in fearful places and amid most grievous tribulations. Mightily did they put the world and the flesh behind their backs and persevere in their righteousness; and they were not overcome by the perils that encircled both their soul and body, but courageously they took the victory, and their names are written in the book of life until the coming of Christ. By God's decree their teaching has been preserved for our instruction and strengthening, as the blessed Apostle testifies (Cf. Romans 15:4) that we might become wise and learn the ways of God, and keep their histories and lives in view as living and breathing icons, and take our

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example from them, and run their course, and make ourselves like unto them. The words of God are as sweet to the soul possessed of great understanding, as food that delights the body; and the histories of the righteous are as desirable to the ears of the meek, as continual watering to a newly planted tree.

Therefore, beloved, have in your mind God's providence (which from the beginning until now is dispensed with foreknowledge (Syriac; *which was dispensed to the men of olden times*)) as some excellent medicine for weakened eyes, and keep its recollection with you at all times. Ponder, consider, and be taught by these things, that you may learn to hold the remembrance of the greatness of God's honor in your soul, and thus find life eternal for your soul in Jesus Christ our Lord, Who is become 'the Mediator between God and men' (1 Timothy 2:5) as being the Uniter in His two natures (or, *Uniter by His two natures*, or, *united in His two natures*, i.e. reading a passive participle instead of an active one (in Syriac the forms are identical). The Greek reads here, *united out of both*, while the Vatican Syriac MS 124, *united out of the two*, i.e. natures, an evident

interpolation). The orders of the angels cannot approach the glory that surrounds the throne of His majesty, yet He has appeared in the world for our sake in a mean and humble form, as Esaias said: 'We beheld Him, that He had no form nor beauty' (Isaiah 53:2). It is He that, being invisible to all created nature, put on a body and fulfilled the oeconomy for the salvation and life of all the nations which were cleansed by Him, and to Him be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 4.

On the Love of God and Renunciation and the Rest Which Is in God.

The soul that loves God finds rest only in God. First loose yourself from all external bonds and then you may strive to bind your heart to God, because unification with God is preceded by loosing from matter. After an infant is weaned, it is given bread to eat; and the man who wishes to progress in things divine must first be weaned from the world, just as an infant from the breasts of its mother. Works performed with the body precede those with the soul, just as in generation the creation of the body preceded the creation of the soul (*Vide* Genesis 2:7. This is the reading of the Syriac printed text. Here the Origenists are refuted. The Vatican Syriac MS reads *as in the case of the soul's inbreathing*. The Greek has *as dust did the soul's inbreathing in Adam*). The man who has not performed bodily works cannot possess the works of the soul, since the second are born of the first just as the ear of corn from a naked grain of wheat. And the man who does not possess the works of the soul is bereft of spiritual gifts.

The sufferings of the present age undertaken for the truth cannot be compared with the delight that is prepared for those who labor in good works (Cf. Romans 8:18). And just as the sheaves of gladness follow for those who sow with tears (Cf. Psalms 125:5) so joy follows for those who suffer hardship for the sake of God. Bread procured with much sweat seems sweet to the husbandman, and sweet are works for righteousness' sake to the heart which has received the knowledge of Christ. Suffer contempt and humiliation with good will, that you may have boldness before God. The man who with knowledge endures all manner of harsh words without having previously wronged his chider, at that moment places a crown of thorns on his head, and he is blessed, for he is crowned with an imperishable crown in a time which he knows not.

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The man who flees futile glory with knowledge has already sensed in his soul [[the hope of]] the age to come. The monk who says he has left the world and strives with men because of some necessity, lest he should be deprived of his ease, is utterly blind, since although he has voluntarily abandoned the whole body (Syriac; *world*), yet he contends for one of its members. The mind of the man who flees the ease of this age has scrutinized the future age. He who is bound by possessions is a slave of the passions. Do not imagine that merely the possession of gold and silver is possessiveness; rather, it is the acquisition of anything whatever which your will clings to. Do not extol the man who endures bodily hardship and yet gives free reign to his senses: I mean, that of hearing, and whose mouth is gaping and intemperate, and eyes roaming. If you make it a rule for your soul to practice [deeds of] mercy, accustom your soul not to seek your justification in other works, lest you find yourself scattering with one hand what you have gathered

with the other; for solicitude is necessary in the first instance, whereas breadth of heart in the second. Be it known to you, that to remit our debtors their sins is one of the works of righteousness; then you will see tranquility and luster throughout your entire mind. When you rise above the path of justice, you will cleave to freedom in all your actions (Syriac; *That is to say, when in your path you are above justice and [the doing of] what is fitting, you will make way for freedom in all [things]*).

One of the saints spoke of this, saying: 'The merciful man, if he be not just, is blind' (Abba Nilos of Sinai (PG 79. 1244c)). That is to say, he must give to another man what he has gained by his own labors and hardship and not what he has [gained] through fraud, injustice, and trickery. And the same saint said in another place: 'If you wish to sow your seed among the destitute, sow from your own seed; for if you wish to sow from other men's seed, know that what you sow is the most bitter of tares' ([this footnote is repeated a second time on the same page here]; Abba Nilos of Sinai; (PG 79. 1244c)). But I say, that if the merciful man does not rise above what is just, he is not merciful. That is to say, he is merciful who not only shows mercy to others by giving from his own means, but who also suffers injustice from other men with joy [[voluntarily, and who not merely keeps and requires justice in his dealings with his fellow men]], but also shows them mercy. When a man overcomes justice by mercy, he is crowned, though not with crowns awarded under the Law to the righteous, but with the crowns of the perfect who are under the Gospel. For, the ancient Law also dictates that a man must give to the poor from his own means, and clothe the naked, and love his neighbor as himself, and forbids injustice and lying. But the perfection of the Gospel's dispensation commands the following: 'Give to every man that asketh of thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again' (Luke 6:30). And further, a man must not merely with joy suffer injustice as regards his possessions and the rest of the external things which come upon him, but he must also lay down his life for his brother. This is the merciful man, and not he

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that simply shows mercy to his brother by giving him something. And whoever burns within his heart when he sees or hears of something that grieves his brother, such a one is truly merciful, as is also the man who being slapped by his brother does not act shamelessly and answer abusively, thus grieving his brother's heart.

Honor the work of vigil, that consolation may come near your soul. Persevere in reading while dwelling in stillness that your intellect may be drawn toward the wonders of God (Syriac; *awestruck wonder*) at all times. Love poverty with patience, that your mind may be collected and secured from wandering. Detest superfluity, that you may preserve your thoughts untroubled. Withdraw yourself from multitudinous affairs and have your soul as your only concern, so that you may save her innermost tranquility from dispersion. Love chastity, that you may not be disgraced in the time of your prayer to Christ [[the Judge of the contest]]. Acquire purity in your actions, that your soul may glisten with joy during prayer and that at the remembrance of death rejoicing may be ignited in your mind. Be on your guard against small things so that you do not fall in great matters. Do not be slothful in your work, lest you be disgraced when you stand in the midst of your companions; and do not be found without provisions for your journey, lest you be left alone by the wayside. Conduct your works with knowledge, lest you abandon your entire course. Acquire freedom in your manner of life, that you may be freed of turmoil. Do not bind your freedom by what affords you pleasure, lest you

become a slave of slaves. Love mean apparel as your dress so that you may set at naught the thoughts which spring up in you, I mean, haughtiness of heart [[and licentiousness]]. For the man who loves splendid apparel cannot acquire humble thoughts, since necessarily the heart within conforms to outward attire.

Who is the man that can acquire a pure mind while loving idle chatter? And who can acquire lowly thoughts while seeking to capture glory from men? Or, who can become pure of thought and humble of heart when he is licentious and dissolute in his members? For whenever the intellect is drawn away by the senses, it also eats the food of beasts with them. But when the senses are drawn by the intellect they partake together with it of the sustenance of angels.

Vainglory is a servant of fornication; but when it is found in monastic discipline, it is a servant of pride. Self-constraint follows humility, but spacious living is united to love of glory (These two sentences are translated from Syriac. The Greek abbreviates them). Humility attains to divine vision by means of her continual self-constriction, and she adorns the soul with chastity. But vainglory, through its continual turmoil and confusion caused by thoughts which arise from encounters with things, gathers abominable treasures for itself and defiles the heart. And again, vainglory beholds the natures of things with a licentious vision and occupies the mind with deplorable imaginings; but humility

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spiritually constricts herself by means of divine vision and moves the man who possesses her to glorify God.

Do not compare those who work signs and wonders and mighty acts in the world with those who practice stillness with knowledge. Love the idleness of stillness above providing for the world's starving and the conversion of a multitude of heathen to the worship of God. It is better for you to free yourself from the shackle of sin than to free slaves from their slavery. It is better for you to make peace with your soul, causing concord to reign over the trinity within you (I mean, the body, the soul, and the spirit) than by your teaching to bring peace among men at variance. For, as Gregory the Theologian says, 'It is a good thing to speak concerning the things of God for God's sake, but it is better for a man to make himself pure for God' (Oration 3, *On Flight* 12). Love uncouthness of speech joined with knowledge from inner experience more than to spill forth rivers of instruction from the keenness of your mind [[and from a deposit of hearsay and writings of ink]]. It is more profitable for you to attend to raising up unto the activity of intuitions concerning God the deadness of your soul due to the passions, than it is to resurrect the dead.

Many have accomplished mighty acts, raised the dead, toiled for the conversion of the erring, and have wrought great wonders; and by their hands they have led many to the knowledge of God. Yet after these things, these same men who quickened others, fell into vile and abominable passions and slew themselves, becoming a stumbling-block for many when their acts were made manifest. For they were still sickly in soul, but instead of caring for their souls' health, they committed themselves to the sea of this world in order to heal the souls of others, being yet in ill health; and, in the manner I have stated they lost their souls and fell away from their hope in God. The infirmity of their senses was not able to confront or resist the flame of things which customarily make wild the vehemence of the passions. For their senses still required guarding: I mean, that these men should not have seen women at all, or have taken their ease, or gained wealth and

possessions, or had authority over others, or been exalted above other men.

It is better for you if men think you unlearned and uncouth because of your inexperience in disputation, rather than one of the wise because of your shamelessness (Syriac; *Be despised by fools for your uncouthness, and not by wise men for your shamelessness*). Become poor for humility's sake, and do not amass riches on account of your shamelessness. Confute those who would strive to dispute with you (or simply *who dispute with you*) by the strength of your virtues and not by the persuasiveness of your words. By the meekness and quietness of your lips put the impudence of the obstinate to silence [[and not by speaking]]. Reprove the wanton

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by the nobility of your life, and those who are shameless as regards the senses, by the modest curbing of your eyes.

Consider yourself a stranger all the days of your life, wherever you may be, so that you may find deliverance from the injury which is born of familiarity. In every matter consider yourself to be totally ignorant so as to escape the reproach which follows the suspicion that you wish to set aright other men's opinions (Syriac; *that you are competent to correct others*). Let your lips always utter blessings, and you will never be reviled; for revilement begets revilement, and blessing begets blessing. In all things think that you are in need of teaching and you will prove wise throughout your life. Do not pass on to another what you yourself have not attained, lest you put yourself to shame and your lie be exposed by a comparison with your life. If you begin to say something profitable, say it as though you yourself are still earning, and not with authority and shamelessness. Judge yourself beforehand and prove to your listeners that you are inferior to them in order to show them the way of humility, and to incite them to hearken to your words and readily to take action; then you shall be venerable in their eyes. And if possible, speak of these matters with tears so that both you and they may be profited and the grace of God may be with you.

If you gain the grace of God and are deemed worthy to revel in the divine vision of God's judgments and of visible creation (Syriac; *and attain to reveling in the mysteries of visible creation*), which is the first summit (Greek; *stage*. Here Saint Isaac is not referring to the first degree of knowledge explained in Homily 52) of knowledge, prepare yourself, yea, arm yourself against the spirit of blasphemy. Do not take a stand in this battlefield without weapons, lest speedily you be slain by those who lie in wait for you and deceive you. And let your weapons be tears and continuous fasting (Syriac; *fasting and tears shed with continual prostrations*). Beware of reading the doctrines of heretics (Syriac; *Beware of reading books that delineate the doctrines of [other] creeds with a view to explaining them*) for they, more than anything else, can arm the spirit of blasphemy against you. And, when you fill your stomach, do not shamelessly search out matters and concepts concerning God, lest you later repent of it. Understand what I say: there can be no knowledge of the mysteries of God on a full stomach. Read often and insatiably the books of the teachers of the Church on divine providence, for they lead the mind to discern the order in God's creatures and His actions, give it strength, and by their subtleness they prepare it to acquire luminous intuitions and guide it in purity toward the understanding of God's creatures. Read also the Gospels (Syriac; *and you will gain luminous intuitions by their subtleness, so that your mind may journey smoothly on the path toward the goal of [understanding] the right explanation of the fashioning of the world, according to the wise and laudable mind of the Maker of creation. Read also the*

two Testaments), which God ordained for knowledge for the whole world, that you may find provisions for your journey in the might of

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God's providence for every generation, and that your intellect may plunge deeply into wonder at Him. Such reading furthers your aim. Let your reading be done in a stillness which nothing disturbs; be free of all concern for the body and the turmoil of affairs, so that through the sweet understanding which surpasses all the senses you may savor that most sweet taste in your soul which she perceives in herself because of her constant intercourse with these things. Let not the words of experienced men be to you as those of shallow persons and the vendors of words, lest you dwell in darkness till your life's end and be deprived of any profit from them, and lest, like a man confused, you become troubled in the time of warfare and fall into a pit due to a thing that is seemingly good (Syriac; *into one of the pits which bears the likeness of the truth*).

This shall be a sign for you, in whatever matter you wish to penetrate, if you have truly entered into that realm: when grace begins to open your eyes so that you may perceive the divine vision of things such as they are, then your eyes will immediately start to shed torrents of tears, so much so that they will wash your cheeks by their abundance. Thereupon peace comes to the war of the senses and it is curtailed within you. But if someone should teach you otherwise, do not believe him. Besides tears, you should not ask any other manifest sign from the body [[as an indication that you have perceived the truth, except the silence of the activity of the members, that is to say]] when the mind is exalted above created things, the body also takes leave of tears and of every movement and sensation [[apart from its natural vitality. For this knowledge does not stoop to take with itself as a companion—figuratively, through mental vision—the forms of things of the visible world. 'Whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth,' and he heard 'unspeakable words' (2 Corinthians 12:2, 4). All that is heard by the ears can be spoken (Vatican Syriac MS 124 *when something is heard it can be spoken*). He did not hear audible sounds, nor did he see a vision composed of the corporeal images of sense perception, but it was by intuitions of the understanding, being in rapture, while his will had no fellowship with the body. Eye has never seen such things, nor ear heard the like, and his heart never imagined that the likeness which his diversified knowledge saw would rise up [in it] through recollection, I mean those things which God has prepared to show the pure of heart (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9) by reason of their deadness to the world. This is not corporeal vision received by means of the eyes of flesh through gross distinctions, nor phantasies which they (i.e. the pure of heart) themselves form in their minds in an unreal manner. But this is the simplicity of *theoria* concerning noetic things and the things of faith (which is contrary to partition and divisions that exhibit images composed of elements). Gaze upon the sphere of the sun according to your visual power and only so as to delight in its rays, but not so as to investigate the course of its orb, lest you be deprived of your limited visual faculty as well]].

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'When you find honey, partake of it with measure, lest becoming satiated, you vomit it up' (Cf. Proverbs 25:16). The nature of the soul is light and imponderable. Hence, she sometimes leaps, desiring to ascend to great heights and learn things which surpass her nature; for often she grasps something from the reading of the Scriptures and

the divine vision of created things. But when it is permitted, and she compares herself with those things she has grasped, she finds herself much inferior and meaner as regards the measure of her constitution (The Syriac can also mean *way of life*. The Syriac printed text has; *knowledge*). For her knowledge has entered into such things that she is clothed with fear and trembling in her thoughts, and she hastens under the constraint of timidity to return to her lowly life upon the earth, being ashamed, as it were, that she dared to approach spiritual matters which surpass her. Because of the fear which these things inspire, a certain timidity is born in her, and discretion beckons to the soul's mind to practice silence and refrain from shamelessness, lest she perish; and it bids her not to seek things which far surpass her, or search out what is more lofty than she. When you are given the power to understand—understand; do not act shamelessly with regard to mysteries, but worship, silently give glory, and confess [[what surpasses comprehension]]. Just as 'it is not good to eat much honey' (Proverbs 25:27), so it is also not a good thing to probe into glorious utterances, lest, desiring to behold things far distant when we have not yet attained to them, due to the ruggedness of the way, our faculty of vision should grow feeble and be injured. For sometimes, indeed, phantasms are seen instead of the truth. And when the intellect grows weary from its searching, it loses its focus. Thus, the wise Solomon has said well that, 'A man without patience is like a city without walls' (Cf. Proverbs 25:28). [[There is no need for us to roam about heaven and earth in quest of God, or to send forth our intellects into diverse places in search of Him.]] Therefore, purify your soul, O man, and drive away from you all cares which concern things outside your nature, and shroud your soul's perceptions and movements with the veil of chastity and humility: by this means you will discover Him that is within you, since 'mysteries are revealed to the humble' (Ecclesiasticus [or Sirach] 3:19).

If you intend to dedicate your soul to the work of prayer, which purifies the mind, and to night vigil in order to acquire an illumined intellect, betake yourself far from the sight of the world, sever all intercourse, and, even on seemingly good pretexts, do not allow friends to visit you in your cell, as is the custom, but only those who think and live as you do and are your fellow initiates. If you fear the confusion of [[hidden]] unspiritual converse which is wont to spring up [[in the soul]] involuntarily, cut off and loose yourself from outward converse. Yoke mercy to your prayer (Syriac; *the virtues to your prayers*), and your soul will see the light of truth. For in so far as the heart ceases to be disturbed by [[recollections of]] external

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things, to such an extent can the mind receive the astonishment which arises from understanding the meanings [[of the verses of Scripture]]. For it is an easy matter for the soul to exchange one converse for another, if we strive to show even a little diligence [[and patience]]. To exchange one converse for another, occupy yourself with reading books which will make plain to you the subtle pathways of [[ascetical discipline]], of divine vision, and of the lives of the saints, although you may not sense the sweetness of this at once, due to darkness caused by [[recollections of]] things close at hand.

And when you stand up to pray and to say your rule of prayer, instead of thinking of what you have seen and heard in the world, you will find yourself pondering the divine Scriptures you have read, and this meditation will make you forget worldly things. In this manner your mind will come to purity. And herein lies the meaning of the following: 'Reading assists the soul when she stands in prayer'; and also: 'From reading the soul is enlightened in prayer' (Greek; *from prayer the soul is enlightened in reading*. This is a

copyist's error, but a true statement). Instead of confusion from without, reading provides [the soul] with material for the different kinds of prayer. [[This material is the veracious intuitions which suddenly enter the mind by reason of wondrous recollections of what was read. For how many times has the power of *theoria*, [aroused] by [reading] the Scriptures, astonished and stupefied the mind, even during prayer, and left it standing motionless! This power is also wont to cut off prayer itself by its sweetness, as I have said, to embrace the heart with stillness and to silence the thoughts of the heart by arresting the members of both body and soul. What I say is known by those who have experienced this very thing in their souls, who have entered into its mysteries, and who have not learned of it from others or stolen it from writings which so often can falsify the truth.]] Thus, as was said, by reading the soul is enlightened anew and helped always to pray assiduously and without confusion (This sentence is found only in the Greek).

It is just as shameful for lovers of the flesh and the belly to search out spiritual things as it is for a harlot to discourse on chastity. A body suffering grave illness shuns fatty foods and abhors them; and likewise, a mind occupied with worldly affairs cannot approach the inquiry into the things of God. A fire cannot be ignited with wet wood, nor can the divine fervor be kindled in a heart which loves ease. The harlot does not limit her affections to one man, nor does the soul that is pinioned by many affairs remain faithful to divine teachings. As a man who cannot see the sun because of the feebleness of his eyes is unable to describe to another (For *to describe to another*, the Syriac has instead, *to imagine*) its light, its rays and brilliance, since he himself has not beheld it but knows only from hearsay, so it is with the man whose soul has not tasted the sweetness of spiritual works [[and whose way of life has never brought him to

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the experience of these mysteries, so as to be able to grasp with his mind a likeness that embraces the truth. This man can never find real conviction in his soul or attain to the exact truth of things through human instruction and exercise in copying books]].

If you have something above your daily needs, give it to the poor, and then go with boldness to offer your prayers, that is, to converse with God as a son with his Father. Nothing can bring the heart so near to God as almsgiving, and nothing brings such serenity to the mind as voluntary poverty. It is better for you to be called an ignoramus by the many because of the generosity of your hands and your measureless liberality because of your fear of God, than to be called wise and sound of mind by reason of your niggardliness (this is the Syriac reading). If someone on horseback should stretch out his hand and ask alms of you, do not refuse him, for at that moment he is certainly in need, just as one of the destitute. When you give, give generously, with a joyous countenance, and give more than you are asked for, since it is said: 'Send forth thy morsel of bread toward the face of the poor man, and soon you will find your recompense' (Cf.

Ecclesiastes 11:1). Do not separate the rich from the poor, nor try to discriminate the worthy from the unworthy, but let all men be equal in your eyes for a good deed. In this way you can draw even the unworthy toward the good (Syriac; *draw them toward the truth*) since the soul is easily led to the fear of God by means of bodily things. The Lord ate at table with publicans and harlots and did not alienate the unworthy, that He might in this way bring all to the fear of God, and that through bodily things they would approach the spiritual. For this reason, and especially because they are your brethren, of your very nature, and have erred from the truth unwittingly, deem every man equally worthy of benefaction and honor, be he a Jew, an unbeliever, or a murderer.

When you do good to someone, do not await a recompense from him, and you will receive repayment from God on both accounts; and if you are able, neither do good so as to receive reward in the future age [[but rather, practice virtue because of the love of God. The rank of love is more initiated than the rank of labor for God; nay, it is more initiated in its mystery than the soul surpasses the body in initiation]]. If you make poverty a rule for your soul and, by God's grace, you are freed from cares, and by your poverty you are exalted above this world, then beware, lest you become enamored of possessions under the pretext of almsgiving due to your love for the poor, and thus, by taking from one man in order to give to another, you put your soul in turmoil, and efface your honor by subjection to men while begging from them, and lose the freedom and nobility of your mind through your concern for matters of this life. For your station is higher than that of the almsgiver. Do not, I beseech you, do not accept such subjection (Syriac; *do not be mocked*). Almsgiving is like

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the rearing of children, but stillness is the summit of perfection (Syriac; *Almsgiving is the stage of rearing children, but stillness is the path of perfection*). If you have possessions, distribute them at once; but if you have none, do not desire any. Sweep your cell clean of every delicacy and superfluous article, and this will lead you to abstinence even against your will. Scarcity in all things teaches a man patience; but whenever we enjoy possessions, we are unable to control ourselves.

Those who have gained the victory in the exterior war have acquired confidence against interior fear and there is nothing that can vexedly compel them; they are harassed by warfare, either from in front or from behind. By [[exterior]] warfare, I mean that which a man heedlessly brings upon himself through the senses, that is, through giving out and receiving (i.e. worldly dealings) through hearing [[and seeing]], and through speech [[taking food, and a gradual, persistent increase of one's affairs]]. When such things overlie the soul, they blind her, and because of turmoil from without, she is unable to give heed to herself during the onslaught of hidden warfare and, because of her serenity, to conquer that which suddenly attacks her from within. For when a man has barred the city gates, that is, the senses, he fights within [[face to face]] and does not fear those devising evil outside the city.

Blessed is the man who, knowing this and abiding in stillness, does not trouble himself with a multitude of works, but has translated all his physical activity into the work of prayer [[and as he proceeds from divine service to divine service, does not join anything else to the work of God that consists in prayer and reading]], being confident that inasmuch as he toils in company with God and has Him as his only concern both night and day, he will never be in want of any necessity. For it is on His account that he shuns distraction and works. But if a man cannot persevere in stillness without some manual pursuit, let him work, using this as an auxiliary, but not for gain's sake, satisfying greed. Such occupation is allocated for the weak, but it is a source of tribulation for the more perfect. The Fathers have declared that the needy and the slothful should work, but they did not make handwork compulsory.

At whatever time God should grant compunction to your heart (Syriac; *should open up your thinking*) from within, give yourself over to unremitting bows and prostrations, and when the demons try to persuade you to do something else, do not allow your heart to be concerned about any matter, and then behold, and wonder at what is born within you from this. There is nothing greater and more laborious in ascetical struggles,

and nothing more excites envy in the demons, than if a man prostrates himself before the Cross of Christ, praying night and day, and is like a convict whose hands are bound behind him. Do you wish that your fervor should never be cooled, and your tears never impoverished? Govern yourself in this way, and you

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will be blessed O man, making what has been told you your only care both night and day, and seeking nothing else. Then light will dawn within you, and your righteousness will quickly shine forth, and you will be like a paradise of burgeoning flowers and an unfailing fountain of waters.

Behold, what good things are born in a man from struggle! It often happens that when a man bends his knees in prayer and stretches forth his hands to the heavens, fixing his eyes upon the Cross of Christ and concentrating all his thoughts on God during his prayer, beseeching God all the while with tears and compunction, suddenly and without warning a fountain springs up in his heart gushing forth sweetness: his members grow feeble, his eyesight is veiled, he bows his head to the earth, and his thoughts are altered so that because of the joy which surges throughout his entire body he cannot make prostrations. Therefore, O man, pay attention to what you read here. [[Indeed can these things be known from [writings of] ink? Or can the taste of honey pass over the palate by reading books?]] For if you do not strive, you will not find, and if you do not knock at the door with vehemence and keep constant vigil before it, you will not be heard.

Who is the man that, hearing this, will desire outward righteousness (i.e. the active virtues), save only he that is unable to persevere in stillness (Syriac; *to endure the bonds of his cell*)? Yet if there be someone who cannot practice stillness, since it is the grace of God that brings a man within the door, let him not forsake the other way, lest by so doing he have no share in either of the paths of life.

Until the outer man dies to all the doings of the world, not only to sin, but also to every bodily activity, and likewise until the inner man dies to evil thoughts and the natural stirrings of the body weaken [[and the body dies a little by means of labors]], so that the sweetness of sin no longer arises in the heart: until such a time the sweetness of the Divine Spirit will most certainly not arise in a man, his members will not open themselves to life (Greek; *be rendered chaste in life*), and divine intuitions will not be seen. And until in his heart a man has stilled every concern for the affairs of this life, except for the indispensable needs of his nature, and he entrusts this care to God, spiritual inebriation will not overwhelm him, nor will he experience that madness whereof the Apostle was accused. [['Much learning', he said, 'hath made him mad' (Cf. Acts 26:24).]]

But when I say these things, I do not mean to banish hope, as though only those who have attained to the most sublime perfection can be accounted worthy of God's grace and find consolation. For in very truth, when a man disdains evil actions and separates himself from them entirely and clings to the good, he will quickly sense divine aid. And if he struggle a little, he will find comfort for his soul, he will gain the remission of his sins, he

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will be deemed worthy of grace and will receive a multitude of blessings. Yet such a one is found inferior when compared to the perfection of the man who has banished himself from the world and has found within his soul the mystery of that blessedness which is of the future age, and has laid hold of that thing for which Christ came, to Whom be glory

together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 5.

On Keeping Oneself Remote From the World and From All Things That Disquiet the Intellect.

God has conferred much honor upon men with the two fold instruction (i.e. nature and Scripture) which He has given them. And from every quarter He has opened a door to enable them to enter into saving knowledge. Ask from nature a true witness concerning yourself, and you will not go astray. Yet even if you turn aside from thence, learn from that second witness (i.e. Scripture) and it will place you on the path from which you wandered (For these last two sentences the Greek reads; *But if you wish a true witness of the aforesaid, be one to yourself, and you will never be lost. But if you wish to know this from without, you have a second teacher and witness who will guide you unerringly toward the way of truth*).

A muddled intellect cannot avoid forgetfulness (The Syriac reads here; *A distracted heart cannot avoid forgetfulness*. The word *forgetfulness* in Syriac also means, *going astray*) and wisdom does not open her door before it. He who is enabled to understand with exact knowledge what degree of equality the end of all [men] brings, needs no other teacher for renouncing life's affairs. The first book given by God to rational beings was the nature of created things (The Greek reads here; *The natural law, given by God to men in the beginning, is the divine vision of His creatures*. This is certainly Saint Isaac's meaning, but it is not a literal translation). But the instruction (Greek; *law*) set down in writing was added after the transgression.

Whoever does not voluntarily withdraw himself from the causes of the passions is involuntarily drawn away by sin. These are the causes of sin: wine, women ((or for women—men; that is, Saint Isaac is presumably referring in this context to someone of the opposite gender)), riches, and robust health of body. Not that by their nature these things are sins, but that nature readily inclines toward the sinful passions on their account, and for this reason man must guard

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himself against them with great care. If you bear your weakness constantly in mind, you will not overstep the bounds of caution. With men, poverty is something loathsome; but with God, much more so is a soul whose heart is proud and whose mind is scornful. With men, wealth is honored; but with God, the soul that has come to humility.

Whenever you wish to make a beginning in some good work, first prepare yourself for the temptations that will come upon you, and do not doubt the truth. For it is the enemy's custom, whenever he sees a man beginning a good mode of life with fervent faith, to confront him with diverse and fearful temptations, so that he should be afraid, his good intention should be chilled, and he should lack the fervor to undertake that God-pleasing work. It is not that our adversary has such power (for then no one could ever do good), but God concedes it to him, as we have learned with the righteous Job. Therefore prepare yourself manfully to encounter the temptations which are brought against the virtues, and then begin to practice them. For if you have not prepared yourself beforehand

to meet temptations, then refrain from practicing the virtues.

The man who doubts that God is his Helper in good work is put to flight by his own shadow; he starves at a time of prosperity and plenty, and in a period of calm he will be tempest-tossed (Syriac; *his shipwreck will be severe*). But a man whose confidence is in God is stout of heart; his worth is made manifest to all men, and his praise is before the face of his enemies.

God's commandments excel all the treasures of the world. A man who has gained inward possession of them finds the Lord in them. The man who always goes to bed with rumination upon God has gained Him as his Chamberlain; and he who desires the fulfillment of God's will, will have the angels of heaven as his guides. A man who fears sins will traverse a terrible passage without stumbling, and at a time of darkness he will find light before him and within himself. The Lord carefully watches the steps of the man who fears sins, and God's mercy forestalls him when he slips. A man who considers his transgressions to be slight, falls into worse sins than he formerly committed and he will pay his penalty sevenfold. Sow your alms in humility, and you will reap mercy at the judgment.

By those means whereby you have lost goods, you will gain them back again. You owe a penny to God and He will not accept a pearl from you in its place [[because the former is needed]], (from this point to the end of the paragraph we have followed Bedjan's Syriac text). Having lost chastity, do not allow fornication to remain in its place and give alms because of it: God will not accept them, for in place of sanctification He requires sanctification. Although you wrong not the poor, do not allow an unjust possession to remain in its place. You fast from bread: do not leave iniquity in its place and struggle with some other thing. Greed is uprooted by mercy and privation. You have left the plant in its place, and do you struggle with something else?

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Saint Ephraim said, 'In summertime, do not struggle against the scorching heat in winter clothing.' Let each man reap by means which oppose the iniquity he has sown. Every disease is cured with its own remedies. And you, who are overcome by envy, why do you battle against sleep? While the transgression is still small and blossoming, pluck it up, before it spreads and covers the field. Do not be negligent, when your fault seems slight to you, for later you will find it an inhuman master, and will be running before it like a shackled slave. But a man who fights against a passion from the start will soon subdue it.

He who is able to suffer wrong with joy, though having means at hand to rebuff it, has [[consciously]] received from God the consolation of his faith. The man who endures accusations against himself with humility has arrived at perfection, and he is marveled at by the holy angels, for there is no other virtue so great and so hard to achieve.

Do not believe yourself to be strong, until you are tempted and find yourself superior to change. In this manner test yourself in everything. Acquire a right faith in yourself (Syriac; *Acquire exultation [or boasting] in the faith of your heart*) so that you may trample down your enemies; keep your mind lowly, and place no confidence in your strength, lest you be given over to the frailty of your nature, and then, from your own fall you will learn your own weakness. Nor should you trust your knowledge, lest you be found amid subtle snares and you become entangled (Many Greek MSS read; *lest the enemy come into the midst and trap you in his subtle snares*). Have a meek tongue, and dishonor will never encounter you. Acquire sweet lips, and you will have all men as your

friends. Never boast of your labors with your tongue, lest you be put to shame (Instead of; *lest you be put to shame*, the Syriac reads; *lest, there being nothing in creation that is free of change, your shame be rendered double when you are found in the contrary [state]*). In each matter about which a man boasts himself, God permits that he change, so that he should be humbled, and learn humility. This is why you must surrender all things to God's foreknowledge, and not believe that there is anything in this life unchanging.

Acting in this manner, your eye will be always lifted to God. For God's protection and providence encircle all men, yet they are not seen except by those who have cleansed themselves from sin and who continually keep their attention on God, and on Him alone. But God's providence is especially apparent to them when they enter into a great trial on behalf of the truth; for then they perceive it as if seeing it with their bodily eyes, each man in proportion to the magnitude of the temptation which befalls him and according to the cause thereof. This is the case in order that providence might anoint its champions to have courage in this manner, as with Jacob, and Jesus of Navi, and the Three Children, and Peter, and the rest of the saints, to whom it appeared in a human form (i.e. the angels sent by God's providence), giving them confidence and confirming them in godliness (Syriac; *and consoling their faith*). But if you say that these things were

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granted to the saints from God by way of oeconomy, and that it was for special reasons that they were deemed worthy of such visions, then let the holy martyrs be examples to encourage you. The martyrs, often many together, but sometimes one alone, in places both many and diverse, contested for Christ's sake, and with the *[[secret]]* strength that came to them they courageously endured in bodies of clay the lacerations of iron and torments of every kind, which things surpassed nature. But also, to such as these, the holy angels would manifestly appear, so that every man might learn that Divine providence is very near to those who in every manner endure both every temptation and every affliction for the Lord's sake, for their encouragement and for the shaming of their enemies. For insomuch as the saints were roused to manliness by visions of this kind, to just such a degree did their adversaries rage and become frenzied with wrath at their unyielding patience (Syriac; *were their adversaries tormented by their unyielding patience*).

But what need is there to speak of the ascetics, those strangers to the world, and of the anchorites, who made the desert a city and a dwelling-place and hostelry of angels? For the angels would continually visit these men because their modes of life were so similar; and as being troops of a single Sovereign, at *[[all]]* times they would keep company with their comrades-in-arms, that is to say, those who embraced the desert all the days of their life, and took up their abode in mountains and caves and dens of the earth because of their love for God. And since, having abandoned things earthly, they loved the heavenly and were become imitators of the angels, rightly did those very same holy angels not conceal the sight of themselves from them and they fulfilled their every wish. Moreover, from time to time they would appear to them to teach them how they ought to lead their lives. Sometimes they would clarify certain perplexities for them; or sometimes the saints themselves would ask them for what was needed. And sometimes they would guide them when they had strayed along the way; or sometimes they would come to their rescue when they fell into temptations. Sometimes they snatched them from unexpected mishap and peril that overtook them, such as a snake, or a ledge, or a splinter of wood, or a blow from a stone. Or sometimes, when the enemy was openly waging war on the saints, they showed themselves visibly to their eyes and said that they were sent to

their aid, and would bring them confidence, daring, and refreshment [[by their words]]. At other times they would perform healings through them; or at times they would cure the saints themselves when they fell into certain ailments. Sometimes, when their bodies succumbed from lack of food, with a touch of the hand, or with words, they would fortify and strengthen them above nature; or sometimes, they would bring them food, loaves of bread (which were oftentimes even hot) and other things for their nourishment. To some of them they would

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foretell their departure; and to others, the very manner of their departing. But why should we count up the many things that prove the holy angels' love for us, and their special care for the righteous? For just as big brothers do for their little ones, so do they look after us. All these things come to pass so as to assure every man how 'nigh the Lord is unto all that call upon Him in truth' (Cf. Psalms 144:18), and how much provision He manifests toward those who have devoted themselves to pleasing Him, and who follow Him with pure hearts.

If you believe that God makes provision for you, why be anxious and concerned about temporal affairs and the needs of your flesh? But if you do not believe that God makes provision for you, and for this reason you take pains to provide for your need separately from Him, then you are the most wretched of all men. Why even be alive or go on living in such a case? 'Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He will nourish thee' (Psalms 54:22), and you shall never be dismayed at any terror that overtakes you (Cf. Proverbs 3:25).

A man who has dedicated himself once and for all to God goes through life with a restful mind. Without non-possessiveness the soul cannot be freed from the turmoil of thoughts; and without stillness of the senses she will not perceive peace of mind. Without entering into temptations, no man will ever gain the wisdom of the Spirit; and without assiduous reading, he will know no refinement of thoughts. Without tranquility of thoughts the intellect will not be moved in hidden mysteries; and without the confidence that comes through faith, the soul cannot dare to withstand temptations with boldness. Moreover, without actual experience of God's protection, the heart cannot hope in Him; and if the soul does not taste Christ's sufferings (Syriac; *sufferings for Christ's sake*) consciously, she will never have communion with Him.

Deem him to be a man of God who by reason of much compassion has mortified himself even with regard to necessary wants; for he who gives alms to a poor man has God to take care of him. And a man who has become poor for His sake has found inexhaustible treasures.

God has no need of anything. But He is gladdened whenever He sees a man comforting His image and honoring it for His sake. When someone asks you for something you have, do not say in your heart, 'I shall keep this for myself, that I may be comforted by it, and God will supply him with his need from elsewhere'; for these are the words of the unrighteous and of those who do not know God. A righteous and kindly man does not give his honor to another, nor does he permit an occasion for charity to pass him by unused. The poor and indigent man is provided for by God (because God abandons no one); but as for you, you have shunned the honor given you by God and have estranged His grace

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from you by turning a beggar away. So, whenever you give, be glad and say, 'Glory be unto Thee, O God, for Thou hast deemed me worthy to find a man to comfort!' but if you do not have anything to give, rejoice the more and say, offering great thanks to God, 'I thank Thee, my God, that Thou hast granted me this grace and honor, to go in want for Thy Name's sake, and hast deemed me worthy to taste the affliction that is set in the path of Thy commandments, with sickness and want, such as Thy saints who walked this path did also taste.'

And whenever you are ill, say, 'Blessed are those who discover the object which God has placed in what He brings upon us to profit us!', (Greek; *blessed is the man whom God deems worthy to be tried in matters whereby we inherit life!*). For God administers sicknesses for the health of our soul. For one of the saints said, 'I have taken note of the following, that a monk who does not serve the Lord in a God-pleasing manner, who does not strive earnestly for his soul's salvation, but remains heedless regarding the exercise of virtues, is most assuredly allowed by God to fall prey to temptations so that he be not idle, and from his excessive idleness lapse into a worse state.' This indeed is why God inflicts temptations upon the lazy and heedless, that they may be preoccupied with these and not with frivolous things. This God always does with those who love Him [[but if He sees that they begin to disregard His works, He sends a great trial upon them]], that He may chasten them, make them wise, and teach them His will. And whenever they pray to Him, He does not quickly hearken to them, but waits until they grow weary and have learned in no uncertain manner that these things befell them because of their slothfulness and negligence. For it is written, 'When ye spread forth your hands unto Me, I will turn Mine eyes from you; and if you multiply your prayer, I will not hearken unto you' (Isaiah 1:15). For even if this was said of others also, nonetheless it is written especially about those who have abandoned the way of the Lord.

But since we say that God is plenteous in mercy, why is it that when amidst temptations we unceasingly knock and pray, we are not heard and He disregards our prayer? This we are clearly taught by the Prophet when he says, 'The Lord's hand is not little, that it cannot save; nor is He heavy of hearing, that He cannot hear: but our sins have separated us from Him, and our iniquities have turned His face away, that He doth not hearken' (Isaiah 59:1, 2). Remember God at all times, and He will remember you whenever you fall into evils.

Your nature has become receptive to accidental occurrences, the temptations of the present world have multiplied, and evils are not far from you, but well up inside you when He gives a sign, and from under your feet and from the place where you are standing. As the eyelids come close to each other, even so are temptations close to men.

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But God has ordered these things with wisdom for your profit, so that you would knock persistently at His door, and that by your fear of what oppresses you the remembrance of Him would be sown in your mind, and you would draw near to Him through your entreaties, and your heart would be sanctified by constant remembrance of Him. When you pray, He will hearken to you. And you will learn that God is the one that delivers you; and you will perceive Him Who fashioned you, provides for you, protects you, and Who has for your sake created two worlds: one as a teacher (Syriac; *school*), and for a while your chastiser; but the other as your ancestral home and your eternal inheritance. God did not make you immune to things that are grievous, lest in aspiring to divinity (Syriac; *the rank of divinity*) you should fall heir to what he that was formerly the

'Bringer-of-Dawn', but afterwards became Satan because of his self-exaltation, came to inherit. But likewise, neither has He created you undeviating and fixed, lest you be like the nature of creatures not endued with [rational] souls, and the good things within you be of no profit to you, and bring you no recompense (as is the case with irrational beasts, since their natural animal merits profit them nothing), (For this sentence the Syriac reads; *Nor has He made you incapable of aberration, lest you be like the natures that are bound and you should possess your good and bad [qualities] without any profit or recompense, like the other fleshly creatures upon the earth*). For how much benefit, thanksgiving, and humility is produced by the incursion of these spurs is an easy matter for all to learn for themselves.

Now it is clear that to strive after good and to turn away from evil is within our power; thus, the honor and disgrace which come of these are to be ascribed to us. When we are put to shame by disgrace, we are afraid; but receiving honor, we offer thanks to God and stretch ourselves out toward virtue. God has made these instructors plentiful for you, lest being free from them, and immune to and having no part in tribulations, and feeling yourself superior to every fear, you should forget the Lord your God and turn away from Him, and fall to believing in many gods, just as many have done. For although these men had a passible nature like your own, were subject to want, and were scourged with these very griefs, yet in a brief space of time, because of paltry [[riches]], fleeting power, and [[ephemeral]] health, they not only fell into polytheism, but in their madness they had the audacity to declare themselves gods by nature. For this reason, then, He allows you to be amidst afflictions; but sometimes it is in order that you should not by turning away provoke Him to wrath, and He with the meting out of punishment destroy you utterly from before His face. I shall not speak of ungodliness and the other blasphemies which are bred of a life led in prosperity and in the absence of fear, even though what was mentioned above should not come to pass (i.e. that one should fall into polytheism or think oneself a god. The last phrase is rendered from the Syriac). For this reason, then, He has made His

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remembrance abound in your heart by means of sufferings and griefs, and He has spurred you toward the gate of His mercy with the fear of hostile forces. And by means of deliverance from these things, He has implanted in you seeds of love for Him. And when you lay hold of love, He brings you to the honor of sonship, shows you how abundant is His grace [[and how constant is His care for you. Then He will cause you to perceive both the holiness of His glory and the secret mysteries of His nature's grandeur]]. Whence could you have known these things, if adversities had never befallen you? Since it is especially owing to these that the love of God can be augmented in your soul, owing, that is, to the perception of His graces and memory of the many acts of His providence. All these good things are born to you from grievous circumstances so that you might learn (The Syriac printed text reads; *if you know*) to give thanks.

Remember God, that He too might always remember you; and when He has kept you in His memory and preserved you safe to the end, you will receive every blessing from Him. Do not forget Him, your mind being distracted with futile concerns, lest He forget you in the time of your warfare. When you enjoy abundance, be obedient to Him, so that in the time of your afflictions you may have boldness before Him through the heart's persevering prayer to Him.

Seat (The Greek has; *cleanse*, which the Syriac shows to be a copyist's error for

seat) yourself before the Lord continually, keeping the memory of Him in your heart, lest having lingered outside His memory, you are unable to speak boldly when you enter in before Him, because boldness with God comes from constant conversing with Him and from much prayer. Our connexion and continuance with men is through the body; but our connexion and continuance with God is through the soul's recollection (Syriac; *meditation*) and the vigilance and [sacred] offering of frequent prayer. From long continuance in His recollection, a man is transported at times to astonishment and wonder. For, 'The heart of them that seek the Lord shall rejoice.' 'Seek ye the lord', ye condemned, and 'be strengthened' with hope; 'seek His face' (Psalms 104:3, 4) through repentance, and sanctify yourselves by the holiness of His face, and you will be thoroughly purged from your sins. Run to the Lord, all you that are guilty of sin, to Him that has the power to pardon sins and overlook transgressions. For He has spoken to His Prophet an oath, saying, 'As I live, saith the Lord, I wish not the death of a sinner, but that he return and live' (Ezekiel 33:11). And again, 'I have spread out My hands all the day, unto a rebellious and gainsaying people' (Isaiah 65:2). And again 'Wherefore do ye die the death, O house of Israel?' (Cf. Ezekiel 33:11). And again, 'Return to Me, and I will return unto you' (Malachi 3:7). And again, 'In what day soever the sinner shall return from his way, and return unto the Lord, and execute judgment and righteousness, I will not remember

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his iniquities; but living he shall live, saith the Lord. And if the righteous shall forsake his righteousness, and if sinning he do wrong, I will not remember his righteousness, but it will lay a stumbling-block before him; and he shall die in the darkness of his works, because He abode in them' (Ezekiel 33:14-15). Why so? Because the sinner will not stumble over his sin when he returns to the Lord. And the righteousness of the just will not redeem him when he sins, if he persists in such sinning. But God spoke this also to Jeremias, 'Take thee a parchment, and write all things that I have spoken unto thee from the days of Josias the king of Judah unto this day, all the evil things that I spake unto thee, saying that I would bring them upon this people: that when he hath heard it and been afraid, a man might forsake his wicked way; and returning they may repent, and I may take away their sins' (Cf. Jeremiah 43 (36): 2-3). And Wisdom has said, 'He that covereth his sin shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth his sins, and leaveth the same behind him, shall bring down mercy from God' (Proverbs 28:13). And Esaias says: 'Seek ye the Lord, and when you have found Him, call upon Him: and when He shall draw nigh, let the sinner forsake his privy way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts, and return unto Me, and I will have mercy upon you. For My thoughts are not as your thoughts, neither are My ways as your ways' (Isaiah 55:6-9). 'If then ye hear Me, ye shall eat the good of the land' (Isaiah 1:19). Come unto Me and obey Me, and with your soul ye shall live! Whenever you keep the ways of the Lord and do His will, then put your hope in the Lord and call on Him; and 'as soon as you cry out, He will say to you: "Behold, I am here!"' (Isaiah 58:9).

When temptation overtakes the iniquitous man, he has no confidence wherewith to call upon God, nor to expect salvation from Him, since in the days of his ease he stood aloof from God's will. Before the war begins, seek after your ally; before you fall ill, seek out your Physician; and before grievous things come upon you, pray, and in the time of your tribulations you will find Him, and He will hearken to you. Before you stumble, call out and make supplication; and before you make a vow, have ready what things you

promise, for they are your provisions afterwards. The ark of Noe was built in the time of peace, and its timbers were planted by him a hundred years beforehand. In the time of wrath the iniquitous perished (Syriac; *the iniquitous who lived calmly in their iniquity, were perturbed*) but the ark became the shelter for the righteous man.

The iniquitous mouth is stopped during prayer, for the condemnation of the conscience deprives a man of his boldness. A good (Syriac; *steadfast*) heart joyously sheds tears in prayer. [[Voluntary and steadfast endurance of injustice purifies the heart. Patient endurance of injustice springs from disdain for the world; and a man endures calumny cheerfully because his heart has begun to behold the truth. Joy arising from voluntary endurance of

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calumny and injustice exalts the heart.]] They for whom the world is dead submit to contumelies with joy. But they for whom the world still lives cannot submit to injustice: either -moved by vainglory- they are provoked to anger and are troubled, being stirred up in the manner of brutes, or else they are overcome by grief. O how difficult it is to attain this virtue (i.e. to be forbearing while being wronged), and how much glory it procures from God! He who would attain to this virtue must depart from his kinsmen and live the life of a stranger, for he cannot attain it in his homeland. Only such as are great and mighty are fit to endure the anguish of this virtue among their kindred; to these this world has died, and they have no hope of consolation from this present age.

As grace accompanies humility, so do painful incidents accompany pride. The eyes (Syriac; *heart*) of the Lord are upon the humble to make them glad; but the face of the Lord is against the proud to make them humble. Humility always receives mercy from God; but hardness of heart and littleness of faith contend with fearful encounters [[until suddenly and unexpectedly disaster rises up against them and surrenders them to speedy destruction]]. In all respects belittle yourself before all men, and you will be raised above the princes of this age. Anticipate every person with your greeting and your bow, and you will be more highly prized than those who bring the gold of Souphir as a gift (*Vide* 3 Kings 10:11).

Be contemptible in your own eyes, and you will see the glory of God in yourself. For where humility burgeons, there God's glory wells forth. If you strive to be slighted openly by all men, God will cause you to be glorified. If you have humility in your heart, then in your heart God will show you His glory. Be disdained in your greatness, and not great in your insignificance. Endeavor to be despised, and you will be filled with the honor of God. Seek not to be honored while within you are filled with wounds. Deprecate honor, that you may be honored; and do not love it, that you be not dishonored. Honor flees away from before the man that runs after it; but he who flees from it, the same will it hunt down, and to all men become a herald of his humility. If you treat yourself with contempt so as to be honored, God will expose you publicly; yet if you disparage yourself for the sake of the truth, God will move all His creatures to hymn your praise. They will open up before you the door of your Creator's glory, and they will praise you [[like the Creator]] because you are truly in His image and after His likeness.

Who has seen a man shining throughout with the virtues, but vile-seeming to men: radiant in his life, wise in knowledge, and humble in his spirit? Blessed is he who humbles himself in all things, for he will be exalted in all. For a man who for God's sake humbles himself, and thinks meanly of himself, is glorified by God. The man who hungers and

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thirsts for God's sake, God will make drunk with His good things (Syriac; *with that wine whose inebriation never passes from those who drink it*). And he who goes naked for God's sake is clad by Him in a robe of incorruption and glory. And he who becomes poor for His sake is consoled with His true riches. Set yourself at naught for God's sake, and without your knowing it, your glory will be multiplied all through your life. Hold yourself a sinner, that you may be righteous throughout your life. [[Be scorned when you are wise and do not be a fool in your wisdom.]] [In Syriac; *be a fool* (from *shta*) is a play on *scorned* (*shita*; from *shat*)]. Be unlearned in your wisdom, and do not seem wise, being unlearned. And if humility exalts the simple and ignorant, consider how much honor it will procure for the great and highly esteemed!

Flee vainglory, and you will be glorified; fear pride, and you will be magnified. For pomposity has not been assigned to the sons of men, nor haughtiness to the offspring of women. If you have voluntarily renounced all things in this life, by no means quarrel with any man over anything at all. If you have come to detest praise, avoid those who chase after glory. Avoid the acquisitive even as you would acquisition. Keep yourself away from the wanton even as you would from wantonness. Avoid the intemperate even as you would intemperance. For if even the memory of the people mentioned troubles our thought, how much more will the sight of them and the life conducted by them? Draw nigh to the righteous, and through them you will come near to God. Associate with those who have humility, and you will learn their ways. For if the mere sight of those here mentioned is beneficial, how much more the [[example of their lives and]] instruction of their mouths?

Love the poor, that through them you may also find mercy. Do not keep company with the disputatious, lest you be forced to take leave of your calm. Bear the noisome smells of the sick without disgust, and especially of the poor, since you too are wrapped about with a body. Do not rebuke those who are afflicted in heart, lest you be scourged with the selfsame rod as theirs: then you will seek consolation and will find none. Do not disdain those who are deformed from birth, because all of us will go to the grave equally privileged. Love sinners, but hate their works; and do not despise them for their faults, lest you be tempted by the same. Remember that you share the earthly nature of Adam and that you are clothed with his infirmity (The Greek reads; *and do good to all*). Do not reprove those who are in need of your prayer, and do not withhold tender words of comfort from them, lest they perish and their souls be required of you; but do as the physicians, who cure the diseases which are more feverish with cooling remedies, and the more chilling with their opposites.

When you meet your fellow man, constrain yourself to pay him more honor than is his due. Kiss his hands and feet, often take his hands with deep respect, put them over your eyes, and praise him for what he does not even possess. And when he parts from you,

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say every good thing about him, and whatever it may be that commands respect. For by these and similar acts, you draw him to good and make him feel ashamed because of the gracious names by which you have called him, and you sow the seeds of virtue in him. From behavior such as this, to which you accustom yourself, a good pattern is also imprinted in you; and you gain much humility for yourself, and achieve great things

without toil (Syriac; *and you will be freed from great and arduous conflicts, from which others have been preserved by many labors*). And not only this, but if he has any faults [[or voluntary imperfections]], he will readily accept correction from you when he is honored by you, being ashamed because of the respect which you have shown him [[and the proof of love he continually sees in you]]. Let this always be the aim of your conduct: to be courteous and respectful to all. And do not provoke any man or vie zealously with him, either for the sake of the Faith, or on account of his evil deeds; but watch over yourself not to blame or accuse any man in any matter. For we have a Judge in the heavens Who is impartial. But if you would have that man return to the truth, be grieved over him and, with tears and love, say a word or two unto him; but do not be inflamed with anger against him, lest he see within you signs of hostility. For love does not know how to be angry, or provoked, or passionately to reproach anyone. The proof of love and knowledge is profound humility, which is born of a good conscience in Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom be glory and dominion, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, even unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 6.

That to Our Profit God Has Permitted the Soul to Be Susceptible to Accidents, and on Ascetical Activities.

The fact that a man slips into accidental sins demonstrates the weakness of his nature; for to our profit God has permitted our nature to be susceptible to sinful occurrences (The Greek can mean both *accidents*, *occurrences* [i.e. things one undergoes] and *passions*). For He has not thought it good to make the soul superior to these occurrences before the second regeneration. It is profitable for the soul to be susceptible to accidental sins because this pricks the conscience. To persist in them is, however, audacious and shameful. There are three ways by which every rational soul can draw nigh to God: by fervency of faith, by fear, and by the Lord's chastisement. No man can draw nigh to the love of God if one of these three does not lead the way.

Just as turbulence of the thoughts is born of gluttony, so ignorance and frivolousness of the intellect are born of talkativeness and unruly conversations. Concern for the affairs of this life disturbs the soul, and the distraction of works confuses the intellect and casts out its serenity.

The monk who has given himself over to a celestial husbandry must always and continuously be without any care for the things of this life, so that when he enters inside himself, he will find nothing at all of the present age there [[nor thought concerning anything visible]]. For when he is unengaged with these things, he will be able without distraction to study the law of the Lord both day and night. Bodily labors unaccompanied by purity of mind are like a barren womb and withered breasts, for they cannot bring a man

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to the knowledge of God. They greatly belabor the body, yet they take no pains to uproot the passions from the mind. For this reason bodily labors reap no harvest. Like a man who sows in a brier patch and then is unable to reap, such is the man who corrupts his thinking with anxiety, remembrance of wrongs, and covetousness, and then groans upon

his bed because of his many vigils and great abstinence (this is the Syriac reading). Scripture testifies concerning this, saying: 'As a people that had done righteousness and had not forsaken the commandments of the Lord, they now ask of Me righteousness and truth and wish to draw nigh to Me, their God, saying Why have we fasted and Thou regardest not? Why have we humbled ourselves and Thou didst not know it? Nay, in the day of your fasts ye do your own wills' (Isaiah 58:2, 3), that is, your wicked desires. Ye offer them as whole burnt offerings unto idols; and unto the wretched thoughts, that ye reckon in yourselves as gods, ye daily sacrifice your free will, a thing more precious than all incense, which ye ought rather to consecrate unto Me by your good works and your purity of conscience.

Good soil which gladdens its husbandman by bringing forth fruit an hundredfold is a soul that is made radiant by the remembrance of God and unsleeping vigil both day and night. The Lord establishes on her steadfastness a cloud that overshadows her by day and with a flaming light He illumines her by night. Within her darkness a light shines.

As a cloud veils the light of the moon, so the vapors of the belly banish the wisdom of God from the soul. What the flame of fire is to dry wood, this also is bodily lust to a full belly. As combustible matter added to combustible matter increases the flames of a fire, so succulence of foods increases the lustful movements of the body. The knowledge of God does not dwell in a pleasure-loving body, and the man who loves his own body will not obtain divine gifts. Just as from labor-pangs a fruit is born that delights its mother, so from toil there is born in the soul the knowledge of the mysteries of God; but slothful and pleasure-loving men reap the fruit of shame. As a father cares for his child, so Christ also cares for the body enduring hardship for His sake and He is near to its mouth at all times. Priceless is the possession of labor wrought with wisdom.

A stranger is he whose mind is estranged from all things of life. A mourner (in Syriac this also means *monk*) is he who passes all the days of his life in hunger and thirst for the sake of his hope in future good things. A monk is he who remains outside the world and is ever supplicating God to receive future blessings (Syriac; *who making his dwelling far from the world's spectacles, has the desire of the world to come as the only entreaty of his prayer*). A monk's wealth is the comfort that comes of mourning and the joy that comes of faith, which shines in the secret places of his mind. A merciful man is he who does not distinguish mentally between men, but has mercy on all alike. A virgin is not merely one who keeps his body undefiled by intercourse, but one who feels shame

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before himself even when he is alone. If you love chastity, banish shameful thoughts by exercising yourself in reading and prolonged prayer; then you will be [[inwardly]] armed against their natural causes. But without reading and prayer purity cannot be present in the soul. If you wish to acquire mercifulness and almsgiving, first accustom yourself to disdain all things, lest by their oppressiveness your mind be drawn away from its self-imposed aim. For the exactness (Syriac; *limpidity*) of mercy is shown in patiently enduring injustice. The perfection of humility is to bear false accusations with joy. If you are truly merciful, do not grieve inwardly when you are unjustly deprived of something you possess, and do not tell others of your loss. Nay rather, let the loss you suffer from others be swallowed up by your mercy, as the sharp edge of wine is swallowed up by much water. Show the fullness (Syriac; *limpidity*) of your mercy by the good with which you repay those who have done you injustice, as did the blessed Elisseus with his enemies who intended to take him captive (*Vide* 4 Kings 6:13-23). For when he prayed

and their eyes were blinded by mist, he manifested the power that was in him [[and if he had wished, they would have been annihilated before him]]; and when he gave them to eat and drink and permitted them to depart, he manifested the mercy that was in him.

A man who is truly humble is not troubled when he is wronged and he says nothing to justify himself against the injustice, but he accepts slander as truth; he does not attempt to persuade men that he is calumniated, but he begs forgiveness. Some have voluntarily drawn upon themselves the repute of being licentious, while they are not such; others have endured the charge of adultery, being far from it (Saint Makarios the Great. *The Alphabetical Patericon*, s.v. 'Makarios', 1), and proclaimed by their tears that they bear the fruit of the sin they had not committed, and have wept, asking their offenders' forgiveness for the iniquity they had not done, their souls all the while being crowned with all purity and chastity; others, lest they be glorified because of the virtuous state which they have hidden within them, have pretended to be lunatics, while in truth they were permeated with divine salt and securely fixed in serenity, so that, because of their uttermost perfection, they had holy angels as heralds of their deeds of valor (Saint Symeon of Emesa, the fool for Christ [+End of 6th century.] He is celebrated on July 21).

You think that you possess humility. Other men accuse themselves; but while you cannot even bear to be accused by others, you reckon yourself humble. If you are humble, by these things try yourself: whether or not you are troubled when you suffer injustice.

The Saviour calls the *many mansions* of His Father's house (*Vide* John 14:2) the noetic levels of those who dwell in that land, that is, the distinctions of the gifts and the spiritual degrees which they noetically take delight in, as well as the diversity of the ranks of the gifts. But by this He did not mean that each person [yonder] will be confined in his existence by a separate

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special dwelling and by the manifest, distinguishing mark of the diverse placement of each man's abode. Rather, it resembles how each one of us derives a unique benefit from this visible sun through a single enjoyment of it common to all, each according to the clarity of his eyesight and the ability of his pupils to contain the sun's constant effusion of light. And again, it is just as a lamp placed in a house diversely distributes the illumination of its light, although by the diversity of its appearance the lamp is not substantially divided up into many, losing the simplicity of its radiance. For, in the same manner, those who at the appointed time will be deemed worthy of that realm will dwell in one abode which will not be divided into a multitude of separate parts. And according to the rank of his discipline each man draws delight for himself from one noetic Sun in one air, one place, one dwelling, one vision, and one outward appearance. He whose measure is less will not see the great measure of his neighbor's rank, lest [he should think that] this arises from the multitude of his neighbor's gifts and the fewness of his own, and this very thing should become for him a cause of sadness and mental anguish. Far be it that one should suppose such a thing to occur in that realm of delights! Each man inwardly takes delight in the gift and the lofty rank whereof he has been deemed worthy. The vision (i.e. that which is seen) however, that is outside them all is one, and the place is one (From the beginning of the paragraph until this point, the Syriac is rendered because the Greek has somewhat abbreviated the passage). [[And what is truly greater, their dwelling will be like that of the angelic host in the unity of an ethereal place, in the uniformity of the clear vision and the secret knowledge which belongs to their own ranks, through the revelations of divine vision which differ according to their orders. If, indeed,

eternal beings possess, beyond the operation of sense perception, intellections of the mind, then no one will be so bold as to declare by his words that in the world to come there will be an order of things differing from this one, that is, from [the order of] the intellect, and what is beyond, though indeed, on account of the perfection of nature [then], this is very evident. True, therefore, is the word spoken by the Fathers that, on the one hand, ignorance will exist for an undetermined time and, on the other hand, there is a time reserved for the revelation of its (i.e. ignorance's) abolition (*Vide* 1 Corinthians 13:12) and also [for the revelation] of the rest of those special mysteries regarding the Supreme Being which are delimited by silence.]] Besides the state that is completely on high and the state that is absolutely below, in the future separation there will be no middle realm between them. A man will either belong entirely to those [who dwell] on high, or entirely to those below; but within both one state and the other there are diverse degrees of recompenses (The Greek abbreviates this sentence).

If this is true, which it most certainly is, what is more senseless and foolish than those

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who say that 'It is sufficient for me to escape Gehenna, but I do not seek to enter into the Kingdom!' For to escape Gehenna means precisely to enter the Kingdom, even as to fall away from the Kingdom is to enter Gehenna. Scripture has not taught us the existence of three realms, but, 'When the Son of man shall come in His glory, He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left' (Matthew 25:31, 33). He did not speak of three orders, but two: one on the right and one on the left. And He definitely separated the distinctions of their dwelling places, saying, 'The righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43), but sinners shall depart into everlasting fire' (Cf. Matthew 25:41). And again, 'Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 8:11, 12), a thing more dreadful than any fire. Have you not understood by these things that falling short of (Greek; *the opposite of*. The Syriac uses a rare word here which, perhaps, the Greek translators did not know) the order on high is, namely, the Gehenna of torment?

It is an excellent thing to teach men that which is good and by constant care to draw them away from delusion and into the knowledge of life. This is the path of Christ and the apostles and it is very lofty. But if a man perceives in himself that through such a way of life and continual communion with men his conscience is weakened by seeing external things, his serenity is disturbed, and his knowledge is darkened (since his mind must still be guarded and his senses must still be held in submission) and that while he seeks to heal others he loses his own health, and departing from the [[chaste]] freedom of his will his intellect is shaken; than let him remember the apostolic exhortation which says, 'Strong food belongeth to them that are more perfect' (Hebrews 5:14). Let him turn back, lest he hear from the Lord the words of the proverb, 'Physician, heal thy self' (Luke 4:23), let him condemn himself, let him watch over his own good health. Instead of audible words let his excellent manner of life serve for edification, and instead of the sounds of his mouth let his works teach others, and when he keeps his soul healthy, let him profit others and heal them by his own good health. For when he is far from men he can benefit them even more by the zeal of his good works than by his words, since he himself is sickly and is in greater need of healing than they. For, 'If the blind lead the

blind, both shall fall into the ditch' (Matthew 15:14). Strong food belongs to those who are healthy, whose senses are trained, who are able to take every kind of nourishment, that is, the invasions of all the senses, and to those who by reason of their training in perfection are able to endure every encounter without their heart being harmed.

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When the devil wishes to defile the [[noble]] mind by recollections of fornication, he first tests its constancy by the love of vainglory, since the inception of this thought has no appearance of passion. He constantly acts thus with men who guard their mind and in whom he cannot readily introduce an unseemly thought. But when a man departs from his fortress through converse with the first thought and moves away from his refuge, the devil immediately confronts him with something pertaining to fornication and turns his mind to licentious subjects. At first the man is troubled by this sudden onslaught, since his thoughts were formerly chaste, and his chastity had forestalled those things from the sight of which his governing intellect was separated. Yet even though he was not completely defiled, the devil has succeeded in debasing him from his former dignity. But if he does not turn back and swiftly seize upon his first thoughts [of vainglory] -which are the cause of the second- when he often encounters these things, then through the frequency of their occurrence this habit will blind his soul's faculty of discernment (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek printed text and many Greek MSS read, *But if he recoils and thwarts the first assault of the thoughts [of vainglory], which is the cause of the invasion of the second, then with God's help he can easily subdue the passion*). [[Thus the greater the magnitude and extent of the first passion, the greater is the subjugation to the second.]]

It is better to elude the passions by the recollection of the virtues than by resisting and disputing with them. For when the passions leave their place and arise for battle, they imprint on the mind images and idols, and this warfare has great force, able to weaken the mind and violently to perturb and confuse a man's thinking. But if a man acts by the first rule we have mentioned, when the passions are repulsed they leave no trace in the mind.

Bodily toil and study of the divine Scriptures guard purity; hope and fear make toil steadfast; and withdrawal from men and unceasing prayer establish hope and fear in a man's mind. Until a man has received the Comforter, he requires the divine Scriptures (Syriac; *inscriptions in ink*, i.e. the written word in general) to imprint the memory of good in his heart, to keep his striving for good constantly renewed by continual reading, and to preserve his soul from the subtleties of the ways of sin; for he has not yet acquired the power of the Spirit that drives away that delusion which takes soul-profiting recollections captive and makes a man cold through the distraction of his intellect. When the power of the Spirit has penetrated the [[noetic]] powers of the active soul, then in place of the law of the Scriptures (Syriac; *laws [written] in ink*) the commandments of the Spirit take root in his heart and a man is secretly taught by the Spirit and needs no help from sensory matter. For, so long as it is from matter that the heart has its teaching, error and forgetfulness straightway follow the lesson; but when teaching comes from the Spirit, its memory is kept inviolate (Syriac; *But when teaching is from things infallible, then its recollection does not fail, as standing firmly upon their perspicuity*).

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There are good thoughts and good volitions; there are evil thoughts and an evil heart. [[The first without the second are little accounted for a recompense.]] The first

level (i.e. the thoughts) is a movement that passes through the mind like a sea wind that stirs up the waves; but the second level (i.e. the volition and the heart) is a groundwork and a foundation. In proportion to the extent of the foundation, but not according to the movement of the thoughts, the recompense for good and evil is meted out. The soul does not have rest from the movement of changing thoughts; and if you were to mete out a recompense for each thought, though it has no foundation in the heart, nearly ten thousand times a day you would change your good [recompenses] and determine your judgment (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek; *change your good and the opposite*, is obscure).

The intellect that has newly come forth from the intricate bonds of the passions by repentance, and strives to rise above earthly matters at the time of prayer, is like an unfledged bird; and since it is still unable to take flight, it hops upon the face of the earth [[where the serpent slithers]]. Yet with the help of reading, labor, fear, and care for the many virtues, it gathers together its deliberations, for it is incapable of knowing anything else except these. And for a short time this keeps the intellect unperturbed and undefiled; but later, memories arise, and these trouble and defile the heart. For the man has not yet sensed the still air of freedom which gathers the intellect for a long span of time by forgetting all earthly things. For the intellect has acquired only physical feathers, that is, virtues performed outwardly, but has not yet beheld the divine vision belonging to the virtues it practices, and it has not perceived that this is the wing of the intellect wherewith it draws nigh to celestial things and takes leave of terrestrial ones.

So long as a man serves the Lord through palpable things, images of these things imprint themselves in his thoughts, and he reflects upon the Divine in material images. But whenever he receives perception of that which lies within things, immediately, according to the measure of that perception, his mind will be exalted above the images of things at diverse times.

'The eyes of the Lord are upon the humble of heart, and His ears are opened unto their supplication' (Cf. Psalms 33:15). The prayer of a humble man is like a word spoken from the mouth into an ear: 'O Lord my God, Thou wilt enlighten my darkness' (Psalms 17:28).

When you dwell in stillness and possess the work of humility, this will be a sign for you that your soul is nigh to emerging from darkness: your heart is aflame and hot like fire both day and night, such that all the world is for you refuse and ashes, and you have no desire even for food by reason of the sweetness of the new and flaming thoughts constantly arising in your soul. Suddenly like a freely flowing torrent you are given fountains

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of tears mingled with all your works: with your reading, your prayer, your psalmody, your reflection, your eating and drinking, and to your every work your tears are joined. When you see this in your soul, be of good courage, for you have crossed the sea. And so add to your labors, stand watchfully on guard, that grace may increase in you day by day. But if you have not experienced this, you have not yet completed your journey to reach the mountain of God. If, however, after you have found and received the gift of tears, they cease, and your fervency should cool, though there be no other change, as for instance bodily infirmity (Syriac; *without there being hereafter a change to something else*. The words, *as for instance bodily infirmity*, found in the Greek, were probably added by a copyist), then woe to you! What you have lost! For you have fallen into self-

esteem, or heedlessness, or sloth. But what follows upon tears once a man has received them, and what he afterwards encounters, we shall describe in another place, in the chapters on the successive order of [monastic] disciplines (See Homily 18. This is the Syriac reading. The phrase might also be translated, *on the course of the [monastic] way of life*, or, *on the course of the governance [of the world]*. Taking this latter sense the Greek has, *on providence*) even as we have been enlightened by the Scriptures and the Fathers, to whom these mysteries have been entrusted.

If you have no works, do not speak on virtues. Afflictions suffered for the Lord's sake (Syriac; *for righteousness*) are more precious to Him than every vow and sacrifice; and the odor of their sweat surpasses every fragrance [[and choice incense]]. Regard every virtue performed without bodily toil as premature, stillborn fruit of the womb. The offering of the righteous is the tears of their eyes; and their acceptable sacrifice is their sighings during vigil. The righteous, burdened by the weight of their body, cry out dolefully to the Lord and send forth their supplications to God with pain; and at the cry of their voice the angelic orders stand close at hand to aid them, to encourage them with hope, and to comfort them. For the holy angels are partakers of the sufferings and the tribulations of the saints through their nearness to them.

Rightly directed labors and humility make a man a god upon earth. Faith and mercy speed him on the way to *limpid purity*. Fervency and contrition of heart cannot dwell simultaneously in one soul, even as drunken men cannot have control of their thinking. For when the soul is given this fervor, the contrition of mourning is taken away. Wine has been given for gladness, and fervor for the rejoicing of the soul. The former warms the body, and the word of God the understanding. Those who are inflamed by fervor are ravished by hope's meditations and their mind is caught away to the future age. Just as men drunken with wine imagine diverse hallucinations, even so men drunken and made fervent by hope are conscious neither of affliction nor of anything worldly. This, and other like things that are prepared for those who journey the path of successive disciplines (Greek; *the path of the virtues*)

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after they have practiced the prolonged labors of purification, occur in the very beginning of the way to the simpler of heart and more fervent in hope, and this is by reason of the soul's faith alone. All that the Lord wishes, He does.

Blessed are those who for the sake of their love of God have girded their loins with simplicity and an unquestioning disposition to meet the sea of afflictions, and who do not turn their backs! Such men speedily find refuge in the promised haven (Literally; *the haven of promises*. The Greek has; *the Kingdom's haven*), and find rest in the tents of those who have toiled well; their souls are led out of their tribulations and they exult in the joy of their hope. Those who hasten onward with hope do not turn their gaze toward the perils of the way, nor do they stop to examine it, but only when they have crossed the sea they look back upon the treacherous path and give thanks unto God for how He delivered them from gorges, precipices, and the craggy way, while they knew it not. Those, however, who ponder over many deliberations, who strongly desire to be prudent and who give themselves over to intricate and quailing thoughts, who are ever making ready and striving to foresee every peril, are (for the most part) always to be found sitting on the doorstep of their houses.

'When the sluggard is sent in the way, he says, There is a lion in the way and murderers in the streets' (Proverbs 22:13). And those who say, like the sons of Israel,

'There we saw the sons of giants, and we were before them as grasshoppers' (Numbers 13:33) are those who will be found still journeying on the way at the time of their death, who always desire to be very prudent, but who never wish at all to make a beginning. The simple and unlearned man who sets out swimming passes through the waters retaining his first ardor, having no care at all for his body, nor deliberating in himself as to whether or not his endeavor will in any wise succeed. Let not much wisdom become a stumbling-block to your soul and a snare before you; but trusting in God, manfully make a beginning upon the way that is filled with blood, lest always you be found wanting and naked of the knowledge of God. For he who is fearful or watches the winds, sows not (Cf. Ecclesiastes 11:4). Death [[in battle]] for God's sake is better than a shameful and sluggish life. When you wish to begin one of the works of God, first make a testament, like one who is no longer to live in this life, like a man who is prepared for death and has despaired of his present life, and as though you have reached your fore-appointed time (Syriac; *as though it is the end of your days without your seeing any more*). Hold this unwaveringly in your mind, that hope for this present life may not hinder you from struggling and being victorious. For the hope of this present life enfeebles the thinking. Therefore do not be overly wise, but rather give place in your mind to faith, and remember the days after your death, and slackness will never enter in

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upon you, according to the word of the wise man who said, 'A thousand years of the present age are not like one day in the age of the righteous' (Cf. Psalms 89:4). Begin every good work with fortitude, and do not undertake such labors with a divided soul; and let not your heart waver in its hope in [[the grace of]] God, lest your toil be profitless and the work of your husbandry be burdensome. Believe with your heart that the Lord is merciful and gives grace to those who seek Him, not in proportion to our works, but according to the ardent love of our souls and our faith in Him. For He says, 'As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee' (Matthew 8:13).

The diverse works of those who live according to God are the following: one man strikes his head all the day long, and does this instead of the hours of his services. Another joins together the set number of his prayers by persevering in continual prostrations. Another replaces the services by copious tears and this suffices him [[because it seems better to him than anything else]]. Another is zealous in the intellect's meditation and limits his appointed rule to this. Another torments his soul with hunger to the extent that he cannot perform the services. Another's recitation of the Psalms is unceasing due to the fervor of his mind (Greek; *Another makes his service unceasing by continuing in ardent study of the Psalms*). Another passes his time in reading, and so kindles his heart. Another is taken captive as he comprehends the divine meaning of the divine Scriptures. Another's oral recitation is restrained from its customary course by his astonishment at the verses (Greek; *Another is restrained from his customary study and is held by silence due to his astonishment at the wonders of the verses*). But another, having tasted but a little of these things, became puffed up and fell into error. Another is prevented from keeping to his rule by grievous illness and weakness; yet another by the predominance of some habit, or desire, or ambition, or vainglory, or covetousness, or the desire to amass wealth. And another made progress, stood firmly, and did not turn back until he received the pearl of great price. Always make a beginning, therefore, in God's work with joy and earnestness. And if you are pure from the passions and a doubting heart, God Himself will raise you up to the summit, help you, and make you wise

according to His will, and in a wondrous way you will receive perfection. To Him be glory and dominion [[and adoration and majesty]] both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 7.

On the Kinds of Hope in God; and on Who Should Put His Hope in God, and Who It Is That Foolishly and Imprudently Entertains Such Hope.

There is a hope (The Syriac word has the further sense of; *trust, confidence*) in God that comes through the faith of the heart, which is good, and which one possesses with discernment and knowledge. And there is another, a false hope, which is distorted and which derives its existence from folly (The Greek text has; *iniquity*, which is a copyist's error for *folly*). The man who pays no heed at all to that which perishes, but devotes himself entirely to the Lord both night and day, who gives thought to nothing worldly because of his great assiduity in the virtues, and occupies his every leisure moment with divine things, and who for this reason neglects to procure food and clothing for himself, and the preparation of a place of shelter for his body, and all the rest: this man rightly and knowingly hopes in the Lord, for He will prepare his necessities for him. This truly is the hope which is both true and most wise. It is right for such a man to put his hope in God, inasmuch as he is His servant, and is diligent in His work, being free of any negligence due to whatever cause. To a man such as this, it is meet that God manifest His special attention, because he has kept His commandment which says, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you' (Matthew 6:33) and, 'Make no provision for the flesh' (Romans 13:14). Whenever we manage ourselves in this way, the world, like some servant, will prepare all things for us, and will unhesitatingly submit to our words as to her masters, and will never set herself against our will. For it is so as not to desist from his constant standing before God that such a man

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does not allow himself to give thought to the necessities of his body. And because he takes no thought for anything else, and he is [[equally]] void of all care for things small or great which produce comfort or diversion [[or departure]] from the fear of God, he will be marvelously furnished even with these things (i.e. the needs of the body) having neither given them thought nor labored for them.

Very different, however, is the case with the man whose heart is completely buried in earthly concerns, who constantly eats dust with the serpent (*Vide* Genesis 3:14), who gives no thought at all to what is pleasing to God, who expends all his labors on corporeal things, who is lax, who is continually engaged in concerns and the diversion of wantonness, and who grasps at every pretext for this. Because such a man has fallen away from virtue through his sloth and indolence, it is a different case with him whenever he suffers affliction, or is deprived of some needful thing, or the fruits of his foolish deeds cause him distress (From the beginning of the paragraph until this point we have followed the Syriac), and he says, 'I shall put my hope in God, and He will relieve me of my worry, and bring me comfort.' O fool, until the present hour you would not remember God, but have insulted Him with your dissolute practices, and His name is blasphemed

among the heathen through you, even as it is written (Romans 2:24), and now you dare to say with mouth open wide, 'In Him shall I hope, and He will help me, and take care for my concern'? Well has God said by His prophet to the shame of such persons, 'They seek Me daily, and would learn My ways, as they that do righteousness and do not forsake the ordinances of their God; they ask of Me judgment and righteousness', Isaiah 58:2). He is a fool, therefore, who even mentally does not draw nigh to God, and yet, when he is surrounded by tribulations, lifts his hands to Him with confidence. This man must be seared with hot iron many times over so that somehow he might be instructed. He possesses no work deserving of confidence in God. Rather, with his grievous practices, and his negligence of his duties, he has rendered himself deserving of chastisement; yet for His mercy's sake, God, Who is longsuffering, endures him. Therefore let not such a one deceive himself, and forget the level of his conduct, and say that he hopes in God; for he will be chastised. When he does not possess the works of faith, let him not stretch out his feet in idleness and say, 'I trust God will provide me with my necessities', as though he were living in the labors of God. If, on account of his own foolishness, such a one falls into a well while he is walking, he says immediately (although formerly God had never entered his mind at all), (Greek; *let not such a man cast himself into a well (while in no wise having God in remembrance), and after his fall, say*), 'And as for what happens now, I shall hope in God, and He will deliver me.' Err not, O fool! Toil for God's sake and sweat

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in His husbandry precede hope in Him. If you believe in God, you do well, but faith has need of labors also (*Vide* James 2:19 ff), and confidence in God is the good witness of the conscience born of undergoing hardship (Greek; *is shown by undergoing hardship*) for the virtues. Do you believe that God provides for His creatures, and is able to do all things? Let suitable labor, therefore, follow on your faith, and then He will hear you. Think not to grasp the winds in your fist (Cf. Proverbs 30:4) that is, faith without works.

Often it happens that a man unwittingly travels a road where there lies a wild beast, or murderers, or something of the kind. But the universal providence of God delivers him from injury, either by delaying him on his way for some reason until the dangerous beast has gone off, or by an encounter with someone, to make him turn aside from the road. And again, sometimes a venomous serpent is found lying in the road yet out of sight, but God, not willing to surrender the man to this trial, suddenly makes the serpent hiss and withdraw from the place, or slither out in front of him, and the wayfarer when he sees it is put on his guard, and is saved from it, even though he is undeserving on account of his secret sins, which only he knows; yet God still rescues him, for His mercy's sake. And again, it often happens that a house, or a wall, or a stone is about to fall, and it slips from its place with a splintering sound, but people are found sitting there, and in His love for men God commands an angel to hold it back, and to keep it from falling until they rise up from thence; or else, under a certain pretext, He leads them out, so that no one is found underneath. But as soon as they go out, He straightway lets it fall. And even if it happens that someone is caught, He works the matter so that they are in no way hurt. By this God wishes to show the infinite magnitude of His power.

All these things and their like, therefore, belong to God's universal and catholic providence, and this *[[grace]]* the righteous man has inseparably with him. For God has bidden other men to manage their affairs with discretion, and to combine their own knowledge with God's providence. But the righteous man has no need to manage his

affairs through that knowledge, because instead of that knowledge he possesses faith, by means of which he 'casteth down every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God' (2 Corinthians 10:5). And he will fear none of the things here enumerated, as it is written, 'The righteous man is bold as a lion' (Proverbs 28:1), daring all things through faith, not as one who tempts the Lord, but as one who has confidence in Him (Greek; *as one who sees Him*), and as one who is armed and arrayed in the power of the Holy Spirit. And because God is his constant concern, God will also say concerning him, 'I am with him in affliction, and I will rescue him and glorify him, with length of

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days will I satisfy him, and I will show him My salvation' (Psalms 90:15-16). The man who is lax, on the other hand, and who is indolent in his labor, cannot have that hope. This, then, belongs only to him who uninterruptedly abides in God in all things, who draws near Him through the beauty of his works, and strains the gaze of his heart unceasingly toward His grace, as the divine David has said, 'from my hoping in my God, mine eyes have failed me' (Psalms 68:4). For unto Him is due glory, honor, and worship unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 8.

On What Helps a Man to Approach God in His Heart, and What Is the Real Cause That Secretly Brings Help Near Him; and Again, What Is the Cause That Leads a Man to Humility.

Blessed is the man who knows his own weakness, because this knowledge becomes to him the foundation, the root, and the beginning of all goodness. For whenever a man learns and truly perceives his own weakness, at that moment he contracts his soul on every side from the laxity that dims knowledge, and he treasures up watchfulness in himself. But no one can perceive his own infirmity if he is not allowed to be tempted a little, either by things that oppress his body, or his soul. For then, comparing his own weakness with God's help, he will straightway understand the greatness of the latter. And again, whenever he looks over the multitude of his devisings, and his wakefulness, his abstinence, the sheltering, and the hedging about of his soul by which he hopes to find assurance for her, and yet sees that he has not obtained it, or again, if his heart has no calm because of his fear and trembling: then at that moment let him understand, and let him know that this fear of his heart shows and reflects that he is altogether in need of some other help. For the heart testifies inwardly, and reflects the lack of something by the fear which strikes and wrestles within it. And because of this, it is confounded, since it is not able to abide in a state of surety; for God's help he says, is the help that saves (Cf. Psalms 59:13; 107:13). When a man knows that he is in need of Divine help, he makes many prayers. And by as much as he multiplies them, his heart is humbled, for there is no man who will not be humbled when he is making

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supplication and entreaty. 'A heart that is broken and humbled, God will not despise' (Psalms 50:17). Therefore, as long as the heart is not humbled, it cannot cease from

wandering; for humility collects the heart.

But when a man becomes humble, at once mercy encircles him, and then his heart is aware of Divine help, because it finds a certain power and assurance moving in itself. And when a man perceives [[the coming of]] Divine help, and that it is this which aids him, then at once his heart is filled with faith, and he understands from this that prayer is the refuge of help, a source of salvation, a treasury of assurance, a haven that rescues from the tempest, a light to those who are in darkness, a staff of the infirm, a shelter in time of temptations, a medicine at the height of sickness, a shield of deliverance in war, an arrow sharpened against the face of his enemies, and, to speak simply: the entire multitude of these good things is found to have its entrance through prayer. From this time forward he revels in the prayer of faith, his heart glistens with clear assurance, and does not continue in its former blindness and the mere speech of the tongue. When he thus perceives these things, he will acquire prayer in his soul, like some treasure. And from his great gladness the form of prayer is turned into shouts of thanksgiving. This is the very thing pronounced by one who has defined the form proper to each of our actions: 'Prayer is joy that sends up thanksgiving' (Saint Nilos of Sinai. *On Prayer*, 15. The Greek original has, *Prayer is the fruit of joy and thanksgiving*). Here he speaks of the prayer that is achieved through the knowledge of God, that is, prayer that has been sent from God (Syriac; *the prayer that offers up [thanksgiving]*). For at that moment a man does not pray with labor and weariness (as in the rest of his prayer, which is prayed before the experiencing of this grace) and because his heart is full of joy and wonder, it continually wells up [[motions of confession and]] gratitude while he silently bows the knee. Nay, [[from his vehement inner ardor,]] since he is very greatly moved by astonishment at this comprehension of God's graces, he suddenly raises his voice in praise and glorification of Him, and sends up thanksgiving; and he moves his tongue while being held with great awe.

If any man has reached this in truth and not in fancy, and has made many observations of this reality in himself, and has come to know its many differences by reason of his great experience, he knows what I say, for there is nothing here contrary to the truth. And from this time forward let him cease from pondering vanities, and let him remain with God by means of unbroken prayer, while being in anxiety and trepidation lest he be deprived of the magnitude of God's succor (Syriac; *the stream of its [prayer's] succors*).

All these good things are born to a man from the recognition of his own weakness. For out of his craving for God's help, he presses on toward God by the petitions of his

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prayer. And to the extent that he draws near to God in his intention, God also draws near to him through His gifts, and will not take His grace away from him, on account of his great humility; for just like the widow before the judge, he cries out to be avenged of his adversary (*Vide* Luke 18:3). But for this very reason the compassionate God defers in granting a man's requests, even so that this may become a cause for him to draw near Him, and for his need's sake to stay close to Him Who is the brimming fount of succor. Some of his petitions God grants him promptly (I mean those without which no one can be saved), but some He withholds from him. And on certain occasions He restrains and dispels from him the scorching assault of the enemy, while on others, He permits him to be tempted, that this trial may become to him a cause for drawing near to God (as I said

before), and also that he may be instructed, and have the experience of temptations. And such is the word of Scripture: "The Lord left many nations, without driving them out; neither delivered He them into the hands of Jesus, the son of Navi, to chastise the sons of Israel by them, and that the tribes of the sons of Israel might be taught, and learn war" (Judges 2:23 ff). For the righteous man who has no consciousness of his own weakness walks on a razor's edge, and is never far from falling, nor from the ravening lion; I mean the demon of pride. And again, a man who does not know his own weakness falls short of humility; and he who falls short of this, also falls short of perfection; and he who falls short of perfection is forever held by dread, because his city is not founded on pillars of iron, neither upon lintels of brass, that is, humility. No man can acquire humility save by humility's own means whereby the heart is made contrite and the deliberations of conceit are brought to naught. This is why the enemy often finds himself a slight cause whereby he can deflect a man from the path. Without humility the work of man cannot be perfected, and the charter of his liberty does not yet bear the seal of the Spirit, but rather, until now he is a slave, and his work does not rise above fear. For a man cannot correct his work without humility, and he is not instructed except through temptations, and without wisdom he does not acquire humility.

Therefore the Lord looses upon the saints the causes of humility, of a contrite heart, and of ardent [[undistracted]] prayer, so that those who love Him might draw nigh Him through humility. Often He jolts them with the passions of their nature, and the intrusions of shameful and polluted thoughts; and often too by rebukes, insults, and the buffetings of men; but sometimes with diseases and bodily ailments; and at other times with poverty, and the utter lack of necessities. And sometimes with the torment of excessive fear which He permits to fall upon them in the open warfare of the demons so as to trouble them strongly; but at times with dire variations, one more oppressive, grievous, and difficult

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than the next (the Greek abbreviates this sentence). All these things occur so that they may have causes to be humbled, and that they do not become immersed in the sleep of negligence, either as regards those things from which the ascetic is wont to fall ill, or as regards the fear of things to come. Therefore temptations are necessarily profitable to men. But I do not say this with the intent that a man should voluntarily allow himself to be made lax by shameful thoughts, that this may become to him a pretext of humility in his remembrance of them, nor do I mean that he should be assiduous to enter into further temptations, but rather that in cultivating good, he must be sober at all times, and watch over his soul, and reflect that he is a created being, and therefore very liable to sudden change (Syriac; *clad with aberration*). For every created being is in need of God's (Syriac; *of another's*) power for assistance, and by his need of another's assistance every man reveals his natural weakness. But the man who knows his own weakness must of necessity humble himself, so that his need may be supplied by Him Who has the power to give it. And if he had known it from the beginning, and had looked upon his weakness, he would not have grown negligent; and if he had not grown negligent, he would not have slumbered, and been given over to the hands of those who afflict him in order to wake him up.

Therefore, whoever is walking upon the path of God must give thanks to Him for all the things that come upon him, and revile and blame his own soul, and know that he would not have been delivered over by his Provider except for the sake of negligence, in

order that his mind might be awakened, or else because he has become puffed up. But he should not be overly disturbed on this account, nor quit the arena and the fight, nor leave himself free of self-reproach, lest his evil grow twofold. For with God, Who abundantly pours forth righteousness, there is no injustice. Far be it! Unto Him be glory unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 9.

On Voluntary and Involuntary Sins, and on Those Which Are Committed Because of Some Accidental Circumstance.

There are sins which a man commits from weakness, being drawn into them against his will, and there are sins which a man commits voluntarily, and ones from ignorance. Also, it happens that a man will sin due to an accidental circumstance, or again, because of his long continuance in evil, or from habit. Although all these modes and kinds of sins are blameworthy, yet with respect to the punishment to be exacted for each, one is found to be comparatively greater than the other. The blame of one sin is very great and its repentance is only accepted with difficulty, but another is more easily forgiven. Just as Adam, Eve, and the serpent all received from God the recompense of their sin, yet the curse which each one received differed greatly, so it was also with the sons of Adam and Eve. The severity of the punishment for a sin accords with a man's intention and his desire of sin. If a man does not wish to follow the way of sin, but notwithstanding, he is drawn toward it on account of his negligence regarding virtue (since he does not practice it), even though it is grievous to him to be joined with sin, then his punishment will be severe. But if someone who is diligent in virtue should be tempted in some sin, then mercy is undoubtedly near him to cleanse him.

It is one thing when a man is carefully diligent in virtue, constant in its works, and passes the night meditating upon it, lest he fall short in any of its duties (Greek; *in anything he is concerned with*). But although he should carry his burden around with him by day and all his care is for virtue, still while he is engaged in such concerns, the scale of his balance sinks a little to the left and he is

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drawn down by the flesh's weakness into one form of sin, either by reason of a certain ignorance, or because of things that oppose him on his path (that is, the path of virtue) and the billows that rise up in his members at every hour, or because of the aberration (i.e. the propensity toward aberration) that is allowed to remain in him so that his free will might be tried. This causes him grief and anguish and, because of the misery that contrary things inflict upon him, he sighs painfully over his soul.

But it is a very different thing when a man is found to be lax and heedless in the work of virtue, when he has utterly abandoned the path and hastens slavishly to be subservient to every pleasure of sin, showing his zeal to invent means whereby he might enjoy it perfectly, and being ready like a slave assiduously to do the will of his enemy, and to make his members weapons for the devil in complete obedience to him; he wishes not at all to give heed to repentance, neither to draw nigh to virtue, nor to put an end to and return from the path of his destruction.

Diverse are the slips (Greek; *One thing is the sin resulting from slips*) and the falls

which can occur on the path of virtue and the way of righteousness, as the Fathers write, saying that on the path of virtue and the way of righteousness there are falls, oppositions, compulsions, and the like.

But something quite different is the death (Greek; *fall*) of the soul, complete destruction and utter abandonment. By this it is evident that whenever a man falls, he should not forget the love of his Father. And if it happens that he fall into many diverse transgressions, he should not be negligent concerning the good, nor should he stop his onward course, but even though he was vanquished, he should rise up again to struggle against his adversaries and each day begin to lay a foundation for his ruined dwelling, having the words of the Prophet in his mouth until his departure from this world, 'Rejoice not against me, mine enemy, that I have fallen; for I will rise again; for though I should sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me' (Micah 7:8). May he never cease from making war until his death, and as long as there is breath in him may he not surrender his soul to defeat, even at the very moment of his defeat! But if each day his ship be broken up and his cargo perish in the deep, let him not cease from acquiring new possessions, trading, and also from borrowing; let him set out in other ships, sailing in hope, until beholding his struggle and taking compassion on his ruin, the Lord sends down upon him His mercy and gives him powerful motivations to enable him to undergo and resist the flaming darts of the enemy. This is the wisdom which is granted by God, and this is the wise invalid who has not cut off his hope (Syriac; *this is the wise invalid. Despair, [Literally; cutting off hope], gives no profit*). It is more expedient for us to be condemned on account of particular deeds than on account of

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our abandoning all. For this reason Abba Martinian admonished us not to become weary in the face of the many struggles and the diverse kinds of warfare that are met continually on the path of righteousness and not to turn back so as to give the enemy victory over us in some shameful manner. As a loving father he enjoins these things in an orderly fashion, point by point.

The Admonition of Saint Martinian.

My children, if you are truly strugglers, men who pay heed to virtue and care for your souls, and you earnestly desire your mind to be limpidly pure before Christ and to do that which is pleasing to Him, then it surely behooves you to accept for His sake every warfare kindled by our nature's passions, the attractions of this world, the duration and persistence of the demons' wickedness with which they are accustomed to confront you, and all their snares. Do not grow faint-hearted because of the continuing and obdurate fierceness of the battle; do not become hesitant because of the long duration of your struggle; do not grow lax, neither be afraid of the hosts of your enemies; and if for a season you should perhaps stumble and sin, do not fall into the pit of despair. But if something should befall you in this great war and you should even be wounded upon your face, let this in no wise hinder you from attaining your goal. Rather, persevere in the pursuit that you have chosen, and you will achieve that thing most desirable and praiseworthy, to prove steadfast and unmoving in war, reddened by the blood of your wounds. Never cease therefore, from wrestling with your adversaries.

Such are the admonitions of the great elder. Hence, you should not grow weak or lax because of what we have said. But woe to that monk who has proven false to his vow,

who, trampling upon his conscience, stretches forth his hand to the devil to enable the latter to exult over him because of one of the small or great modes of sin, and who can no longer withstand his enemies since one part of his soul has been devastated! With what countenance will he meet the Judge (Syriac; *will he look on*) when his companions who have attained purity will greet one another for he has parted ways with them and walked the path of perdition; he has lost the boldness before God that the righteous possess, and the prayer that ascends from a pure heart, which is borne up above the angelic hosts and is not arrested until it has obtained its request and returned with joy to the mouth that sent it forth. But what is more terrible, just as he has separated his path from theirs, so Christ will separate him from them in that day when the shining cloud will bear upon its back their bodies made resplendent by purity and carry them through the gates of Heaven. For this reason 'the ungodly shall not stand up in judgment', since their works have been judged here already, 'nor sinners in the council of the righteous' (Psalms 1:5) in the resurrection of judgment.

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Homily 10.

On the Words of the Divine Writings Which Urge Men to Repentance, and That They Were Said With a View to Men's Weakness, Lest They Perish From the Living God, But That One Must Not Employ Them As An Excuse for Sinning.

The encouragement which the Fathers give in their divine writings and the help for repentance which is found in the writings of the apostles and the prophets must not be employed by us as an aid for sinning and for breaking the Lord's inviolable decrees (Syriac; *as an aid for spurning the menaces made by the divine judgments and the punishment for transgressing the inviolable decrees*). For by the power of God these things were decreed from ancient times through the mouth of all the saints in all their writings and legislations in order to abolish sin. But the fact that repentance furnishes hope should not be taken by us as a means to rob ourselves of the feeling of fear, so that one might more freely and fearlessly commit sin (This sentence has been rendered according to the Syriac. The Greek MSS have widely divergent readings here). For behold how God in every wise preached fear in all the Scriptures and showed Himself to be a hater of sin (Instead of this sentence the Syriac reads; *Now of those things which through a decree with all kinds of threats the Lord confirmed by the seals of the word of God in all the Scriptures of our salvation, some He has partially revealed by means of many men or by a few through the punishments that He brought upon them in order to show that He is a hater of sin*). Why indeed was the generation of men in the days of Noe drowned in the deluge? Was it not because of their lasciviousness when they raved over the beauty of the daughters of Cain?, (*Vide* Genesis 6:2 ff). At that time there was no avarice, no idolatry, no sorcery, no wars. Why were the cities of the Sodomites consumed by fire? Was it not because they gave their

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members over to lust and impurity, such that it dominated over all of them in every abominable and unnatural act, even as they willed?, (*Vide* Genesis 18:20 ff). Was it not because of the fornication of one man that in one instant five and twenty thousand of the sons of Israel, the firstborn of God, fell and died?, (*Vide* Numbers 24:9). Why was the mighty man Samson rejected by God, he who was set apart and consecrated to God while

still in the womb; whose birth was announced by an angel, like John, the son of Zacharias; who was granted great power and worked great wonders [[and who by the supernatural strength which God poured into his body smote a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass and became a saviour and judge unto Israel]]? Was it not because he defiled his holy members by union with a harlot? For this reason God departed from him and surrendered him to his enemies (*Vide* Judges 16:4 ff). And David, who was a man after God's own heart, who because of his virtues was found worthy to generate from his seed the promise of the Fathers, and to have Christ shine forth from himself for the salvation of all the world, was he not punished because of adultery with a woman, when he beheld her beauty with his eyes and was pierced in his soul by that arrow? For it was because of this that God raised up a war against him from within his own household, and he who came forth from his loins pursued him. These things befell him even after he had repented with many tears, such that he moistened his couch with his weeping, and after God had said to him through the prophet, 'The Lord hath forgiven thy sin' (2 Kings 12:13).

I wish also to bring to mind certain men before David. For what reason did wrath and death come upon the house of the priest Eli, the righteous elder who was eminent for forty years in his priesthood? Was it not because of the iniquity of his sons Ophni and Phinees? For neither did he sin, nor did they with his assent, but it was because he did not have the zeal to demand from them the Lord's vindication (i.e. to punish them. *Vide* 1 Kings 3:13) and he loved them more than the statutes of the Lord. Lest someone surmise that the Lord manifests His wrath only upon those who pass all the days of their life in iniquities, behold how for this unseemly sin He manifests His zeal against His genuine servants, against priests, judges, rulers, men consecrated to Him, to whom He entrusted the working of miracles, and He in no wise overlooks their transgression of His statutes, as it is written in Ezekiel, 'I said to the man who I commanded to go into Jerusalem with an invisible sword: Begin at My sanctuary, and have no mercy upon the old man and the youth' (Cf. Ezekiel 9:5, 6). Thus he showed that His true servants and friends are those who walk before Him in fear and reverence and do His will, since virtuous deeds and purity of conscience are things holy [[and beloved]] of God. But when men repudiate His paths, the Lord repudiates them, casts them away

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from His face, and takes from them His grace. For why was the sentence against Baltasar issued so swiftly and why did it strike him down, as it were, by the form of a hand? Was it not because he acted with audacity toward the untouchable vessels of offering which he seized from Jerusalem, drinking out of them, both he and his concubines?, (*Vide* Daniel 5:1 ff). In the same manner, those who have consecrated their members to God, but are so audacious as to use them once more for worldly deeds, the same perish, being smitten by an invisible blow.

Therefore, let us not disregard the oracles and threats of God by reason of our confidence in repentance and the good courage given us by the divine Writings, and so to make Him wrothful by our wicket deeds and defile our members that have been consecrated once and for all for the service of God. For lo, we have consecrated ourselves to Him, as Elias, Elisseus, the sons of the prophets, and all the other saints and virgins, who worked great wonders and spoke to God face to face. And further, as all those who came after them: John the Virgin, the holy Peter, and the other heralds and preachers of the New Testament, who consecrated themselves to the Lord, from Whom they received

the knowledge of mysteries—some from His very mouth, others through revelation—and who became intercessors between God and men [[and receptacles of His revelations]], and preachers of the Kingdom to the whole world.

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Homily 11.

On How the Beauty of Monastic Life Is Preserved and On How It Can Be a Means for God to Be Glorified.

The monk (or *solitary*) ought to be in his appearance and all his actions an exemplar of profit (Syriac; *a sight of stimulation*) to those who see him, so that by reason of his many virtues which shine forth like sunbeams, the enemies of truth, when they look upon him, will involuntarily confess that the hope of salvation which the Christians have is firm and unshakable, and from every side will run to him as a refuge. And so the horn of the Church will be exalted over Her enemies, and many will be moved to emulation of his virtue, and will come forth from out of the world; and he will be venerable among all because of the beauty of his life [[so that on his account the mouth of the sons of the Church will be opened and their head will be exalted above all religions]]. For the boast of the Church of Christ is the monastic way of life.

In every aspect, therefore, the beauties of a monk's life should shine forth, namely: in elevation above the visible world; scrupulous non-possessiveness; perfect contempt of the flesh; sublime fasting; constancy in silence; orderly discipline of the senses; careful watch over the sight; the cutting off of all contention with any man over anything pertaining to this age; brevity in speech; purity from the remembrance of wrongs; simplicity with discernment; sincerity and ingenuousness of the heart coupled with sound judgment, alertness, and acumen. And further, the following is proper to him: to know that the present life is unavailing and fleeting, and that the true and spiritual life is near at hand; not to be known or observed by men; not to fetter himself by companionship and union

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with any man; to have a quiet dwelling-place [[a cramped abode, paltry and mean possessions]]; to flee men always like a wild ass, and unflaggingly to persevere in prayers and readings; not to love honor, nor to rejoice in guests; not to bind himself with this life; courageously to endure temptations; to divorce himself from worldly rumors and from inquiries into worldly affairs; continually to take thought for and to keep in mind his true country; to have a sad and furrowed countenance; to weep without pause day and night; and more than all these, in things both small and great to keep guard over his chastity and to cleanse himself from gluttony. For these are a monk's manifest beauties (Greek; *virtues*) stated in brief, and they bear witness to his dying utterly to the world and his nearness to God.

We ought at all times, therefore, to give thought to these virtues and acquire them for ourselves. But if someone should ask what need have I to state these things separately and not speak about them generally and in brief, I answer that it is done of necessity, in order that when a man, who takes care for his life, looks for one of the aforesaid things in his soul to find whether he is lacking in one of them, he may learn his deficiency in each virtue from these [[distinctions]], and this list will serve as a reminder to him. And should

he acquire in himself all the virtues stated, then knowledge of others also, which I have not mentioned, will be granted to him. And he will be, for men and the holy angels, a cause for ascribing glory to God. Thus from here, before he departs from this life, he will prepare for his soul a place of repose. To our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 12.

That the Servant of God Who Has Divested Himself of Worldly Goods, and Is Come Forth in Quest of Him, Must Never, Because He Has Not Attained to a Sure Apprehension of the Truth, Cease From His Quest for Fear of This, and Grow Cold in That Ardor Which Is Born of Love for Things Divine and of Searching out Their Mysteries; and on How the Mind Is Confounded By the Memory of the Passions.

The stages through which man advances are three: the beginner's stage, the intermediate, and that of the perfect. In the first stage all a man's thinking [[and recollection]] is held within the passions, even if his mind is directed toward good. The second is a kind of midway laid between passion and dispassion: (Syriac; *and the spiritual state*) both thoughts from the right hand and those from the left move equally within him (Syriac; *it*, i.e. the second stage) and light and darkness never cease from welling forth, as has already been said. But if he should desist for a little from continuous reading of spiritual writings and from the forming of vivid conceptions of divine subjects (which, when he muses upon them, set him aflame by their modes of truth, [Syriac; *by their aim which strikes the truth*, i.e. by their truthfulness], according to his capacity), and should he cease as well from his outward watchfulness (from which come both inner watchfulness and proficient work) then he is certain to be swept away into the passions. He should, therefore, feed his natural ardor in ways I have said, and should not leave his quest and search and yearning after those things which are afar off, even though he has never seen them, but only the indications of them found in his reading of the divine Scriptures. By these things he should nourish his thoughts, holding them close lest they incline to the left. He should be careful not to accept some devilish seed

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[[of phantasy]] in the guise of truth, and should ardently watch over his soul. Then, if he does these things and if he asks God with arduous prayer and patience, He will grant him his petition and open His door to him, but chiefly for his humility's sake. For 'mysteries are revealed to the humble' (Ecclesiasticus 3:19). But if he dies in this hope, even if he has nowhere seen that land from close at hand, nevertheless it seems to me that his inheritance will be with those righteous men of old, who hoped to reach perfection even though they never saw it, as the Apostolic utterance says, 'For they labored in hope all their days, and they slept' (Cf. Hebrews 11:13). Otherwise, what should we say if such a man were not to gain entry to the land of promise, which is the stage (The Syriac employs here the Greek word. The Greek printed text has, *place*. Some Greek MSS have, *type*. The context which follows demands the Syriac reading) of perfection, that is, lucid comprehension of the truth according to the measure of his natural capacity? Is he then barred from it on that account, and does he remain in the lowest stage, where the entire disposition is inclined toward things of the left? Or because he has not apprehended the whole truth, shall he then continue in the ignobleness of the lowest stage, which has no

cognizance of, nor any desire for, these things? Or is it fitting that he should be raised to that middle stage which I have mentioned? For even though he has never beheld it, not even 'through a mirror' (1 Corinthians 13:12) still he hoped from afar, and through this hope was added to his Fathers. And although he was not deemed worthy of perfect grace while here, nevertheless, because he was always conversant with it, and with all his intellect he always absorbed himself in it, and because his desire was fixed upon it as long as he was alive, he was able to cut off evil thoughts. And so, his heart being filled with God, he departed from life with this hope.

Anything whatsoever possessing humility is of its nature comely. For the intellect's incorporeal rumination on the love of God (which meditation is guided by the understanding of the divine Scriptures) screens the soul from within against evil thoughts. And further it holds the mind in the remembrance of good things to come, lest the mind in its idleness should be diffused amid recollections of worldly things, and by these the fervor of its movements should be chilled, and it should descend into desires. But to our God be glory. Amen.

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Homily 13.

On the Alteration and Change That Takes Place in Those Who Are Making Their Way on the Path of Stillness, Which Has Been Laid out by God; for Sometimes Melancholy and Strangulation of Soul Occur, Sometimes Sudden Joy and Unaccustomed Fervor, Glory Be to Him Who Orders Our Paths Aright! Amen.

Once a man has made up his mind to live his life in stillness, let him set himself in order and pass the rest of his days in the cultivation and regular practice of stillness. Whenever it happens to you (as is usual in the regular practice of stillness which is determined by divine grace) that your soul is enshrouded by thick darkness from within and, as with the sun's rays when they are hidden from the earth by the mist of clouds, for a brief time she is deprived of spiritual comfort and the light of grace on account of the cloud of passions that overshadows her; and further, that the joy-producing power in your soul is curtailed for a little, and your mind is overshadowed by an unwonted mist: then do not be troubled in mind, do not lend a hand to despondency (or *faint-heartedness*, [Literally; *littleness of soul*]. This is the Syriac reading. Greek; *ignorance of soul*). But be patient, be engaged in reading the books of the Doctors of the Church, compel yourself in prayer, and expect to receive help. Then straightway help will come unawares. For just as by the rays of the sun the face of the earth is unveiled from the darkness of the atmosphere that enshrouds it, even so is prayer able to dissolve and scatter the clouds of passions from our soul, and make our mind transparent to the light of gladness and comfort which, indeed, it customarily produces in our thoughts, but especially when it possesses material [[of succor]] from the divine Scriptures and vigilance, which burnish the mind. For continual study in the writings of the saints fills the soul with incomprehensible wonder and divine gladness. To our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 14.

Concerning Hesychasts: On When they Begin to Understand What Place They Have

Attained With Their Labors in the Boundless Sea That Is the Life of Stillness; and on When They Can Have a Little Hope That Their Toils Have Begun to Yield Them Fruit.

I shall tell you something, and do not laugh, for I speak the truth; neither doubt my words, for they who have handed them down to me are true. Though you should suspend yourself by your eyelids [[before God]], do not think you have attained to anything by the manner of life which you lead until you have attained to tears. For until then, your hidden self is in the service of the world; that is, you are leading the life of those who dwell in the world, and do the work of God with the outward man. But the inward man is still without fruit, for his fruit begins with tears.

When you attain to the region of tears, then know that your mind has left the prison of this world and has set its foot on the roadway of the new age, and has begun to breathe that other air, new and wonderful. And at the same moment it begins to shed tears, since the birth pangs of the spiritual infant are at hand. For grace, the common mother of all, makes haste mystically to give birth in the soul to the Divine image for the light of the age to come. But when the time of its delivery is arrived, simultaneously the mind begins to be stirred by something of that other age, just like the subtle breath the babe draws inside the body wherein it is nurtured. And since the mind cannot bear what is not usual

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for it, it suddenly begins to set the body to wail, a wailing mingled with the sweetness of honey. And as much as the inward babe is raised, by just so much is there an increase in tears (Some Syriac MSS continue with the following sentence; *This stream of tears begins when the mind becomes clear and serene*). But this order of tears, the one of which I have been speaking, is not the one that also at intervals comes over hesychasts. Because this consolation, which appears from time to time, is every man's who dwells in stillness with God. Sometimes it comes to him when he finds himself in the divine vision of his mind, and sometimes through the words of the Scriptures, and sometimes in the converse of prayer. But I am rather speaking of that order which belongs to him who sheds tears unceasingly both night and day.

Whoever has found the reality of these things truly and accurately has found it in stillness. The eyes of such a man become like fountains of water for two years' time or even more [[that is, during the time of transition: I mean, of mystical transition]]. But afterwards he enters into peace of thought; and from this peace of thought he enters into the rest of which Saint Paul has spoken (*Vide* Hebrews 4:3) only in part, however, and to the extent that nature can contain it. From that peaceful rest his intellect begins to behold mysteries. And thereupon the Holy Spirit begins to reveal heavenly things to him, and God dwells within him, and raises up the fruit of the Spirit in him. And from this he perceives, dimly somehow, and in a figure (Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12) as it were, the change nature is going to receive at the renewal of all things.

These things I have written down as a reminder and source of profit for myself, and for every man who comes upon this book, according to what I have understood from both the divine vision of the Scriptures and from true mouths, and a little from experience itself, in order that they might be a help to me through the prayers of those who are profited by them. For I have taken no little trouble to set these things down.

But again, hear also what I am about to tell you; it is something I learned from a mouth that does not lie. When you enter into that region which is peace of the thoughts,

then the multitude of tears is taken away from you, and afterwards tears come to you in due measure and at the appropriate time. This is, in all exactness, the truth of the matter as told in brief, and it is believed by the whole Church [[and by Her eminent men and front-line warriors]].

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Homily 15.

On Guarding Oneself and Keeping Oneself From Lax and Negligent Men, and on How, by Drawing Near to Them, Heedlessness and Laxity Rule Over a Man and He Is Filled With Every Passion. And on Guarding Oneself From Proximity to Youths, Lest the Intellect Should Be Defiled by Licentious Thoughts.

He who restrains his mouth from speech guards his heart from the passions. The man who cleanses his heart from the passions beholds the Lord at every moment; and he whose meditation is always upon God drives away the demons from himself and uproots the seed of their wickedness. The heart of the man who oversees his soul at all times is made joyous by revelations. He who gathers within himself the vision of his intellect beholds therein (i.e. in his intellect) the Radiance of the Father. The man who despises every distraction beholds his Master within his heart. If you love purity, in which the Master of all can be seen, do not speak disparagingly of any man or listen to another who maligns his brother. If some quarrel in your presence and you hear words of wrath, close your ears and flee from that place, lest your soul perish from life. A wrathful heart is entirely devoid of the mysteries of God, but the meek and humble man is a well-spring of the mysteries of the new age.

Lo, Heaven is within you (if indeed you are pure) and within it you will see both the angels in their light and their Master with them and in them. The man who is justly praised is not harmed thereby; but if praise seems sweet to him, he labors without recompense. The treasure of the humble is within him, and this is the Lord. He who guards his tongue will never be plundered by it unto the ages. A silent mouth interprets God's

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mysteries, but the garrulous man is distant from his Creator. The good man's soul shines more brightly than the sun and is gladdened at every moment by the *theoria* of divine mysteries. He who follows a lover of God will be enriched by God's mysteries, but he who follows an unrighteous and proud man will be estranged from God and abhorred by His friends. The man whose tongue is inclined to silence will acquire a humble discipline in all his habits and will thus gain control over his passions without toil. The passions are uprooted and driven away by unceasing study of God and this is the sword that slays them. Just as the dolphin stirs and swims about when the visible sea is still and calm, so also, when the sea of the heart is tranquil and still from wrath and anger, mysteries and divine revelations are stirred in her at all times to delight her.

He who wishes to see the Lord within himself devises means to cleanse his heart by continuous remembrance of God, and thus through the clearness (Syriac; *purification*) of the eyes of his mind he will behold the Lord at all times. That which befalls a fish out of water, befalls the mind that has come out of the remembrance of God and wanders in the remembrance of the world. The more a man withdraws from the converse of men, the

more he is deemed worthy of boldness before God in his intellect. And insomuch as he denies himself the comforts of this world, by so much does he become worthy of the joy of God in the Holy Spirit. Just as fish perish from lack of water, so the noetic movements that God causes to blossom forth vanish from the heart of the monk who loves to dwell and pass his life in company with worldly men.

A man of the world who endures tribulation in worldly affairs and hardship in this life is superior to the monk who suffers hardships and dwells with worldly men (Syriac; *who wearies his heart with commerce and lodging with worldly men*). Dreadful to the demons and greatly beloved of God and His angels is the man who (Some Greek MSS and the Greek printed text add here; *both day and night seeks God in his heart and who*) with ardent zeal uproots from his heart the assaults (Syriac; *seeds*) sown by the enemy. The country (Greek; *realm*) of the man who is pure in soul is within him. The sun that shines within him is the light of the Holy Trinity. The air that the denizens of this realm breathe is the comforting and All-holy Spirit. And those who make their abode with him are the holy and incorporeal natures (i.e. the angels). Christ, the Light of the Father's light, is their life, joy, and happiness. Such a man is gladdened at all times by the divine vision of his soul, and he is enthralled by his own beauty which is truly a hundredfold more resplendent than the brilliance of the sun itself. This is Jerusalem and the Kingdom of God which is hidden within us, as the Lord says (*Vide Luke 17:21*). This realm is a cloud of God's glory into which only the pure of heart may enter to behold the

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countenance of their Master (Cf. Matthew 5:8) and to have their intellects illumined by the ray of His light.

But the angry and wrathful man, the vainglorious, the avaricious, the glutton, and he who mixes with worldly men, he who wishes to have his own way, the irascible, and he who is filled with every passion, these are like men who wage war in the night; they grope in the dark because they are outside the realm of life and light, for that realm has been allotted to the godly, the humble, and to those who have purified their hearts. A man cannot behold the beauty that lies within himself until he dishonors and detests every beautiful thing that is outside of him, and he cannot genuinely set his gaze upon God until he has utterly renounced the world. He who reviles and belittles himself will be made wise by the Lord, but he who considers himself wise will fall away from divine wisdom. The more a man's tongue flees talkativeness, the more his intellect is illumined so as to be able to discern deep thoughts; for the rational intellect is bemuddled by talkativeness.

The man who becomes destitute of the things of this world will be rich in God, and the friend of rich men will become destitute of God. I believe that if a man is sober in mind, humble, abhors boldness, and expels anger from his heart, he certainly sees the light of the Holy Spirit in his soul whenever he stands up (Syriac; *fixes his gaze within him*) in prayer, and he exults in the illuminations of His light's resplendence, and is made joyous by the divine vision of His glory and by the soul's change according to His likeness. There is no other activity that can so disperse the onslaught of the unclean demons as divine vision in God.

A certain father related to me the following: 'One day as I was sitting, my intellect was taken captive in divine vision, and when I came to myself, I sighed heavily. But when the demon who was standing opposite me heard this he was terrified, and consumed as it were by lightning, and compelled to wail aloud, he took to flight as though he were pursued by someone.'

Blessed is the man who remembers his departure from this life and severs his ties with this world's delights, for many times over he will receive blessedness at his departure and this blessedness will he not lack. This is the man who is born of God and whose Nurse is the Holy Spirit; he suckles the life-giving nourishment from the Spirit's breast and delights in the odor of His fragrance. But the man who is enchained by worldly affairs, and by the world, and by its consolations, and who loves its intercourse, is bereft of life and I know not what to say concerning him, except to weep with inconsolable cries of lamentation, the sound of which breaks the hearts of those who hear it.

You who are in darkness, raise up your heads that your countenances may shine in the light. Come forth from the passions of the world so that the Light that originates from the Father may come forth to meet you and command the ministers of His mysteries to loose you from your bonds, that you may walk in His footsteps toward the Father. Alas,

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how we are bound, and from Whom we are set apart, that we should not behold His glory! Would that our bonds were severed so that we might search for and find our God! If you wish to understand the mysteries within men but you have not yet come to learn this from the Spirit, then from each man's words, manner of life, and discipline you may learn it, if only you are wise. He who is pure of soul and chaste in life always speaks the words of the Spirit discreetly, and he converses concerning divine things and what lies within him in accord with his own measure. But when a man's heart is crushed by the passions, his tongue is moved by them; and even though he speak of spiritual matters, yet he discourses passionately, to the end that he might be victorious by unjust means. The wise man will mark such a man at his first encounter with him, and the pure man will smell his evil stench.

The man who is found continually in idle speech and distraction of soul and body is a fornicator; he who approves of such a man and keeps his company is an adulterer; and he who intimately communes with him is an idolater. Special affection for youths is abominable licentiousness before God and there is no plaster that can heal such a man's fall; but the man who loves all men equally and indiscriminately with compassion has attained perfection. The young man who follows after a youth causes discerning men to weep and lament over the two; but an old man who follows after youths has a passion more foul-smelling than the former, and even though he should converse with them about virtue, his heart is grievously injured. A young man who is humble of thought and silent, whose heart is pure of envy and anger, who withdraws from every man and pays heed to himself, will quickly comprehend the passions of a negligent elder. In no wise hold company with an elder who is not equally disposed to an old man and to a youth, but with all your strength avoid his company, nay rather, flee from him.

Woe to the heedless who feign purity in order to nourish their passions! But the man who has reached old age abiding in purity of thoughts, in disciplined life, and the holding of his tongue, in this life takes delight in the sweetness of the fruit of knowledge, and at his departure from his body he receives God's glory. Nothing so quenches the fire that the Holy Spirit breathes into a monk's heart for the sanctification of his soul, as familiar intercourse, much speaking, and association, except it be with the initiates of God's mysteries for the nurturing and amplification of his knowledge; for such intercourse as this awakens the soul to life, uproots the passions and, more than all the virtues, makes shameful thoughts vanish. Have none but such men for your friends and

the sharers of your secrets, lest you place a stumbling-block for your soul and stray from the way of the Lord. Magnify in your heart the love that unites and joins you to God (Some Syriac MSS have the variant; *the love for him who unites you to God*. The context makes this seem very likely to be the meaning of the passage), lest the love of the

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world take you captive, for this is the beginning and end of corruption. Habitation and familiar intercourse with ascetics is a cause for each to be enriched with divine mysteries; but affection for slothful and indolent men leads to insatiable filling of the belly in banqueting with one another. It is an odious thing for such a man to partake of food without his companion, and he says, 'Woe to the man who eats his bread alone!', for it will not seem sweet to him, these invite one another to banquets and like hirelings repay each other's courtesies. Away with this accursed love, this unseemly and obscene conduct! Flee, O my brother, those who have become accustomed to do such things and never desire to eat with them, even if necessity should constrain you. For their table is accursed and is waited upon by the demons. The friends of Christ the Bridegroom do not partake of it.

The monk who is ever preparing banquets is a laborer for the demon of lust and he defiles the soul of the humble man. The frugal bread of a chaste man's table makes the soul of him who eats it chaste of every passion. The smell of a glutton's table is the abundance of dishes and fried foods; the foolish and senseless will be drawn to it like a dog to the butcher's shop. But the table of a man who continually perseveres in prayer is sweeter than the scent of musk and the fragrance of perfumes, and the lover of God yearns for this as for a priceless treasure.

Take for yourself the remedy of life from the table of those who fast, keep vigil, and labor in the Lord, and so raise up the dead man in your soul. For the Beloved reclines in their midst bestowing sanctification and He transforms the bitterness of their hardship into His ineffable sweetness. His spiritual and heavenly ministers overshadow both them and their holy foods. I know one of the brethren who has seen this with his own eyes.

Blessed is the man who makes himself deaf to every pleasure that separates him from his Creator, [[for he eats only one delectable food from the table of the Most High, even that by which the powers of Heaven are nourished]]. Blessed is he who has as nourishment the Bread which came down from Heaven and gave life to the world, [[for the ages of the new world are sustained thereby]]. Blessed is the man who in his drink (Greek; *field*) beholds the irrigating Watercourse of life that mercifully pours forth from the Father's bosom. For when he drinks thereof his eye is fixed on Him (i.e. the Watercourse, Christ) and his heart will be made glad, blossom anew and be filled with joy and exultation. The man who has seen his Lord in his nourishment steals away and partakes of it alone, sharing nothing with the unworthy, lest he partake of it when it is bereaved of His splendor. But he whose food is mingled with death's poison cannot partake of it gladly without the company of his companions. The man who has friends in order to satisfy his belly is a wolf devouring corpses. How great is your

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insatiability, O fool, for you wish to fill your belly at the table of the heedless, whereby your soul is filled with every passion! These admonitions will be sufficient for those who are able to rule over their bellies.

The odor of a faster is most fragrant and by meeting him the hearts of discerning

men are made joyous; but the glutton is stricken with fear when he associates with the faster and devises excuses not to eat with him.

An abstinent man's way of life is dearly beloved of God, but his proximity is most oppressive to the greedy. Christ exceedingly praises the silent man, but his presence will not seem sweet to those whom the demons take captive through amusements and distractions. Who does not love a humble and meek man? Only proud men and slanderers, who are foreign to his work.

A Narration of a Certain Holy Man.

Someone related the following to me from his own experience: 'On days that I keep company with men I eat three or four small loaves of dried bread, and when I compel myself to pray, my intellect possesses no boldness before God and I cannot set my gaze upon Him. When, however, I separate myself from them by practicing stillness, the first day with difficulty I eat only one and one half loaves, and on the second day, one. But once my intellect is anchored in stillness, I struggle to eat one loaf and yet I cannot. Without effort my intellect ceaselessly converses boldly with God, and His radiance constantly illumines me and induces me to behold and take delight in the beauty of His divine light. But if, while I am practicing stillness, someone comes and converses with me, be it for an hour only, then it is impossible for me not to increase my meal, not to fall short of my rule, and for my intellect not to grow slack in the divine vision of that light.'

Behold, my brethren, how good and profitable are patience and solitude, and what power and facility they give to ascetics. Blessed is he who is patient in stillness for the sake of God (Syriac; *the One*, in reference to solitude) and eats his bread alone, since he converses with God (Syriac; *the One*, in reference to solitude) always, to Whom be glory and dominion both now and ever and unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 16.

On Renouncing the World and Refraining From Familiarity With Men.

When we wish to flee the world and become strangers to worldly affairs, there is nothing which so separates us from the world, or that so mortifies the passions in us and rouses and brings us to life in spiritual things, as do mourning and the pain of heart that is joined with discernment. The face of a modest and reverent man imitates the humility of the Beloved. And again, there is nothing that makes us associate with the world and those in the world, and even those given over to drunkenness and prodigality, and nothing that separates us from the treasures of wisdom and the knowledge of God's mysteries, so much as do facetiousness and wanton frivolity (Syriac; *the unrestraint of wanton pleasure*). This, too, is the business of the demon of fornication. But since I have made proof of your love of wisdom, beloved, it is with love that I entreat you: be on your guard against the spiteful abuse of the enemy, lest by the trumpery of his words he chill your soul from the fervor of Christ's love, Who for your sake tasted gall on the Tree of the Cross, and lest, instead of that sweet study and boldness (Syriac; *gaze fixed toward*) before God, he fill your soul with many imaginings even while you are awake and, asleep, he make her captive to unseemly dreams, the stench of which the holy angels of

God cannot endure. Thus to others you will be the cause of slips and falls, and to yourself, a stake of impalement. Force yourself, then, to imitate the humility of Christ, so that the fire which He sent down upon you may blaze up all the more; by this fire all stirrings of the world, which slay the new man and defile the courts of the Lord, the Holy and Mighty, are exterminated. For I make bold to say, along with Saint Paul, 'We are the temple of

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God' (Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16). Let us then purify His temple, as He is pure, that He may wish to settle in it. Let us hallow it, as He is holy. And let us adorn it with all good and honorable works. Let us cense it with the frankincense that gives rest to His will, with the pure and heart-felt prayer that is impossible to acquire by association with constant worldly activities, and thus the cloud of His glory will overshadow our souls, and the light of His majesty will dawn inside our hearts; and all those who dwell in the tabernacle of God will be filled with joy and gladness, but the unabashed and shameless will vanish in the flame of the Holy Spirit.

So continually upbraid yourself, O brother, and say: Woe to you, wretched soul, your separation from the body is at hand. Why do you rejoice in what today you will leave behind, the very sight of which you will be deprived of forever? Take heed to what lies before you, stop and consider what things you have done, in what way, and what sort of things they are, and with whom you have passed the days of your life, or who has accepted the toil of your husbandry, and whom you have gladdened with your wrestling, that he will come forth to meet you at the time of your departure. But whom did you gladden and gratify during your course, that you might find rest in his haven? And for whose sake did you endure hardships as you toiled, that you might reach him with joy? And whom will you have as a friend in the age to come, that he might now welcome you in the moment of your departure? In which field did you hire yourself out, and who will pay you your wages at the sunset of your separation?

Examine yourself, O soul, and see in what land your portion lies; and if you have crossed over to that field which bears a harvest of bitterness for those who till it, wail and cry aloud, with groaning and great affliction, those words which give rest to your God more than sacrifices and whole burnt offerings. Let your mouth pour forth anguished laments, at which the holy angels are made glad. Drench your cheeks with the weeping of your eyes, that the Holy Spirit may rest upon you, and wash you from the filth of your wickedness. Appease your Lord with tears, that He may come to your aid. Appeal to Mary and Martha to teach you mournful cries. Call out to the Lord.

A Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, Thou that didst weep over Lazarus, and shed tears of sorrow and compassion for him, accept the tears of my bitterness. By Thy Passion, cure my passions. By Thy Wounds, heal my wounds. By Thy Blood, purge my blood; mingle the fragrance of Thy life-creating Body with my body. Let the gall Thou didst drink at enemies' hands sweeten my soul from the bitterness which the foe hath given me to drink. Let Thy Body, O Lover of men, which was stretched on the Tree of the Cross, extend toward Thee mine intellect which is dragged evilly downward by

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demons. Let Thy Head, which Thou didst bow on the Cross, raise up my head, which is buffeted by mine adversaries. Let Thine all-holy Hands, which were nailed to the Cross by the unbelieving Jews, lead me out of the abyss of perdition to Thee, as Thine all-holy Mouth hath promised. Let Thy Countenance, which received blows and spittings from accursed men, brighten my countenance, which is stained with iniquities. Let Thy Soul, which on the Cross Thou didst commend to Thy Father, guide me to Thee by Thy grace. I have not a mournful heart wherewith to seek Thee, I have no repentance, I have no compunction, which bring the children into their proper inheritance. O Master, I have not a comforting tear. My mind is darkened by the affairs of this life, and hath no strength to look steadfastly toward Thee with groaning. My heart is grown cold from the multitude of temptations (Syriac; *evils*) and cannot warm herself with tears of love for Thee. But Thou, my Lord and God Jesus Christ, the Treasury of good gifts, grant me thorough repentance and a sorrowing heart, that with all my soul I may go forth to seek Thee. For without Thee, I am a stranger to all that is good. Therefore, O Good One, freely grant me Thy grace. Let the Father, Who hath timelessly and everlastingly brought Thee forth from His bosom, renew in me the features of Thine image. I have forsaken Thee, do not forsake me. I have gone out from Thee, come out to seek me, and lead me up to Thy pasture, and number me among the sheep of Thy chosen flock, and nourish me with them on the verdure of Thy Divine Mysteries; for their pure heart is Thy lodging-place, and therein is the illumination of Thy revelations clearly beheld, which is the comfort and refreshment of those who for Thy sake have travailed in afflictions and every kind of outrage. May we also be deemed worthy of this illumination by Thy grace and love for man, O our Saviour Jesus Christ, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 17.

On a Rule for Beginners and Their State and the Matters That Pertain to Them.

This is the rule of life that is chaste and pleasing to God: to refrain from glancing here and there with your eyes, but always to gaze steadily on what lies before you; to refrain from speaking idly and to say only what is necessary; to regard mean attire as sufficient for your body's need and, in like manner, to make use of foods that sustain the body, and not those that satisfy gluttony; to take a little from all foods, and not disdain some and select others and choose to fill your belly with these. Discretion is greater than all the other virtues. Without companions (when not ill or infirm) do not partake of wine. Do not interrupt the words of one who is talking, and contradict him like someone uncouth; but like a wise man, be patient. And wherever you find yourself, consider yourself the inferior, and the servant of your brethren. Do not expose any part of your body in front of any man; and do not touch the body of another, except for some necessary reason, nor permit anyone to touch your body without good cause, as I have said. Shun familiarity as death. Acquire a chaste rule for your sleep, lest the power that guards you (i.e.: the guardian angel) remove itself far from you. If a fit of coughing comes over you while seated at table, turn your face to your back, and cough in this manner. Eat and drink with moderation, as befits the children of God.

Do not brashly stretch out your hand to take something from in front of your companions. But if a stranger should sit with you, urge him once or twice to eat, and set the table neatly, not helter-skelter. Sit with a neat and not a sprawling posture, exposing

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of your limbs. When you yawn, cover your mouth so as not to be seen; but if you hold your breath it will pass. Should you go into your superior's cell, or your friend's or disciple's, restrain your eyes so as not to see anything therein. And if compelled by a thought to do so, take good care lest you obey it and do this. For anyone brazenly disposed in these matters is a stranger to the monastic schema (or *habit*) and to Christ, Who has bestowed this schema upon us. Take no notice of the places where the articles of your friend's cell are kept. Open and shut your door quietly, and your companion's also, do not burst in suddenly on anyone, but when you have knocked outside and been invited in, then discreetly enter.

Do not rush when you walk, unless compelled by some urgent need. Be obedient to all in every good work; but do not follow after the covetous, the avaricious, or the worldly, lest a diabolical work be done. Speak to all with meekness, look upon all with chastity, and do not satiate your eyes with looking on another's face. When you are journeying on the road, do not get ahead of your seniors; but if your companion gets ahead of you, hurry a little to catch up with him. For whoever does not do so is foolish, and little better than a swine that has no manners. If your companion should talk with any people he meets, wait for him and do not press him to go. Before the usual time, let him that is healthy say to him that is ill: 'Let us fulfill the body's need' (A monastic expression meaning, *Let us eat*).

Do not chide anyone for any trespass, but think of yourself as accountable in all things and guilty of his fall. Do not refuse to do any lowly chore with humility, and in no wise decline from doing it. If you are compelled to laugh, do not show your teeth. If you are forced to speak with women, turn your face from the sight of them, and talk with them thus ((or for women—men; that is, Saint Isaac is presumably referring in this context to someone of the opposite gender)). But as from fire, and as from the snare of the devil, keep yourself from nuns; from meetings with them, and conversations, and the sight of them; lest your heart be chilled from the love of God, and you pollute your heart with the mire of the passions. Even if they are your sisters after the flesh, withhold yourself from them as from strangers. Be on your guard against mingling with your kindred, lest your heart be chilled from the love of God. Avoid familiarities and conversations with youths as friendship with the devil. But have one confidant and sharer of your secrets: a man who fears God, and who always pays heed to himself; one who is poor in his place of dwelling, but rich in the mysteries of God. Hide your secrets, your doings, and your warfare from all. Do not sit without a head covering (or *cowl*) before anyone else, except in case of necessity. Go forth to satisfy your need with chastity, as reverencing the angel which watches over you, and do it with the fear of God. Constrain yourself till death, even if your heart is displeased thereby.

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It is better for you to eat deadly poison than to eat with a woman ((or for a woman—to eat with a man; Saint Isaac is presumably referring to someone of the opposite gender)) even if it should be your mother or your sister. It is better for you to live with a dragon than to sleep with a youth and share the same covers, even if it should be your brother after the flesh. When you are journeying on the road, if one of your

seniors tells you, 'Come, let us chant,' do not disobey him. But if he does not say so, then be silent with your tongue, but with your heart give glory to God. Oppose no man in anything; do not quarrel, and do not lie, and do not swear by the name of the Lord your God. Be despised, and do not despise. Be wronged, and do not wrong. It is better for the things of the body to perish with the body than for something pertaining to the soul to be hurt. Go to court with no man, but endure to be condemned, being uncondemned. Have no love in your soul for anything which is connected with those in the world; submit to rulers and princes, but refrain from mingling with them, for such company is a trap which catches the more heedless to their perdition.

O glutton, bent on the worship of your own belly! It is better for you to cast a live coal into your stomach than the fried foods of rulers and princes. Pour your mercy out on all, and be moderate in all things. Keep yourself from much talk, for it is this that extinguishes the noetic movements produced in our heart by God. Flee from discussions of dogma as from an unruly lion; and never embark upon them yourself, either with those raised in the Church, or with strangers. Do not pass through the streets of the hot-tempered and quarrelsome, lest your heart be filled with anger, and the darkness of delusion dominate your soul. Do not dwell with a proud man, lest the energy of the Holy Spirit be taken from your soul and she become the dwelling of every evil passion. If you keep these observances, O man, and occupy yourself continuously with the study of God, in truth your soul will see the light of Christ in herself, and will never be darkened unto all eternity. To Him be glory and dominion to the ages. Amen.

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Homily 18.

On the [[Successive]] Stages of the Monastic Life, Briefly and Distinctly Noted; and How and in What Way Its Virtues Are Born From Each Other.

From activity that demands violence (i.e. fasting, vigil, prostrations, and the like) there is born fervor beyond measure, fired in the heart by glowing thoughts which newly rise to the surface of our mind. This work, and watchfulness, refine the intellect by their fervor and grant it vision. And this vision gives birth to glowing thoughts (those I have just mentioned) by means of the profundity of the soul's vision, which is called *theoria* ('divine vision'). But this same divine vision gives birth to fervor, and of this fervor that follows upon the grace of divine vision (Syriac; *the vision that is from grace*) there is born the flow of tears. At first only to a small degree: that is, repeatedly during the course of a single day tears come over a man, and then leave him again. But from this there comes weeping without cease, and from her unceasing tears the soul receives peace in her thoughts. And from peace of thoughts she is raised to *limpid purity* (or *clearness*, see page 22, Homily Three, sub-title *On the Senses, and on Temptations Also*) of the intellect. And through this *limpidity* of the intellect a man comes to see the mysteries of God, because of the purity that is laid up in peace from warfare. But after these things, the intellect comes to behold that which in Ezekiel the Prophet is indicated by the apparition of the torrent, which depicts the figure of the three stages of soul that draw nigh to things divine, and beyond the third there is no passage (*Vide Ezekiel 47:3-5. The Greek reads here; to behold revelations and signs, like those Ezekiel the Prophet saw depicting the three stages in which the soul draws nigh to God*). The beginning of all these things is a

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good purpose directed toward God, the manifold labors of stillness, and the straightforwardness (Literally; *undeviousness, unpervertedness*) that is born of prolonged separation from the world (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has numerous variants here). There is no great need to speak of the diverse kinds of labors since they are familiar to all. However, as stating them will do my readers no harm, but rather may be to their profit, I must not (as it seems to me, at least) shirk the task of setting them down.

They are: hunger; reading; all-night and sober vigil, according to a man's strength; and the numerous prostrations we are obliged to make both during the hours of the day and also frequently at night. Some make thirty prostrations at a time, and afterward kiss the precious Cross, and then withdraw from it. There are those who add to this number according to their own capacity. And there are others who stay three hours in one prayer and without effort possess a vigilant intellect and no wandering of thoughts while they cast themselves upon their faces. Both these kinds of prayer, [[whether it be multiplicity, when one increases the number of prayers in his flaming ardor, or tranquility, which is received by the soul, and which confines into a single prayer the multiplicity of the aforesaid prayers]], display the great riches of goodness -I mean of grace- which is apportioned to each man according to his own measure. But as to what is the cause (The Greek word usually means; *manner, way*; but the Greek translators have occasionally used it to render the Syriac word; *cause*) of this second [kind of] prayer and how one continues in it free [of the employment] of all violent effort, this I have not thought it right to reveal, either by divulging its method through word of mouth or by writing, lest the reader, if he finds himself not understanding what he reads, should think what is written to be senseless; or, if he is knowledgeable in these things, should be led to look with disdain on one ignorant of this level of activity. So there will be reproach from one side and laughter from the other; and I shall be found gibbering like a barbarian when I speak of such matters, even as the word of the Apostle says, when he spoke of one prophesying (*Vide 1 Corinthians 14:11*). Whoever, therefore, desires to learn these things, lo, their successive order is indicated above: (Greek; *let him make his way on the path indicated above*) [[by the grace of our Lord]], let his doing of them follow up his consideration of them! And when in actuality he has come to these things, he himself will learn by himself, and will need no one else to teach him. For, 'Sit in thy cell', it is said, 'and of itself it will teach thee all' (Saint Moses the Ethiopian. See E.A.W. Budge, *The Sayings of the Holy Fathers* 1:62). And to our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 19.

That Abstinence From Concerns Is Profitable for Hesychasts, and That Going out and Coming in Are Harmful, and Concerning Distraction.

The man of many concerns can never be meek and quiet, because the necessary demands of his affairs (on which he expends his efforts) compel him to be involuntarily and unwillingly disturbed, and completely disperse his calm and stillness (The Syriac printed text adds: *but without distractions the devil has no means of entering the soul*). Therefore the monk must stand himself directly before the face of God and always fix his eye unyieldingly upon Him, if he really wishes to guard his intellect, to purify and transform (The Vatican Syriac MS has simply, *to purify*. The Syriac printed text has, *to*

comprehend. In Syriac the two words are similar in appearance) the slight movements which creep within him, and with tranquility of thoughts to learn to distinguish what enters into and what comes out [from him]. For the many occupations of monks are a clear proof of their slackness with respect to readiness for the practice of Christ's commandments and betrays their failings in regard to divine matters.

Without freedom from concerns do not seek for light within your soul, nor for calm and stillness when your senses are lax, nor for collected senses amid engaging affairs. Do not multiply your occupations, and you will not find turmoil in your intellect, or in your prayer. Without unceasing prayer you cannot draw near to God; and to introduce some other concern into your mind during the toil of prayer is to cause dispersion in your heart. [[If fiery thoughts arise in you when through the consuming flame of divine things you enjoy a taste of God, but when you seek to find them again, you discover them to be tasteless and cold in your soul, [then know that this is because] carefree converse with men

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has rushed upon you from some quarter, or it is because you have esteemed bodily labors above these things, and on this account the fervor of your thoughts has been chilled.]]

Tears, striking the head in prayer with the hand, and casting oneself upon the earth with fervor, waken the warmth of their sweetness inside the heart, and with a laudable ecstasy the heart soars up toward God and cries out: 'My soul thirsted for Thee, the mighty, the living God! When shall I come and appear before Thy face, O Lord?' (Psalms 41:2). Only the man who drinks deeply of this wine, and afterward is deprived of it, only he knows to what misery he has been abandoned, and what has been taken away from him because of his laxity.

O, how evil is the sight of men and intercourse with them for hesychasts! And in very truth, my brethren, association with those who have relaxed stillness is especially harmful. For just as the sudden blast of ice, falling on the buds of the fruit-trees, nips and destroys them, so too, contacts with men, even though they be quite brief and (to all appearance) made for good purpose, wither the bloom of virtue; newly flowering due to the temperate air of stillness (Literally; *the intermingled air*. This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has; *the intermingling of stillness*); which covers with softness and delicacy the fruit-tree of the soul planted beside the channels of the waters of repentance. And just as the bitterness of the frost, seizing upon new shoots, consumes them, so too does conversation with men seize upon the root of a mind that has begun to sprout the tender blades of the virtues. And if the talk of those who have controlled themselves in one particular, but who in another have minor faults, is apt to harm the soul, how much more will the chatter and sight of ignoramuses and fools (not to say of laymen)? For just as a highborn and honorable person, when he is drunk, forgets his own high birth and disgraces his station, and his honor is mocked by the untoward notions that suddenly come over him from the influence of the wine, so too the soul's chastity is made turbid by the sight and conversation of men, she forgets her habit of keeping watch, the object of her desire is blotted out from her mind, and the entire foundation of a laudable estate is ripped up from her.

Now if even when a man is silent and is merely found in the presence of such men and is content only to see and to hear, and nevertheless that which enters through a man's gates of sight and hearing is sufficient to produce in him turbidness and a chilling of his mind from things divine, and if a brief moment can cause so much injury in a monk with

self-control, then what shall we say of continuous encounters, and prolonged involvement in these things? For the exhalation which comes up from the stomach does not permit the intellect to receive divine knowledge, but darkens it in the way that fog rising from the dampness of the land obscures the air. Pride does not perceive that it walks in darkness

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and, as being darkened, it does not know the insight of wisdom. For this reason in its own murky thoughts it elevates itself above all, whereas it is more vile and more feeble than any, and it is incapable of learning the ways of the Lord. And the Lord conceals His will from it, because it did not choose to walk in the path of the humble. But to our God be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 20.

On the Paths Which Bring a Man Nigh to God, and Which Are Revealed to Him by the Sweet Works of Night Vigil, and That Those Who Labor in This Practice Are Fed With Honey All the Days of Their Life.

Do not imagine, O man, that among all the works of monastics there is any practice greater than night vigil. In very truth, my brother, if throughout the hours of the day an ascetic is free from the distraction and agitation of physical occupations and of concern for transitory things, and if he keeps himself to some degree from the world and watches over himself while practicing vigil, then [[I can easily tell you that]] his mind will be quick to take flight as it were on wings, and rise up toward God with delight; it will readily behold His glory and, because of its lightness and buoyancy, it will swim in knowledge which transcends human conception. A monk who perseveres in vigil with a discerning intellect will not seem to be clad with flesh, for this is truly the work of the angelic estate. It is impossible that those who pass their lives in the constant practice of night vigil should be left by God without great gifts on account of their vigilance, their wakefulness (Syriac; *lucidity*) of heart, and the careful conducting of their thoughts toward Him. A soul which labors in the practice of vigil and excels therein will have the eyes of Cherubim, that she may at all times gaze upon and espy celestial visions.

I deem it impossible that a man who has chosen for himself this great and divine labor with forethought and discretion, who has elected to take up this burden and to struggle earnestly in the glorious part which he has chosen, should not guard himself by

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day from the disturbance of encounters and the cares of occupations, lest he be found destitute of the wondrous fruit and the great delight which he looks to enjoy from his vigil. And I dare say that whosoever neglects this does not know why he toils and refrains from sleep, suffers hardship in his prolonged psalmody, in the weariness of his tongue, and in night-long standing, since his intellect is not in his psalmody nor in his prayer, and being drawn along by custom, as it were, he labors without discernment. And if this were not as I say, then why does he not reap from the seeds he continually sows with toil an abundant harvest of benefactions? But if, instead of these cares, he exercised himself in the reading of the divine Scriptures, which fortifies the intellect, especially irrigates prayer (or *is a watercourse for prayer*), is a helper and yoke-mate of vigil, and a light to

the mind, he would then discover reading to be a guide in the straight path, and the sower of the seed of divine vision during prayer. He would find that reading binds fast his thoughts, keeping them from dispersion and wandering and from grazing amid vain things; that it unceasingly sows in his soul the remembrance of God, and of the pathways of the saints who have pleased Him; and that reading causes the intellect to acquire fineness and wisdom. In a word, he would eat the ripe fruit of his works.

Why, O man, do you govern your life with such a lack of discernment? You stand the whole night through and suffer travail in psalmody, hymns, and supplications, and does a little heedfulness during the day seem to you to be so great and arduous a task, if thereby you are deemed worthy of God's grace granted to you on account of your diligence in other works? Why do you belabor yourself, when at night you sow, but during the day you dissipate your toil which is thus rendered unfruitful, when you scatter the wakefulness, sobriety, and fervor which you have gained [[through night vigil]], and without a reasonable excuse you vainly undo your labor by your disturbing intercourse with men and with things? If, however, you had made your cultivation and the fervor of your heart's converse during the day to conform to your night's meditation, and you had placed no wall of separation between them, then in a short time you would have embraced Jesus' bosom. From this it is evident that you lead your life without discernment and that you do not know why it is necessary for monks to keep vigil. You suppose that these things were ordained simply to oblige you to labor, and not because of something else which is born of them. But the man who has been deemed worthy to learn by divine grace what is that hope for the sake of which ascetics withstand sleep, constrain their nature, and offer up their supplications by night through the wakefulness of their bodies and their reflections, this man will also know: the strength which comes from guarding oneself by day, what help in vigil this gives the mind during the still of night, what dominion it receives

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over its thoughts, what purity and concentration is granted to it without great effort or conflict, and how its watchfulness by day permits it freely to espy the loftiness of the Scriptures (Literally; *the words*. This could also refer to the words pronounced during prayer). Hence I say also that if a man's body be enfeebled by illness and he cannot fast, vigil alone can gain for the intellect steadfastness in prayer (The Greek has; *soul*, which is a copyist's error for *prayer*) and bestow upon his heart noetic insight to understand [the nature of] spiritual power, provided only that confusion [Greek; *destruction*. Here the Greek translators read *btilutha* for *blilutha* [*confusion*]) does not come over him by reason of laxity resulting from the day's affairs.

Therefore I entreat you, O man, you that wish to acquire a watchful intellect in God and knowledge of the new life: throughout your whole life never neglect the discipline of vigil. For by vigil your eyes are opened to behold all the glory of the monastic life and the strength of the way of righteousness. But if -far be it!- the thought of laxity should assail you once again and, perchance, nestle within you as a trial from Him that helps you, and is wont to permit the state of your soul to vary (as, for example, in fervency or in coldness) or because of a certain reason, or because of bodily infirmity, or because you cannot endure the habitual labor of your long psalmody, your vigorous prayer, and the many prostrations you are accustomed to make: then I lovingly entreat you, that if these works depart from you and you cannot perform them, at least remain wakeful in a sitting position, pray within your heart, and make every effort to pass the

night without sleeping, sitting and pondering over good thoughts. And if you do not harden your heart and darken it with sleep, then by grace that first fervor, lightness, and strength will return to you, and you will leap with joy, giving thanks unto God. God permits coldness and heaviness to come upon a man in order to train and make trial of him. But if he zealously rouses himself and compels himself a little to shake off these things, then grace will immediately draw nigh to him, as it was formerly, and a different power will come upon him, bearing hidden within it all that is good, and every manner of succor (Syriac; *in which there are hidden ten thousand good things and helpful transformations*). He will marvel then with great astonishment, bringing to mind that former heaviness and the lightness and strength which has now overtaken him, and considering the difference, and his present state, and how such a great change so suddenly found him. Henceforth he will be wise, and if again there should come upon him such heaviness, he will know concerning it from his former experience. If at the first assault, however, a man does not struggle, he cannot gain this knowledge. Do you see how a man becomes wise when he rouses himself a little, and perseveres with fortitude in the hour of warfare? But I do not here speak of the circumstance where the body's nature itself has grown feeble, not from warfare, but from the compulsion of illness; in such a case it is not profitable for you to wage war against your nature. In

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every other instance, however, it is profitable for a man to compel himself in everything.

Continual stillness conjoined with reading, moderation in food, and vigil, speedily rouse the mind to awestruck wonder, unless there is some cause that shatters stillness. The intuitions which in stillness arise spontaneously and unexpectedly [[due to a man's labors]] make his eyes become two fonts of baptism by the flow of his tears which wash his cheeks in their abundance.

When your body is tamed by abstinence and vigil, and by the attentiveness of stillness, and yet you sense in your body piercing darts of the passion of fornication which do not result from a motion of nature (Syriac; *from the usual turbid motion of nature*), then know that you have been tempted by thoughts of pride. Straightway mix ashes with your food, O man, prostrate your belly upon the earth, and search out your proud thought. Study the variation of your nature and your contranatural deeds (The Syriac reads here; *and your labor which is above nature*. In context, the Greek seems to have the more logical reading. But it is also possible that the saint means something like; *Study your nature's weakness and contrast it to the sublimity of your way of life* [i.e. the monastic life]. In such a case the Greek would be a copyist's error) and perhaps God will have mercy on you and will shed His light upon you, so that you may learn humility and your wickedness may not increase. Therefore, let us not cease to struggle and compel ourselves, until within ourselves we behold repentance and find humility, and our heart be brought to rest in God, to Whom be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 21.

A Narration Concerning Saintly Men and the All-holy Words I Heard From Them, and on Their Wondrous Way of Life.

One day I went to the cell of a holy brother and, because of an illness, I lay myself

down in one part of his cell, so that he could take care of me for God's sake, for I had no acquaintance in that region. And so I saw this brother's custom of rising at night before the other brethren to begin his prayer rule. He would recite the psalms until suddenly he would leave off his rule, and falling upon his face he would strike his head upon the ground a hundred times or more with fervor that was kindled in his heart by grace. Then he would stand up, kiss the cross of the Master, again make a prostration, again kiss the same cross, and again throw himself upon his face. Such was his customary discipline, so that it was impossible for me to count the number of his prostrations. Indeed, who could number the prostrations which that brother made every night? He would kiss the cross some twenty times with fear and ardor, with love mingled with reverence, and then begin again to recite the psalms; but all at once, from the mighty flame of the thoughts which kindled him by their fervor, he cried out, being overcome by joy and not able to endure the heat of the flame, for he could not contain himself. And I was greatly astonished at the grace of that brother, his struggle, and the sobriety he showed in the work of God. In the morning after the first hour when he sat to read, he became like a man taken captive. With every chapter he read, he would fall many times upon his face, and at many of the verses he would raise his hands toward heaven and glorify God. He was about forty years of age, his food was very meager and very dry, and because he often constrained his body beyond measure, he looked like a shadow. I pitied him because of the feebleness of his

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face which, from great abstinence, had wasted away and was scarcely two fingers in width. Many times I said to him: 'Take pity on yourself, brother, in your manner of life and spare this good discipline which you have acquired; do not confuse and cut short your rule of life which is like a spiritual chain, lest for the sake of the addition of a little toil you should stop in your course and leave it uncompleted. Eat with moderation, that you retain the ability to eat; do not stretch out your foot beyond your strength, lest you should entirely lose the ability to work.' He was chaste by nature, easily entreated (Syriac; *very modest and tender-hearted*), wise according to God, and because of his cheerfulness and purity he was loved by all. When his help was needed, for he was skilled in every task, he worked with the brethren (Syriac; *in their cells with the clay*). Perhaps this refers to plastering the walls with clay), often for three or four days at a time, returning to his cell only in the evening. Whenever he obtained something, he was unable to say that he did not have it (even if he had great need of it) because of his profound modesty before both great and small. Moreover, when he worked with the brethren, he did so because of his modesty, and he forced himself, since he did not like to leave his cell. Such was the discipline and life of that truly marvelous brother.

On an Aged Elder.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

On another occasion I went to a certain aged elder, an excellent and virtuous man who had great love for me. His speech was very simple, but his knowledge was illumined, his heart profound, and he spoke those things which grace gave unto him. He did not often leave his cell, but only for the Holy Mysteries; he was very attentive to himself and preserved stillness. Once I said to this man, 'Father, the thought comes to me to go early to the portico of the church on Sunday and to sit down there and eat, so that everyone who enters or departs would see and scorn me.' In answer to this the elder

replied, 'It is written that every man who causes scandal for those of the world shall not see light. No one knows you in this region, nor does anyone know your life (Syriac; *what your fame is*) and so they will say, "The monks eat from the morning hours." But there is a greater reason: there are here novices who are still weak in their thoughts; many of them have faith in you and are profited by you, and when they see you do this thing, they will be harmed. The fathers of old did such things because of the many miracles which they worked and the honor and great name they possessed among men. They did this, that they might be dishonored, to

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hide the glory of their way of life, and to drive away from themselves the causes of pride. But what necessity obliges you to do such a thing? Do you not know that every discipline has its rule and time? Your way of life is not singular, nor your name famous, for your discipline is that of the brethren; this thing would not be profitable to you and you would harm others. Further, such things are done by way of dispensation and are not beneficial for every man, but only the great and perfect, because herein there is unrestraint of the senses. They are detrimental to those in the middle state and to beginners, since these are in need of much watchfulness and submission of the senses. The elders, however, have passed through the period of watchfulness, and in all things which they choose they find profit. Unexperienced merchants suffer great losses in great ventures, but they quickly become successful through less significant transactions. And again, as I said, there is an order for every work, and for every discipline there is a fixed time. Every man that before the time begins things that are beyond his measure makes his harm twofold, and he gains nothing. If you truly desire that which you seek, patiently endure with joy the involuntary dishonor that providentially comes upon you, and do not be troubled, nor hate the man who dishonors you.'

Once I conversed with this goodly elder, who had tasted of the tree of life through the sweat of his soul from the early dawn of his youth to the evening of his old age, and after he taught me many things concerning virtue, he said to me, 'Reckon every prayer, wherein the body does not toil and the heart is not afflicted, to be a miscarriage, for this prayer has no soul.' Again he said to me, 'Neither give nor receive anything from a man who is quarrelsome, who seeks always to maintain his opinion, whose mind is guileful and whose senses are shameless, lest there should withdraw from you the *limpid purity* which you have gained with great toil, and your heart be filled with darkness and turmoil.'

On Another Elder.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

Once I went to the cell of one of the fathers. This saint very seldom opened to anyone, but as soon as he saw from his window that it was me, he said, 'Do you wish to enter?' and I replied, 'Yea, reverend father.' After I had come in and prayed, and sat down and we had conversed a long time, finally I asked him, 'Father, what should I do? Certain people come to me and I neither gain nor profit from intercourse with them, but I am ashamed to tell them not to come. Often they hinder me from performing my usual rule of prayer, and this causes me grief.' That blessed elder answered in reply to these things with the following words.

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'Whenever men who love idleness come to you, allow them to sit a little while, then make as though you wish to stand up to pray. Say, bowing to the guest: "Brother, let us pray, for the time of my prayer rule has already come and I cannot let it pass, since if I try to perform it at another hour, this becomes a cause of turmoil and oppression for me. Except for dire necessity I cannot omit it, but now there is no necessity that I set aside my prayer." Do not let him excuse himself from praying with you. If he says, "You pray and I shall go my way," bow before him and say, "For love's sake, make but one prayer with me, that I be benefited by your supplication." Then, when you stand up, make your prayer longer than usual. If you do this each time they visit you, they will learn that you are not of like mind with them, nor do you love idleness, and they will in no wise approach the place where they hear that you are to be found.

'Take heed, lest being a respecter of persons, you annul the work of God. If, however, your visitor be one of the fathers or a wearied stranger, reckon his company in the place of your longest prayers. But if the stranger should prove to be one of the lovers of idle chatter, comfort him as much as you can and dismiss him in peace' (The Syriac has the variant reading; *quickly*).

One of the fathers said, 'I was amazed when I heard of monks who do handwork in their cells and are able to perform their rule of prayer without omissions and remain free of turbulence.' That man also said this marvelous thing, 'I tell you in very truth, that if I go out to pass water, I am shaken from my habit [of mind] and its order (or *from the order of my habitual practice*) and I am impeded from the accomplishment of my deeds of excellence.'

On the Question of a Certain Brother.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

That same elder was asked by a certain brother: 'What should I do? Many times I obtain a thing I have need of because of illness, or because of my work, or for some other reason, and without this I cannot remain in my discipline of stillness, but when I see that someone has need of this object, I am overcome by mercy and I give it to him. Often it also occurs that being asked by someone, I give away that which I need, for I am constrained by love and the commandment to do so. Afterward, however, my need of the object causes me to fall into cares and turbulent thoughts, and thus my mind is distracted from solicitude for stillness. Often I am obliged to depart from my solitude and to go in search of that thing. But if I persevere and do not go out, I suffer much affliction and

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turmoil in my thoughts. I do not know which of the two alternatives I should choose: to interrupt and disperse my stillness for the sake of my brother, or to disregard his request and continue in stillness.'

The elder said in reply to this: 'May that righteousness perish and every form of mercy, love, compassion, or whatever is thought to be for God's sake, which hinders you from the practice of stillness; which fixes your eye upon the world; draws you into cares; shakes you from the memory of God; arrests your prayers; brings your thoughts to a state of turbulence and unrest; stops you from study of the divine readings (which is a weapon that rescues a man from wandering thoughts); disperses your watchfulness; causes you to walk about freely, though formerly you were bound, and to associate with men, though

formerly you lived in solitude; awakens in you the mortified passions; abolishes the abstinence of your senses; resurrects your corpse which was dead to the world; causes you to fall from the angelic husbandry, whose labor has but one concern; and which places you in the portion of men who live in the world! For the fulfilling of the duty of love with respect to providing for physical well-being is the work of men in the world, or even of monks, but only those who are imperfect, who do not dwell in stillness, or who combine stillness with brotherly concord and continually come and go. For such men this thing is good and worthy of admiration.

'Those, however, who have chosen to withdraw from the world in body and in mind so that they might establish their intellect in solitary prayer by deadness to what is transitory [[to concern over all affairs]] and to the sight and recollection of worldly things, should not serve in the husbandry of physical things and visible righteousness (so as to be justified for Christ thereby). Rather, by the mortification of their members which are upon the earth (Cf. Colossians 3:5) -after the apostolic utterance- they should offer Him the pure and blameless sacrifice of their thoughts, the first-fruits of their husbandry, and also the affliction of their bodies through their patient endurance of perils for their future hope. For the monastic discipline rivals that of the angels. It is not right for us to abandon this celestial husbandry and to cleave to material things.'

On the reproach of a Certain Brother.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

Once a certain brother was reproached for not giving alms, but unabashed he replied boldly to him that found fault: 'Monks are not obliged to give alms, for it is the monk who can say to Christ with an unveiled face as it is written, "Behold we have forsaken all

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and followed Thee," (Matthew 19:27). He it is that possesses nothing upon the earth, who earns nothing for himself among material things, who in his mind clings to nothing visible, nor endeavors to acquire anything; if someone should give him something, he takes only what he has need of, but he seeks nothing beyond this and he is like a bird in his way of life. Such a man is not obliged to give alms [[because he has a work superior to almsgiving]]. Indeed, how could he give to another that of which he has been liberated? The man, however, who is distracted with matters of this life, who works with his own hands and receives from others, should give alms. To neglect this is a manifest opposition to the Lord's commandment. If a man does not draw near to God in hidden ways, and he neither knows how to serve God in spirit, nor does he concern himself with manifest actions which are within his power, on what does he place his hope to gain life? Such a man is foolish' (The Syriac printed text has *anathema*, but the Sinai Syriac MS has *foolish*, as does the Greek).

Another elder said: 'I am astonished by men who disquiet themselves in their stillness by toiling so as to provide others with things pertaining to the body.' and again he said: 'We should not mix the work of stillness with care for anything at all [[except that which stillness itself facilitates]]. Let every discipline be honored in its own place, lest we become confused in our disciplines. The man who has many cares is the slave of many; but he who has forsaken all and cares only for the state of his soul, the same is a friend of God. Consider that there are many men in the world who give alms and fulfill

[the commandment of] love of neighbor in matters pertaining to the body, but toilers in complete and beautiful stillness, and men entirely devoted to God, are scarcely to be found and are exceedingly few. Who among men in the world, who give alms or accomplish another form of righteousness through material things, has attained to one of the gifts which those who remain in stillness receive from God?' Again he said: 'If you live in the world, practice virtuous disciplines suitable to laymen; but if you are a monk, distinguish yourself in the works wherein monks excel. If, however, you wish to practice both, you will quickly fall from the one and the other alike. These are the works of monks: freedom from worldly things, bodily toil in prayer, and unceasing recollection of God in the heart. But judge for yourself whether without these things the worldly virtues will suffice you.'

Question: Is it really true that a monk who endures hardship in stillness cannot acquire the two modes of virtue, [[the outward and the inward]], I mean, to keep in his heart both care for God and solicitude for other men?

Answer: I am of the opinion that even though a man who wishes to dwell in stillness abandons all things, takes concern for his soul alone and is without any care for the things of this life, he will still be unable perfectly to perform the work of stillness; therefore, how much more so if he has solicitude for others? The Lord has reserved for Himself

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men in the world who serve Him and take concern for His children, and He has chosen for Himself those who serve before Him. For a difference in rank is not only to be seen in the affairs of earthly kings, where those who stand always before the king and are confidants in his secrets enjoy greater glory than those who are engaged in external matters. But the same can also be seen in what pertains to the heavenly King: how much greater boldness is acquired by those who are unceasingly initiated into His mysteries by conversing with Him in prayer, of how much greater heavenly and earthly wealth they are accounted worthy, and how much more apparent is their mastership over all creation [[which does not gainsay their words, and clearly how much greater is their glory than all things rational and irrational and]] than those who serve God by means of the possessions and the things of this life and please Him by their good deeds, though this be very great and most beautiful. Therefore, we should not take example from men who are deficient in the works of God, but from the holy athletes and strugglers who splendidly ran the course of their life, who upon earth cultivated the celestial Kingdom, who renounced earthly things once and for all and stretched out their hands toward the gates of Heaven.

'By what means did the saints of old please God, those who journeyed before us on the path of our discipline? Did Saint John of Thebes (Sometimes also known as John of Lycus, or Lykopolis. See Budge, *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, Hieronymus 2), the treasury of virtues, the well-spring of prophecies, please God as he remained secluded in his cell by comforting the brethren with things pertaining to the body, or was it by his prayer and stillness? I do not contend the point that many have proved well-pleasing to God through outward actions, but these are fewer than those who have done so through prayer and the abandonment of all. For the help given by those who live in stillness, who are held in great honor by their fellow brethren, is well known; I mean, how they help us by a word in the time of necessity or offer up a prayer in our behalf. If any recollection of

care with respect to this life apart from these two activities (i.e. to help by a word, and to offer up a prayer) should settle in the heart of men who dwell in stillness, it will not belong to spiritual wisdom. For "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21), that is, render to a neighbor that which is his, and to God that which is due to Him, was not said for dwellers in stillness, but for those who walk without. Those who persevere in the angelic labor, I mean in the soul's meditation, have not been commanded to please God in matters pertaining to this life, that is, to take concern for handwork or to receive from one man and give to another. [[His labor, indeed, is in Heaven.]] A monk should not have any care which disturbs and draws his mind away from its stand before the face of God.

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'But if someone should object and make mention of the divine Apostle Paul, how he worked with his own hands and gave alms, we answer him that only Paul could do all things, and we know of no other Paul ever existing, a man like unto him capable of all. Show me another man like Paul, and you will persuade me! Do not, therefore, bring forth things that come to pass by a Divine oeconomy as a rule for ordinary actions. The work of preaching the Gospel is one thing; the activity of stillness, another. If you wish to hold fast to stillness, become like the Cherubim, who take no thought for anything of this life, and fix in your mind that no one else exists on the earth save you yourself and God Whom you heed, even as you have been taught by your fathers who lived before you. Unless a monk hardens his heart and forcibly restrains his compassion so as to become distant from solicitude for all other men (Greek; *for all that are beneath*; i.e. upon the earth), either for God's sake or for some material need, and he perseveres only in prayer during the times which he has appointed [[without having affection and concern for others enter his heart]], he will be unable to attain freedom from turbulence and cares and to live in stillness.

'Whenever, therefore, you should have a thought to care for someone for virtue's sake, such that the tranquility in your heart is dispelled, say to the thought, "The path of love and mercy for God's sake is excellent, but for God's sake I do not wish it." "Wait for me, father," a monk once said, "because I am running after you for God's sake;" but the other replied, "And I for God's sake am fleeing you," (See Budge, *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, Palladius 2:16). Abba Arsenios for God's sake conversed with no one, neither for spiritual profit nor for any other reason. Another man for God's sake spoke all the day long and received every stranger (Abba Moses the Ethiopian), but he, on the contrary, chose silence and stillness. For this cause he conversed with the Spirit of God in the midst of the sea of the present life and passed over it with sublime tranquility in the ship of stillness, even as it was clearly revealed to certain ascetics who inquired of God concerning this (See Budge, *The Sayings of the Holy Fathers*, 1:21). And this is the definition of stillness: silence (Syriac; *quietness, calmness, quiescence*) to all things. If in stillness you are found full of turbulence, and you disturb your body by the work of your hands and your soul with cares, then judge for yourself what sort of stillness you are practicing, being concerned over many things in order to please God! For it is ridiculous for us to speak of achieving stillness if we do not abandon all things and separate ourselves from every care. But to our God be glory. Amen.'

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Homily 22.

On the Diverse Noetic Powers of the Intellect Employed in the Action of Revelations and Spiritual Visions.

(This homily is found only in Syriac).

Divine Vision (i.e. vision pertaining to the Divinity) is a non-sensible revelation of the intellect. Divine revelation consists in the mind's being moved by spiritual intuitions concerning the Divinity. Yet the power to be moved at will [by intuitions concerning] the Divinity, without having received a revelation from divine grace, is not even implanted in the nature of angels. It is one thing to be moved by revelations concerning God's operations, and another to be moved by revelations concerning the nature of His being. The first naturally comes to us through an occasion furnished by perceptible things. But the second does not take occasion from the intellect or from anything else. For, they say, this is the threefold and principal purity of the parts [of the soul], and it is not possible that even one in a thousand righteous men should be accounted worthy of this lofty [noetic] perception. And indeed, the *theoria* concerning our Lord's incarnation and His manifestation in the flesh is also said to arise from *theoria* concerning the Divinity (Literally; *divine theoria*).

Our veracious vision of the angels consists in our being moved by spiritual intuitions concerning those things which pertain to them. It is, indeed, impossible for us to behold the spiritual powers outside the domain of our intellect. When a man is deemed worthy to behold them in their very nature and in their own realm and as it were in their spiritual created state (Literally; *in the created state of their spirituality*) grace moves his intellect by the revelation of spiritual intuitions concerning

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them. When the soul is purified and has been accounted worthy of beholding her fellow servants, the vision of them is not received with these physical eyes. For the angels are not corporeal [so as to be seen] without the soul's faculty of vision, which is true *theoria*, whereby they are seen as they are, without alteration; that is to say, they do not condescend from their nature in the visions [men have] of them. A man cannot receive this veracious vision without the second purification of the intellect.

But when angels appear to men in certain forms, this is not true vision, but on the order of a dispensation the angels confer these things in their ministry. Or they manifest themselves through a vision involving the senses for the comfort and encouragement of the simple. Indeed, such visions are even seen by impure men. The first order [of visions], however, belongs to illumined and wise men who have been exalted by the glorious discipline of stillness to the rank of purity.

On That Which During Prayer Occurs Within Stillness.

(In the Bedjan Syriac printed text this short passage is a new homily bearing this title).

Who is the man that knows that delightful bending of the knees, when the tongue is still and the heart silently utters some doxology in the unbroken sweetness of its rumination and the body is still, resting upon the knees? Blessed is he who partakes of these things continually! Yet such things do not happen at will, nor when a man seeks for them. This is the particular delight that is granted as a consolation to those who

guilelessly walk before God in the discipline of stillness. Now if a man perseveres in this discipline with all simplicity, diligently caring for the purity of his monastic labor, and if his way of life is worthy, then after some time he will be vouchsafed also those things mentioned above. But as for beginners in this discipline whose aim is set straight ahead, grace gives them to taste these things and their like during their reading and it draws their thoughts to itself, carrying them away from all meditation on earthly matters. Then they will labor, keep vigil, and pray, and they will not grow weary. But to those who are but a little trained (or *instructed, practiced*) in the mysteries of stillness, [noetic] perception is given in both their prayer and their liturgy.

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Homily 23.

On Various Differentiations in Prayer (The Greek and the Sinai Syriac MS have, 'in stillness', but the printed Syriac text has, 'in prayer', which in context seems to be the correct reading) and the Dominion of the Intellect, and to What Extent This Dominion Is Empowered to Initiate Its Own Movements in the Different Forms of Prayer; and What the Natural Limit of Prayer Is, and to What Extent You Are Empowered to Pray Therein, and That When Prayer Exceeds This Limit, It Is No Longer Prayer, Although This Activity Is Called Prayer.

Glory be to him who richly pours forth His gifts upon men! For although they are clad with flesh, He has made men to minister unto Himself in the order of the incorporeal natures; He has deemed the earthly nature, and even sinful men like us, who are unworthy even to hear such words, worthy to speak concerning these mysteries. But by His grace He has dispelled the hardness of our hearts, that we might gain understanding by means of the divine vision of the Scriptures and the instruction of the sublime Fathers. For by my own struggles I have not been vouchsafed to experience even one thousandth part of what I have written with my hands, and especially in this homily which I now compose for the kindling and enlightenment of our souls, and of those who come across it, with the hope that, perchance, some might rouse themselves by reason of their desire for what I speak of, and endeavor to practice it.

The sweetness of prayer is one thing, and the divine vision of prayer is another; and the second is more honorable than the first, as a mature man is more perfect than an immature child. Sometimes verses become sweet in a man's mouth, and during prayer one

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verse is chanted numberless times and does not permit him to continue to the next, for he can find no satiety therein. But sometimes a certain divine vision is born of prayer, and the prayer of a man's lips is cut short, and stricken with awe by this vision he becomes as it were a body bereft of breath. This (and the like) we call the divine vision of prayer (Syriac; *in, or during prayer*) and not, as fools affirm it to be, some image and form, or a representation of the imagination. And further, in the divine vision of prayer there exist measures and distinctions of gifts. Till this point it is still prayer, for the mind has not yet passed to where there is no prayer: that state is above prayer. The movements of the tongue and the heart in prayer are keys; what comes after them, however, is the entrance into secret chambers. Here let every mouth, every tongue become silent, and let the heart

(the treasury of the thoughts), and the intellect (the ruler of the senses), and the mind (that swift-winged and most shameless bird), and their every device be still. Here let those who seek tarry, for the Master of the house has come (Syriac; *and their every device, their employment, and [all] supplications here be still, for the Master of the house has come*).

On Pure Prayer.

(This title is found in the Greek as the beginning of a new homily).

Even as the whole force of the laws and the commandments given by God to men terminate in the purity of the heart, according to the word of the Fathers, so all the modes and forms of prayer which men pray to God terminate in pure prayer. For sighs, prostrations, heart-felt supplications, sweet cries of lamentation, and all the other forms of prayer have, as I have said, their boundary and the extent of their domain in pure prayer. But once the mind crosses this boundary, from the purity of prayer even to that which is within, it no longer possesses prayer, or movement, or weeping, or dominion, or free will, or supplication, or desire, or fervent longing for things hoped for in this life or in the age to come. Therefore, there exists no prayer beyond pure prayer. Every movement and every form of prayer lead the mind this far by the authority of the free will; for this reason there is a struggle in prayer. But beyond this boundary there is awestruck wonder and not prayer. For what pertains to prayer has ceased, while a certain divine vision remains, and the mind does not pray a prayer. Every mode of prayer originates from a motion (The Syriac adds; *of the soul*. The words; *motion*, or *movement*; used here have the secondary meaning of; *a thought*, i.e. a mental motion) but once the intellect enters into spiritual movements, there is no longer prayer. Prayer is one

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thing, and the divine vision of (Syriac; *during*) prayer is another, even though each takes its inception from the other. For prayer is the seed, and the divine vision is the harvesting of the sheaves. Whence the reaper stands in ecstasy before the unutterable sight, how from the mean and naked seed which he sowed, such rich ears of wheat have suddenly burst forth before his eyes; then he remains entirely motionless in his divine vision. Every prayer is a supplication, or a request, or a thanksgiving, or an offering of praise. Diligently seek out whether there exists one of these modes of prayer, or a request for something, when the intellect crosses that boundary and enters into that realm. This I ask of men who know the truth, because not everyone possesses this degree of discernment, but it belongs only to those who have beheld and ministered unto this mystery, or who have been taught by such Fathers [as have attained to this], and have learned the truth from their mouths, and have passed their lives in these inquiries and the like.

Just as among ten thousand men scarcely one will be found who has fulfilled the commandments and what pertains to the Law with but a small deficiency, and who has attained to *limpid purity* of soul, so only one man among thousands will be found who after much vigilance has been accounted worthy to attain to pure prayer, and to break through that boundary, and gain experience of that mystery. Indeed, the majority of men have in no wise been deemed worthy of pure prayer, but only a very few. But as to that mystery which is after pure prayer and lies beyond it, there is scarcely to be found a single man from generation to generation who by God's grace has attained thereto (Syriac; *to this knowledge*).

Prayer is a supplication, a care, and a desire of something: of deliverance from

trials here, or in the age to come, or a desire of the inheritance of the Fathers. It is a plea for something whereby a man is helped by God. The motions of prayer are delimited by these movements. Purity or impurity of prayer is to be determined in this manner: if, at the time when the mind makes ready to offer up one of its aforementioned movements, a foreign thought commingles with it, or it wanders in something, then this prayer is not to be called pure; for it has brought an unclean animal to the altar of the Lord, that is the heart, the noetic altar of God. [[But when the mind fervently embraces one of these motions during the time of supplication -corresponding to the compulsion of the occasion- and when on account of its great ardor the course (Literally; *gaze*) of the motion is drawn by the eye of faith to enter within the veil of the heart, then henceforth the entrances of the soul are closed by this to alien thoughts, the same which are called strangers and which the Law forbids entrance into the Tabernacle of Witness. This is named the acceptable sacrifice of the heart and pure prayer. Its boundaries are, again, until this point. But what lies beyond cannot be called prayer.]]

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Someone might, however, bring to mind what is named *spiritual prayer* by the Fathers, and not comprehending the force of their words, might say, 'This also belongs to the domain of prayer.' But I am of the opinion that if anyone should make inquiry into the meaning of this, he will find it blasphemous for a created being to say that spiritual prayer can be prayed at all (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has; *can deviate at all*. The Syriac verb can mean both *to pray (in Pa'el)* and *to deviate (in Pe'al)* but here the context and the form point to the first). For any prayer that can be prayed is inferior to what is spiritual; and anything that is spiritual is free of movement. And if a man can scarcely pray with purity, what shall we say concerning spiritual prayer? The Fathers were wont to call every good motion and spiritual activity by the name of prayer and not only they, but all those enlightened by knowledge were wont to reckon good activities to be nearly the same as prayer, while it is evident that prayer is one thing, and things accomplished, another. Sometimes, spiritual prayer is called by some *theoria* (Greek; *a path*. With the subtraction of the first letter, *theoria* in Syriac closely resembles the Syriac word for *path*. Either reading is possible, but the context points to *theoria*) and by others, *knowledge*, and again by others, *noetic vision* (Syriac; *revelations of noetic things*). Do you see how the Fathers interchange appellations for spiritual things? For the exactitude of designations holds valid for things here, while there is no perfect or true name whatever for things of the age to come, but a simple [state of] knowing only, surpassing every appellation, every rudimentary element, form, color, shape, and composite denomination. For this reason once the soul's knowledge is raised out of the visible world, the Fathers employ whatever appellations they please to indicate that [state of] knowing, since no one knows its name with exactness. But so as to make the soul's deliberations steadfast therein the Fathers resort to appellations and parables, according to Saint Dionysios, who writes: 'We use parables, and syllables, and permissible names, and words on account of our senses; but when our soul is moved by the operation of the Spirit toward those Divine things, then both our senses and their operations are superfluous when the soul has become like unto the Godhead by an incomprehensible union, and is illumined in her movements by the ray of the sublime Light' (*On the Divine Names*; 4 11 (PG 3.708d). The Greek text here rendered is a translation from the Syriac translation and consequently it has some discrepancies with the original. A translation of the original text of Saint Dionysios reads as follows: 'We use sounds and syllables and phrases and

descriptions and words on account of our senses, since when our soul is moved by noetic energies (operations) to things noetic, both the senses and that which they perceive become superfluous, just as, in turn the noetic powers are superfluous when the soul, having become godlike by an unknowable union, throws herself upon the rays of the unapproachable Light with sightless hurlings').

Therefore, my brother, you may be certain that the intellect has the power to discern its own movements up to the domain of purity in prayer. And when the intellect has attained to it, either the intellect turns back (Greek; *and does not turn back*. The Syriac shows that *does not* is a copyist's error for *either*) or it abandons prayer; so then prayer

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becomes as it were a mediator between the natural (Greek; Literally; *pertaining to the soul, soulish*) and the spiritual state. Whenever the intellect moves, it is found in the natural realm; but once it enters into that other realm, it ceases from prayer. The saints of the age to come do not pray with prayer when their intellects have been swallowed up by the Spirit, but rather with awestruck wonder they dwell in that gladdening glory. So it is with us, at the time when the intellect is deemed worthy to perceive the future blessedness, it forgets itself and all things of this world, and no longer has movement (The Syriac also means; *thought*) with regard to any thing. Wherefore with confidence one may dare to say that the free will guides and moves every virtue and every order of prayer (whether performed in the body or in the mind) and even the intellect itself, that sovereign over the senses. But as soon as the governance and the stewardship (Greek; Literally; *management of a household*) of the Spirit rule the intellect, the steward of the senses and the thoughts, then a man's nature is deprived of its free will, and is led by another guidance, and does not direct itself. Where, then, will there be prayer, when a man's nature has no authority over itself, but is led whither it knows not by some other power, and is not able to direct the movements of the mind in that which it chooses, but at that moment is held fast in a captivity by which it is guided whither it does not perceive? But according to the testimony of Scripture, at such a time a man will not possess a will, nor will he know whether he is, 'in the body or out of the body' (2 Corinthians 12:2). Therefore, shall there be prayer in a man who is thus taken captive and does not even have cognizance of himself? Whence let no one blaspheme and dare to affirm that it is possible to pray spiritual prayer. Yet such is the audacious claim of those who pray with impudence and, being ignorant of all knowledge, delude themselves, saying that they can pray spiritual prayer when they wish (Here Saint Isaac refutes the errors of the Messalians. The words, *those who pray*, also mean, *the Messalians*). But humble and sagacious men condescend to learn from the Fathers to know the bournes of their nature, and they do not suffer their intellects to be surrendered to this audacious pretension.

Question: Why, then, is this ineffable grace called by the name of prayer, if it is not prayer?

Answer: This, we say, is because it is granted to the worthy at the time of prayer, and it has its inception from prayer. For, according to the testimony of the Fathers, there is no other time of visitation appropriate to this most glorious grace, save the time of prayer. Verily, for this reason it is called by the name of prayer, because the intellect is led by prayer toward that beatitude, and because prayer is its cause, and at no other time

does it take place, as the writings of the Fathers explain. Indeed, we see how many of the

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saints (as it is also recorded in the narration of their lives) are ravished noetically while they stand at prayer.

But if one would ask, 'Why only at this time are these great and ineffable gifts granted?' we should reply: because at this time more than all others a man is prepared and collected so as to give his attention to God, and he yearns for and awaits mercy from Him. But to put it briefly, prayer is the time of standing at the gate of the King to make supplication; and the entreaty of him that beseeches and makes supplication is fittingly granted at this time. Indeed, what other time is there when a man is so ready and carefully watchful as at the very time of prayer?, (Greek; *as when he is about to pray*). Or is it meet, perhaps, that a man should receive a gift of this kind when he is sleeping, or working, or when his intellect is distracted? For lo, even though the saints are never found idle (since at every moment they are occupied with spiritual matters), yet there are times when they do not stand in the readiness of prayer, because often they meditate upon one of the histories [[in the Scriptures]] or upon the divine vision of created things, or other truly profitable subjects. During the time of prayer, however, the vision of the mind gives heed only to God, and stretches forth to Him all its movements, and it offers Him the heart's supplication with eagerness and constant fervor. Wherefore at this time, when the soul has but one care, it is meet that divine favor should well forth from God. For lo, we observe that when [[we are offering the visible Sacrifice]] everyone (Greek; *the priest*. The phrase, *when we are offering the visible Sacrifice*, is added from the Syriac printed text) has made ready and has taken their stand in prayer, seeking mercy from the Deity, making supplication and concentrating their intellect [[upon God]], then the Holy Spirit comes upon the bread and wine which are set upon the altar table. At the time of prayer an angel appeared to Zacharias and announced to him the conception of John (*Vide* Luke 1:10 ff). Likewise while Peter was praying on the roof at the sixth hour, he beheld the vision which, by means of the sheet descended from Heaven and the beasts therein, led him to call the nations (*Vide* Acts 10:9 ff). And an angel appeared to Cornelius while he prayed, and spoke to him those things written concerning him (*Vide* Acts 10:3 ff). And again God spoke to Jesus the son of Navi when he bowed his face to the earth in prayer (*Vide* Joshua 7:6 ff). And again, from the mercy seat over the ark (*Vide* Numbers 7:89) (whence the priest was initiated in visions from God concerning everything needful) (*Vide* Exodus 29:42; 1 Kings 3:1; Luke 1:8 ff), when the High Priest once a year (*Vide* Leviticus 16:2; Hebrews 9:7) during the dread time of prayer entered into the Holy of Holies and cast himself down upon his face while all the tribes of Israel were assembled and standing in prayer in the outer tabernacle (*Vide* Numbers 20:6), the High Priest

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heard the oracles of God through an awesome and ineffable revelation. O how awesome was the mystery which was ministered in this ceremony! So also in the time of prayer were all visions [[and revelations]] made manifest to the saints. For what other time is so holy, and by its sanctity so apt for the reception of gifts, as the time of prayer, wherein a man converses with God? At this time (when we make our petitions and our supplications to God, and we speak with Him) a man forcefully gathers together all the movements and deliberations [of his soul] and converses with God alone, and his heart is abundantly

filled with God. From this he begins to understand incomprehensible things, for the Holy Spirit moves in each man according to his measure, and taking material from that which a man prays, He moves within him, so that during prayer (Syriac; *by these understandings or intuitions*, i.e. of incomprehensible things) his prayer is bereaved of movement, and his intellect is confounded and swallowed up in awestruck wonder, and forgets the very desire of its own entreaty. The intellect's movements are immersed in a profound drunkenness, and it is not in this world; at such a time there will be no distinction between soul and body, nor the remembrance of anything, even as the great and divine Gregory has said: 'Prayer is the purity (Syriac; *settled state*) of the intellect, and it is terminated only by the light of the Holy Trinity through awestruck wonder.' Do you see how prayer is terminated through the astonishment of the understanding at that which is begotten of prayer (Syriac; *through the astonishment at the understandings (or intuitions) that are begotten of prayer*) in the intellect, as I said at the beginning of this homily and in many other places? And again the same Gregory writes: 'Purity of intellect is the lofty flight of the noetic faculties (Greek; Literally; *noetic things*) which resembles the hue of the sky, and upon and through which the light of the Holy Trinity shines at the time of prayer.'

Question: And when is a man accounted worthy of the whole of this grace during the time of his prayer?

Answer: This comes to pass, he says, when the intellect puts off the old man and puts on the new man of grace, and then it sees its purity to be like unto heaven's hue, which was also called the 'place of God' by the council of the elders of the sons of Israel, when it was seen by them in the mountain (*Vide Exodus 24:9 ff*). Therefore, as I have said, one must not call this gift and grace spiritual prayer, but the offspring of pure prayer which is engulfed (Greek; *sent down*. In Greek; *send down* resembles *engulf, swallow up*, so this is probably a copyist's error) by the Holy Spirit. At that moment the intellect is yonder, above prayer, and by the discovery of something better, prayer is abandoned. Then the intellect does not pray with prayer, but it gazes in ecstasy at incomprehensible things which surpass this mortal world,

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and it is silenced by its ignorance of all that is found there. This is the unknowing which has been called more sublime than knowledge. This is the unknowing concerning which it is said, 'Blessed is the man who has attained the unknowing that is inseparable from prayer' (Syriac; *the insurpassable unknowing that is found in (or through) prayer*. With the omission of a single letter, however, the Syriac could read as the Greek) of which may we be deemed worthy by the grace of the only-begotten Son of God, to Whom be all glory, honor, and worship, now, and always, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 24.

On the Subject of a Discourse Spoken by True Knowledge.
(This homily is found only in Syriac).

Every perceptible thing, whether an action or a word, is a manifestation of

something hidden within, if the cause of the thing [perceived] is not accidental and the thing is a continual activity. A recompense is reckoned for the latter case, but the former is only slightly taken into account. For indeed, the strength or weakness of the will is evidenced by the doing of evil or good deeds, not by something's accidental occurrence; but the proof of its freedom is given by [a thing's] continued existence.

Sometimes power is given to an accidental occurrence so as even to defy the free will. Accidental occurrences, whether good or evil, befall a man as an incentive, or a trial, or for training, or as a recompense. The occurrence which is an incentive is good; the trial is considered evil [by men]; but the occurrences for training and for recompense are both [good and evil]. There are no chance occurrences, for nothing fortuitous happens to a man, whether good or evil. The will of God, which anticipates prayer, provides for every prayer, and by His wisdom He determines accordingly what is for our help. There is a Pilot Who steers (or *a Ruler Who governs*) the things of this world. There is a guardian (i.e. the guardian angel) with each one of us, whose notice nothing escapes and who never weakens. But all occurrences are very carefully managed by this appointed guardian, and in these four kinds [of accidental occurrences] his management is active.

The prayer filled with sorrow, when a suitable manner of life is joined with prayer's affliction, changes the character of occurrences and brings about improvement [in a man]. It strengthens and makes steadfast the good man, while to the evil man it gives a change

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to the opposite direction. Therefore do not doubt what I have said: there is no occurrence that is by chance and has no Pilot. If indeed prayer combined with integrity of life is able to alter or to restrain (or *control*) [occurrences], we should believe that every occurrence has a Steersman. Blessed is the man who compares every occurrence that befalls him with his own hidden, interior state, who seeks out its cause and beholds its Pilot!

The only way that a man who wishes to be wise in the eyes of God can do so is to become a fool to the world and a despiser of human glory. Awesome is the man who conceals the greatness of his labor by self-reproach; at such a man the angels marvel. Let involuntary shortcomings be reckoned by you as the guardians of righteousness, for these are even found from time to time in vigilant men.

There is no prayer so quickly heard as the prayer whereby a man asks to be reconciled with those who are wroth with him. For when he charges himself with the offense, this prayer is immediately answered. If, although you do what is proper and are vigilant over your life, you see yourself as feeble and you are despicable in your own eyes and you hate the glory of men, then know that in very truth you walk on the path of God. But if you perceive in yourself that you are far from these things and, when you sound yourself out, you see that even imaginary thoughts of censure cause you pain, then know that you are devoid of the truth and are deceived by vainglory (another manuscript reading is, *falsehood*).

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Homily 25.

On the Things That Are Bestowed Upon a Brother Within His Cell.
(This homily is found only in Syriac).

Many times it happens to a brother during the hours of the day, that even if you were to give him an earthly kingdom, he would not be persuaded at that hour to leave his cell or to have any man knock at his door. For the time of [spiritual] commerce has suddenly come for him. Such things occur on days that are considered days of rest, but often at times of going in and going out (i.e. times of worldly dealings). For suddenly grace visits him with tears beyond measure, or with an ardent feeling that wells up in the heart, or with a certain joy that has no [apparent] cause, or with delight in prostrations.

I know a brother who put the key in the door of his cell to lock it, so that he might go out and allow his spirit to graze, as Scripture says, and there grace visited him and he turned back straightway. Let no man, therefore, find fault with a brother if, on days whereon he does not observe canonical stillness (or *stillness according to his rule*), it should sometimes occur that he absents himself from the communal church services of the brethren. And this is especially so if he is not one of those reputed to be negligent or given to vain occupations, and if he does not absent himself from the services for bodily labors. You know, my brethren, that our labor is not only that which is accomplished before the eyes of men, but that we have a work which is hidden from men's eyes and which novices and laymen do not know. For you are fully aware that the solitary is under rule and is not his own master. If one of the brethren happens to come to visit with him and he does not respond, that brother should turn back immediately without finding fault with his brother, for he does

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not know what the other is engaged in at the time. The cell of a solitary is the cleft in the rock where God spoke with Moses, as the Fathers say. But monastics who have not experienced this through the work which consists in a true taste of stillness do not know these things, and they despise their brethren and judge them, claiming for themselves equality with them in all things they do.

Sometimes it happens that a certain dire warfare is permitted suddenly to assail a brother and he finds himself in danger. Although his hands are crossed upon his chest, it does not flee from him; he falls upon his face, beseeching God, and [at such a time] he cannot endure to hear a man's voice. These variations are known to those who have passed through them in this great sea and are acquainted with the winds that blow there.

And it happens that waves suddenly rise up against him and his ship is swallowed up in hidden abysses. Such things as these, which are unknown to most men, unexpectedly come upon the solitary in his stillness by reason of the devil's violent combats, and he gives himself over to mourning in his cell. There are many variations in this sea and who is there that comprehends its labors, the magnitude of its commerce, and the wondrous pearls that lie in its depth and also the beasts that rise up therein? Blessed is the man who throughout his entire voyage sleeps not, even until he reaches the harbor of departure [from this life]! There is no man who loves something and does not multiply his efforts. No man is able to be engrossed in divine things if he has not forsaken and despised temporal things, becoming estranged from the world's honors and pleasures, cleaving to the shame of the cross (Cf. Hebrews 12:2) and drinking gall and vinegar daily on account of afflictions, men, demons, and poverty.

Be diligent, my brother, and be like the wise merchant, carrying your pearl and wandering throughout the whole earth, being cautious lest its luster be marred. And be vigilant, lest perchance it be stolen from you because of your laxity and you go to Sheol (Hades; the realm of the dead) with anguish.

Pursue the small consolation that is acquired in time from toil, that you may be accounted worthy of that great consolation which dispels the troubles of this life of sorrows for those who find it. Do not despise small things, lest you be deprived of great ones. Has no one ever seen an infant who, when he puts flesh in his mouth, sucks milk? By means of small things the door is opened to great ones. You dishonor God, O my brother, in that

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you desire Him to govern you without a definite order (i.e. in a disorderly way). For no man has been entrusted with great things without first having been tried in small ones. Set this firmly in your heart, my brother, and bring me to mind at the appropriate time: you will find that every lodging place which you will reach tomorrow on this path of virtue and knowledge of the truth will be more glorious and excellent than those wherein you previously passed the night. You set off, and you are struck with awe at the beauty of the lodging that you enter today. Yet its beauty is swallowed up by the beauty of what you will come upon tomorrow. Who can perceive all the delightful changes of the mind? Only pray, that the door be opened before you.

Beware of despair. You do not serve a tyrant, but your service is to a kind (or *gentle, sweet*) Lord, Who, taking nothing from you, yet has given you all. And when you did not exist at all, He fashioned you so that you would be in that [state] in which you now are. Who is sufficient to render Him thanks for the fact that He has brought us into existence? O the immeasurable grace! Who can sufficiently honor Him with hymns? For He has given us knowledge of all things. And not only of those which are manifest, but also of hidden things. For we know that if there is anything we do not know, it is necessary for us only to ask this [knowledge] from Him. Who has taught you, mortal man, to be stirred up by the desire of seeking to know that of which your nature has no knowledge?, (Literally; *the knowledge of what is not in your nature*).

Never seek consolation that lies outside the heart, for thus discerning knowledge dictates. Raise yourself above all consolation that the senses provide, so that you may be accounted worthy to receive that [consolation] which is within, beyond the senses. The solitary who has estranged himself from the consolation of the world and does not await daily the consolation of Christ, is dead during his lifetime. For God is very compassionate and ardently loves to give, but He wishes that we should be the cause thereof (or *we should give the occasion*). Indeed, He rejoices when a man offers Him a wise prayer.

It is a sign of the beginning of a man's recovery from his illness when he desires hidden things. There is, however, a delay until he witnesses true health. The man who finds it tedious to make entreaty is the companion of him who becomes despondent when there is a delay. Tedium causes a man to put off making supplication in prayer, that is to say, it impedes supplication. Despondency cuts off prayer and prevents its prolongation. But expectation [of divine consolation] causes a man to acquire patience and stimulates him to linger in prayer. Expectation alleviates from the limbs the weight of fatigue and it knows how to give rest to the heart amid its afflictions. There is no burden the weight of which is more pleasant than labor undertaken with expectation, nor is there any comrade whose

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intimacy is so desirable as expectation. Even prison is pleasant for the man who dwells there with expectation. Make this your comrade, O repentant brother, and you will not be

conscious of any of the labors of your struggle. If you are in your cell, it will be with you. And if you find yourself among men, establish your mind in it, and your heart will never wander toward anything earthly, and this world and all that is in it will be a stranger to you. And if you lie down to sleep, make it your bedfellow, and until you are immersed in sleep converse with it. Then no polluted thought will draw nigh your heart, because your [mind's] converse is immaterial, and no material object whose sight troubles the mind can make its appearance there. For there is no demonic thought that can manifest itself detached from a material appearance.

From long-suffering in prayer the fruit of life arises, and expectation is a firm helper during prayer to those who possess it. When you pray, bring to mind the ploughman who sows in hope. He Who causes to return twofold the seed that the ploughman sows with hope, Who has esteemed the seeking of His Kingdom and His righteousness to be greater than temporal things (Cf. Matthew 6:33), He Himself will reward your entreaty according to His promise. Amen.

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Homily 26.

On the Soul Which Seeks for Profound Theoria, That by Being Immersed Therein, She Might Be Freed of Carnal Thoughts That Arise From Things Recollected.

Every thing that is above another is concealed from what is beneath it. This is not, however, because it possesses by nature a sort of veil composed of some other body (The Sinai Greek MS 409 adds here; *but by its own properties it forms one, so to speak*) therefore [when it wishes] it is able to uncover its hiddenness. No noetic essence acquires from outside of itself the distinction of its own rank (Greek; *things*. The Syriac shows this to be a copyist's error for, *ranks, orders*) but these distinctions are confined within its motions (In this homily the word, *motions, movements*, seems to mean, *activity, operations*, but we have left the translation literal). That is, to put the matter more plainly, it can without mediation more easily enter in to receive the primal light than a lower order (Greek; *according to another*. The Syriac shows this to be a copyist's error for, *lower*) [from] which, evidently, it does not differ in locality, but according to the high degree and capacity of its purity, or according to the measure of the noetic beings [therein] as regards their capacity to receive signs and powers from above. Every noetic essence is hidden from the essences that are below it; yet they are not concealed from them by nature, but by the excellence of their motions (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has; *by the motions of the virtues*, which seems to be a copyist's error). This I say concerning the orders of the holy powers, the orders of souls, and the orders of demons. The first are concealed from the second and the second from the third, by nature, place, and by respective movements. Each of the orders (Here Saint Isaac probably refers to the different divisions among angels, souls, and demons)

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is separate, and moreover with respect to knowledge they are hidden from one another, whether they are seen or not; but by nature they are hidden from those beneath them. For the faculty of sight of the bodiless is not from outside, as it is in the case of beings who possess bodies, but their ability to see one another is said to come from within their motions, by both the excellence and the measure of their motions. For this reason, if they

are honored with an equal portion, then even though they be distant from one another, they see each other, not in phantasy, but in real nature with unerring sight; howbeit they see not the Cause of all, Who transcends this distinction, Who alone is worshipful. The demons, though they are extremely polluted, are not concealed from one another in their own orders; howbeit they do not see the two orders that are above them. For spiritual sight is the light (The Syriac also means; *clarity, lucidity*) of motion, and these very [motions] are their (i.e. noetic natures) mirror and their eyes (Greek; *and this very [light] is for them a mirror and an eye*) but when the motions are darkened, they cannot see the orders above them. Now the demons, as being the most dense of the spiritual orders by comparison (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has; *can only see one another according to the same order*) can only see one another. So much for the demons.

As for souls, to the degree that they are defiled and darkened, they are neither able to see one another, nor themselves. But if they cleanse themselves and make their way back to their ancient created state, they will clearly see these three orders, that is, the order below them, the one above, and one another [in their own order]. But I do not mean to say that angels, demons, or other souls must be transformed into a bodily form so that pure souls can see them. On the contrary, they see into their very nature and their spiritual order. But if you say that it is impossible that a demon or an angel can be seen if they are not altered and take on a [physical] form, then it is not the soul that sees but the body. And if this be so, what need is there of purification? For, behold, how at times demons as well as angels appear even to the impure; yet when they see, they see with bodily eyes, and there is no need here of purification. It is not so, however, with the purified soul; for she sees in a spiritual manner with a natural eye, that is, the clairvoyant eye of insight. Do not marvel that souls can see one another even while they are in the body, for I shall give you most clear proof of this from one who bears witness to the truth, I mean the blessed Athanasios the Great, in his life of the great Anthony. Once, he says, while the great Anthony was standing at prayer, he saw someone's soul being raised aloft with much honor, and he called blessed the man who had been deemed worthy to receive such glory. This was the blest Ammoun of Nitria. Now the mountain where Saint Anthony lived was thirteen days distant from Nitria. This example has proven what was said concerning

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the three aforementioned orders, namely that even if spiritual natures are separated from one another, they see each other, and that distances and the bodily senses do not prevent them from seeing one another. So it is that purified souls do not see bodily, but spiritually. For bodily sight pertains to things that are evident and it sees that which is before it. But things that are distant require another kind of vision.

The sublime orders are numberless according to their existence and are named corresponding to their distinction and order. For why else should they be called Principalities, Powers, Virtues, and Dominions unless, perhaps, it is because they are specially honored? They are fewer in number than those who are in submission to them, as Saint Dionysios the Bishop of Athens has said, while in power and knowledge they are great, and singular with respect to the magnitude of their own orders. They are arrayed from order to order until they reach that one [order] which is more ancient and mighty and glorious than all, which is the beginning (or *head, foremost, chief*) and foundation of all created things. The beginning, I say, but not the Creator (i.e. the Son) of the primordial wonders of God's works. For there are many [orders] that are inferior with respect to [their knowledge of] the providence of the wisdom of God, their and our

Creator; and they are as much inferior as the orders below them are in turn inferior to them. By inferior I mean their exaltation or lowliness not in a spatial sense, but as regards their power and knowledge, in proportion to the measure which they have attained as a result of greater or lesser knowledge. The divine books have given all these spiritual essences nine spiritual names and divided them into three divisions of three each. The first is composed of the great, sublime, and most holy Thrones, the many-eyed Cherubim, and the six-winged Seraphim; the second in order is composed of the Dominions, the Virtues, and the Powers; the third is composed of the Principalities, the Archangels, and the Angels. The names of the orders are thus interpreted from the Hebrew tongue: the Seraphim means those who are fervent and burning; the Cherubim, those who are great in knowledge and wisdom; the Thrones, receptacles of God and rest (The Syriac continues with a direct quote from Saint Dionysios' *Celestial Hierarchies*, Book 7, 2. We give here a translation from the Greek original: The beings of this first order are called beholders, not because they are beholders of noetic things as it were by sensible symbols, or because they are led up to the Deity by the diversity of the *theoria* of sacred Scripture, but because they are filled with light which is more sublime than all immaterial knowledge, and are brimming (as far as possible) with the divine vision of that supraessential and threefold Beauty Who is the Origin and Maker of beauty. In like manner they are deemed worthy of communion with Jesus, not through sacred images which formatively engrave the deifying likeness, but as really drawing nigh to Him in that first participation of the knowledge of His deifying illuminations. . . . And [they are called perfected] because they are filled with a primary and transcendent deification, according to the highest knowledge of the operations of God that angels can have (PG 3.208 BC)). These orders are given these names because of their operations. The Thrones are so called as ones

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truly honored; the Dominions, as those who possess authority over every kingdom; the Principalities, as those who govern the atmosphere; Powers, as those who have power over the nations and every man; Virtues (The term *virtue* means here *the embodiment of the power or operative influence in a supernatural or divine being*. (The Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. 'virtue') as ones mighty in power and dreadful in appearance; the Seraphim, as those who make holy; the Cherubim, as those who carry; the Archangels, as vigilant guardians; the Angels, as those who are sent.

On the first day, eight noetic creatures (The Greek has *seven*, which has been transposed from its rightful place in the sentence, as shown by the Syriac) were created, seven in silence and one by a verbal command (Greek, Literally; *voice*), and this was light (*Vide* Genesis 1:3), on the second day the firmament was created; on the third day God gathered the waters and made the herbs to blossom forth; on the fourth day, the division of light; on the fifth day, the birds, reptiles and fish; and on the sixth day, the animals and man. The frame of the whole world is length and breadth. The head is the East; the foot is the West; the right position is the North; the left position is the South. God laid out the entire earth as a bed, and the highest heaven as a curtain (Cf. Psalms 103:3), a vault and a cube (The words *cube* and *curtain* are lacking in Syriac). He fixed the second heaven as a wheel that adheres to the first heaven, and the borders of heaven and earth are joined to one another. He set the ocean as a girdle that encompasses heaven and earth; therein He established lofty mountains reaching even to heaven, and He ordered the sun to journey behind the mountains all the night long; He set the great sea (The *great sea* and the *ocean* refer to two different bodies of water) within the mountains

and it dominates over one-half and one-fourth of the dry land (Syriac; *dominates four times [the area of] the dry land and one fourth is dry land*). To our God be glory. Amen.

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Homily 27.

Against Those Who Say: If God Is Good, For What Reason Has He Made These Things?
(This homily is found only in Syriac).

Sin, Gehenna, and Death do not exist at all with God, for they are effects (or, *acts*), not substances. Sin is the fruit of free will. There was a time when sin did not exist, and there will be a time when it will not exist. Gehenna is the fruit of sin. At some point in time it had a beginning, but its end is not known. Death, however, is a dispensation of the wisdom of the Creator. It will rule only a short time over nature; then it will be totally abolished. Satan's name derives from voluntary turning aside (Here Saint Isaac is giving the Syriac etymological meaning of the word, *satan*) from the truth; it is not an indication that he exists as such naturally (The sense of this passage is that *going astray* (*satan*) is not a natural *substance*, but an *act* or *effect*, and therefore does not *exist with* God. The creature called Satan -whose personal existence is not denied here- took upon himself this activity. Though this activity may cease, the creature will continue to exist, just as in the case of sin and the sinner).

Even if you should find, O my brother, some of these things written in other places, may we not be reckoned in your eyes as ostentatious men, as though we plagiarize the writings of others, pretending them to be our own! But, on the contrary, reckon us as humble men, since we suck the milk of our Fathers who have gone before us, I mean those things which we have gathered and placed before ourselves as objects of *theoria*, with the aim of enriching our minds with these provisions, whereon we can graze and be sustained. For we have not forgotten that we do not rise above the rank of learners so long as we dwell in the flesh.

Discernment consists in the direction a man's natural thoughts take (Literally; *discernment is the mobility of natural thoughts*). For when the

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thoughts by their motions proceed on nature's path, they encounter the changing elements and the ages [of the world]. But when they proceed on an inferior way (i.e. contranaturally), there will be for them another employment than that which they had. For when the natural [thoughts] in the intelligence are twofold in their employment, they will be recognized in one of these only, that is, in the order which does not pertain to the soul (i.e. the corporeal order).

When you encounter sweetness in the verses of your liturgy, your intellect greedily desires to enjoy that sweetness continually. And if you wish to grant the intellects' request, quickly strive to know the cause of such delight. If you reach it swiftly, as a discerning and not a blind man, it will not be difficult for you to enjoy it always without hindrance. And what, then, is the active agent which is also called 'cause'? A file, without adding anything to iron, makes it bright and radiant, for such is the essence of iron. How? It removes the rust which has come upon it when it was unused. The same holds true for *theoria* in relation to the nature of the intellect. Bring your mind to the file and you will find how it shines clearly during your liturgy, emulating the brilliance of the

very stars. For the intellect is unable to proceed onward without this action and it lingers when unattended. For this reason I said that during (or *through*) psalmody—but not through the prayer of the heart and reading—the intellect can be held fast only with difficulty. But this is not the case with prayer and reading; with them only small care is needed. Furthermore, their assistance during psalmody is necessary. Indeed without them, diligence in psalmody will be found to be in vain. And they, again, at the very time when nourishment is furnished, give support to psalmody and not from any other quarter than from these provisions (This sentence is extremely obscure in the Syriac. The *provisions* are probably the substance or material of reading and prayer). Hunger, indeed, knows how to procure food; it will not, however, consent to refrain from eating it.

Sweet to the laborer is bread earned by his own sweat. Until a man has sweated, the bread of truth will not satisfy him. The body, which is the laborer, sweats and it nourishes the rational intellect. And this occurs when the intellect is deprived of its customary, unnatural nourishment.

Spiritual virtue (or *excellence*) is the daughter of the will's virtue, and necessarily so. Therefore free will (Literally; *freedom*), not bondage, is the natural power of reason. But when it is diverted to one side or the other and stays there, then it gives birth to another power that does not belong to its natural state. When this is born, free will is ruled by, and in servitude to, compulsion, and I dare say that it is bound and has no dominion over itself. Before this, compulsion was a matter of the will, but now compulsion has enslaved the will. This, I say, can be seen on

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both sides, whether a man enslaves himself to the right or he gives way to the left. The intellect, however, which can see keenly, is able to perceive in every instance how compulsion subdues free will when this power not found in nature is born of voluntary subjugation. I do not mean here the power that is born of habit, which is very difficult to withstand, but that which is called 'the vindicator'. At any rate habit is subject to the will, although it is a laborious thing to resist habit. Apart from this we know of two powers: one enslaves the will, but the other prevails upon nature itself and even has authority to alter nature. This power, which is an energy (or *operation*. This refers to divine grace) that overrides nature, is known to those who have experienced it.

The changes of men's hearts and the dissimilar ways of thinking that are usually born from them -be they free or not free, living or dead- are greatly assisted by the ununiformity (or *inequality, disparity, unevenness*) of the *theoria* that arises in men's minds concerning God's judgments. By this ununiformity, which is placed in the midst [of things], the world has been preserved for thousands of years. This ununiformity greatly assists the changing of the courses found on the path of mortal life, and what is greater still, it leads men to *theoria* concerning the [Divine] judgments that engender earnest hope (This word can also mean, *opinions, intimations*, depending on the vowels one gives it) in God. But as soon as confidence has entered into many hearts, it is as though a man has taken deadly poison. For even with true and genuine sons ten parts of love should be mixed with five parts of fear.

Nature that is inclined to aberration is not sufficient to receive here the perfection (or *fulfillment, completion*) of divine truth or to know completely the will that God has for rational beings. Even men such as Paul and his like are insufficient for this, until the time come that aberration should be taken away, so that nature should no longer go astray through the influence it feels from aberration.

What is uniformity and ununiformity?, (or *parity and disparity, equality and inequality*). The ununiformity of *theoria*, which in one soul changes and varies, is the incomprehensibility of God's eternal mind (i.e. way of thought. 1 Corinthians 2:16). Uniformity [of *theoria*] is the revelation of truth. If nature, which is inclined to aberration, should receive here the real truth, it would die by reason of the onrush of aberration. This is the, 'O the depth of the riches' (Romans 11:33) and, 'How unsearchable are His judgments' (Ibid) and, 'Who hath known the mind of the Lord' (1 Corinthians 2:16), and the like. Such things as these from time to time unexpectedly come upon the mind in a marvelous way and a man sighs deeply. Some call this the cloud. From this are born the ununiformity of *theoria* and the diversity of [man's] opinions concerning the unattainable quest [for the understanding of] God's judgments.

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But when the perfection of nature will come in that world which is not prone to aberration, nature will no longer shrink from knowing divine truth, fearing lest it might incline toward the left because of confidence. Confidence breeds contempt and an impetuous way of thought. But fear, on the other hand, is wont to bind up aberration and keep it bridled. You will discover this fear in your soul through *theoria* concerning the diversity of God's judgments and the ages, and concerning the ununiformity of the courses of men's lives and the diversity of the recompenses given to each even now, and concerning God's justice which manifests itself from time to time, and then is held back because of His long-suffering, and through *theoria* concerning righteous men and sinners, and the adverse nature of dissimilar encounters with persons who are providentially opposed to you. When the intellect beholds these things, the entire soul is moved. And then there is born in the soul the inquiry into thoughts, words, and deeds, and into the delineation of the fixed boundaries of God's justice.

But when the intellect withdraws itself from this and ascends solely toward the Existent One by beholding the properties of that good Nature Which possesses eternal knowledge that precedes all existent things, and by beholding all His other properties, then immediately fear is cast out and the mind is sustained by confidence.

When, however, the intellect descends once more from thence and spreads itself out toward the different ages and their distinctions, it turns to flight and gives place to fear. And this is especially because providence does not consent to allow the intellect to remain always in that *theoria* of the truth (i.e. when it beholds God through His properties). Therefore from time to time it takes away from the heart the power of confidence which is aroused by true *theoria* and it allows the intellect to be harassed by diverse opinions. This occurs so that a man should not desist from continually judging the truthfulness of his thoughts and actions and thus should acquire cautiousness, for he does not know how he will meet the judgment of God, to Whom be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 28.

On the Vision of the Nature of Incorporeal Beings, in Questions and Answers.

Question: In how many different ways is human nature able to receive vision of the nature of incorporeal beings?

Answer: The direct apprehension of every simple (Greek; *uncompounded*) and subtle nature of spiritual bodies comes within the grasp of the sense faculty of human nature in three ways: in the density of substance, which is a non-essential manner (i.e. a manner not corresponding to essence); in the subtlety of substance, which is a non-essential manner; or in true *theoria*, which is essential vision. In the first, the senses hold sway; in the second, the soul sees superficially; in the third, the power of the mind's nature operates. Further, of the last two, one is dominated by the will and mind, and one by the will and the light of the soul and what strengthens the same. Firstly, then, will is the cause; and these are offspring of the free will, even if the free will and the faculty of volition are quiet at the time of their (i.e. the offspring, the modes of vision) employment, so long as the operation [of the modes of vision] is active and persists. But only one mode of vision (i.e. the first) manifests itself independently of the will and of true knowledge, because independently of the will the senses take in everything that comes to pass. The holy angelic powers employ all these three modes in their fellowship with us for our instruction and the establishment of our life.

The abominable demons, however, can only stir up in us the first two modes, as they draw nigh in order to destroy us and not to profit us. They cannot come to us by the third mode in order to lead us astray, because they have no power whatsoever to set in motion

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the natural thoughts of our intellect. For it is impossible for the sons of darkness to approach light. But the holy angels possess this ability: both to set the natural thoughts in motion and to enlighten them. The demons, however, are the lords and creators of false intuitions, the offspring of darkness. For from luminous beings light is received; from darksome beings, darkness.

Question: For what reason was this given to the angels. But not to the demons?

Answer: Every one of these teachers [of men] must firstly see in himself the insight which he teaches; he must learn it, receive it, taste it, and then only can he offer it to his pupils. The first teachers, the angels, transmit the precise reality of things from their own sound knowledge, which they are able to gain by the swift comprehension of their exceedingly keen and pure intellect. But although the demons possess keenness, they lack light. Keenness is one thing, light another. The first without the second brings its possessor to destruction. The second reveals the truth, but the first, a phantom (Greek; *an appearance, image*) of the truth. For light reveals the reality of things, and in proportion to the measure of a man's way of life, it waxes and wanes.

The holy angels infuse into us that knowledge of the movements of things which they have first tasted and understood, for only then do they transmit it to us. Likewise the second teachers, the demons, set in motion within us conceptions about things (This is the Syriac reading. The the word *conceptions* is literally *motions* or *mental motions*, that is, thoughts. The Greek has; *about the motions of things*) according to the degree of their knowledge; for when they have not [received] permission to lead us astray, it is necessary for them to set in motion in us right thoughts about such things. Nevertheless be certain, as I said before, that even if we are capable of receiving true divine vision, they would be incapable of teaching it to us, though indeed they possessed it in the beginning. Further,

each one of these teachers, the angels or their opponents, inspires his pupils in accord with the Divine oeconomy, by which that teacher is governed. I hold as a truth, nevertheless, that our intellect, without the mediation of the holy angels, is able of itself to be moved toward the good uninstructed; however, our intellect cannot come to know evil or be incited by it without the mediation of the demons or the senses (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has ; *our senses cannot come to know evil or be incited by it without the mediation of the demons*). The intellect cannot work evil of itself; for good is implanted in its nature, but not so, evil. Everything that is alien and comes in from without requires a mediator so that knowledge of it might be gained, but that which is implanted within unfolds itself in nature without instruction, be it but dimly. But although our nature is such that of itself it moves toward the good, its development and illumination cannot come to pass without

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the divine vision (Syriac variant; *tutorship*. In Syriac this word and *divine vision* are similar in appearance) received from angels. They are our teachers, even as they are of one another; for the lower ones are taught by those who oversee them and possess more light, and so each order is illuminated from the one above even up to that one (Greek; *that unity*) [order] which possesses the Holy Trinity as Teacher. And further, this very first order itself says openly that it is not instructed of itself, but it has Jesus the Mediator (Cf. 1 Timothy 2:5) as its Teacher, from Whom it receives and then transmits to those below it.

It is my opinion that our intellect does not have a natural power to be moved to the divine vision of Divinity. And in this one deficiency we are the peers of all the celestial natures, for [[without investigations and reasonings]] both in us and in them grace moves that which is alien by nature both to the human intellect and to the angelic. For divine vision concerning the Godhead is not to be numbered among the other kinds of divine vision. [[For we possess divine vision of the natures of things through participation in their twofold nature, because there is a portion of all things in us. But we do not have a portion of the nature of the [Divine] Essence, and so neither do we have [by nature] divine vision of It.]] Now this divine vision is not stirred by nature in the rational beings of the first and middle orders, but by grace it is set in motion in all intellects, both celestial and terrestrial; nature cannot comprehend this, as it does other things (E.g.; the arts, the sciences, the properties of created beings).

Before Christ's incarnate coming, the *theoria* of the intellect and vision (The Syriac has; *revelations*. This entire passage has been omitted in the 'Eastern' versions of the Syriac text, but is found in the Sinai Syriac MS and Vatican Syriac 124), whereby the order of the celestial beings is moved, was not within their power, so that they could penetrate into these mysteries. But when the Word was made flesh, in Jesus a door was opened unto them, as the Apostle says (Cf. Colossians 4:3). It is, however, my opinion—and indeed it is true—that although we, men, should purify and cleanse ourselves, yet without their mediation, our intellect will not be able to attain to the revelations and insights which lead to that eternal divine vision which is in very truth the revelation of mysteries (Syriac; *to that essential divine vision which is the true revelation of mysteries*). For our intellect does not have a capacity as great as that of the most sublime beings, who without mediation receive revelations and divine visions from the Eternal One. But even they [receive these revelations] from Him in a likeness and not nakedly; and in like manner our intellect also [[and likewise the other orders, except that one which [receives

them] from Jesus Who holds the scepter of the Kingdom]]. By means of transmission each order receives from another (i.e. the one above it) revelation concerning the Divine governance and the discernment

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thereof, from the first to the second and so on until the mystery has passed through all the orders. There are, however, many mysteries which remain with the first order and do not pass on to the rest; for these cannot receive the magnitude of the mystery, but only the first order. Some mysteries proceed forth from the first order and are only revealed to the second, where they are kept in silence and remain unknown to the rest of the orders. And there are mysteries which proceed as far as the third and the fourth orders. There is also loftiness and meanness (Greek; *increase and decrease*) in the revelations that are manifested to [[each of the orders of]] the holy angels. [[One order is enriched with revelations, and mysteries of a lofty degree are revealed to it, and it receives superabundant illumination. But another is inferior to the former and its intuitions are too weak for these mysteries. Thus in the reception of revelations there is abundance and scarcity, greatness and smallness among the spiritual orders. Except for that single and chief order which is the first of all the orders, the rest receive divine vision and indications concerning the whole of the Divine governance [of things] from their fellows.]] If, therefore, it is thus with the celestial orders, how much less should we be able to receive such mysteries without the angels and without mediation?

Whenever the perception of the revelation of a mystery descends into the intellects of the saints, this is also from the angels. When it is permitted by God, a mystery is revealed from a higher [angelic] order to a lower one, [[even unto the lowest]]; and in the same manner, when it is permitted by the Divine nod that a mystery should come even to human nature, it is transmitted by those (i.e. by the angels. This is the Syriac reading; the meaning is further explained in the following sentence. The Greek has; *to those*) who are wholly unworthy of it. For by their intermediary the saints receive the light of divine vision, [leading] even to the glorious Eternal Being, the mystery which cannot be taught; and the angels receive from one another, 'for they are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation' (Hebrews 1:14) [[through the awareness of true intuitions that are proper to them]]. In the future age, however, this order of things will be abolished. For then one will not receive from another the revelation of God's glory unto the gladness and joy of his soul; but to each by himself the Master will give according to the measure of his excellence and his worthiness, and he will not receive the gift from his comrade as he does here. Then there will be no teacher and no pupil, nor one whose deficiency must be filled up by another. For One is the Giver there, Who gives without mediation to those who receive; and those who win joy, procure it from Him. [[For they do not perceive Him through diverse intellections, but by [direct] revelation of Him, without departing from him through thoughts.]] There the order of those who teach and those who learn ceases, and on One alone hangs the ardent love of all.

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I also maintain that those who are punished in Gehenna are scourged by the scourge of love. Nay, what is so bitter and vehement as the torment of love? I mean that those who have become conscious that they have sinned against love suffer greater torment from this than from any fear of punishment. For the sorrow caused in the heart

by sin against love is more poignant than any torment. It would be improper for a man to think that sinners in Gehenna are deprived of the love of God. Love is the offspring of knowledge of the truth which, as is commonly confessed, is given to all. The power of love works in two ways: it torments sinners, even as happens here when a friend suffers from a friend; but it becomes a source of joy for those who have observed its duties. Thus I say that this is the torment of Gehenna: bitter regret. But love inebriates the souls of the sons of Heaven by its delectability.

Someone was asked, 'When will a man know that he has received the remission of his sins?' He answered, 'When in his soul he becomes conscious that he has completely hated them with his whole heart, and when he governs himself in his external actions in a manner opposed to his former way of life. Such a man, as having already hated his sin, is confident that he has received remission of his sins by reason of the good witness of his conscience which he has acquired, after the saying of the Apostle, "A conscience uncondemned is a witness of itself,"' (Cf. Romans 2:15). And may we also gain remission of our sins by the grace and love for a man of the unoriginate Father with His only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, to Whom be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 29.

On the Example and Similitude Furnished by a Divine Vision Concerning the Lord's Day and the Sabbath.

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 (the Greek also has the sense of, *ceased*) on the seventh day' (Genesis 2:2), 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 in departure from it.

Just as those who are worthy receive in this world the mysteries of the Lord's day in a similitude, but not that day itself as long as they are in their bodily nature (Literally; *corporeally*. Syriac; *in their corporeality*) so ascetic strugglers receive the mysteries of the Sabbath in a similitude, but not the true Sabbath itself, which is repose from every sorrow and perfect rest from every troublesome [[passion]]. For God has given us [[to taste]] a mystery, but he has not [[ordained]] that we should here lead our lives in the true reality. The true Sabbath, the Sabbath that is not a similitude, is the tomb, which reveals and manifests perfect repose from the tribulations of the passions and from the toil against them. The whole man, both soul and body, there keeps the Sabbath. In six days God ordered the constitution of this world, He fixed the elements, and He gave their constitution unresting motion for the accomplishment of their liturgy, and they will not cease from their course until the dissolution. From the force of

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these primordial elements He fashioned our bodies. But neither did He give the former repose from their motion, nor our bodies, formed from them, repose from their husbandry. He fixed repose as a limit to our corporeal elements (Literally; *those things (elements) within us*) so that they should follow their primaeval kinship with the earth,

which means dissolution from this life. Thus He said to Adam, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread.' Until when? 'Until thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken.' 'And the earth shall bring forth unto thee thorns and thistles' (Genesis 3:19, 3:18), which are mysteries [signifying] the husbandry of this life, for as long as a man lives (Syriac; *which is a mystery [signifying] that this world is a world of husbandry (or labor) for as long as a man (or the world) lives.* But from the time of that night when the Lord sweated (*Vide* Luke 22:44), He changed the sweat that brought forth thorns and thistles into a sweat in prayer and the husbandry of righteousness.

For more than five thousand years (Greek; *five thousand five hundred years*) the Lord left Adam to toil in that first husbandry, because the path of the saints had not yet been revealed, as the Apostle says (Cf. Hebrews 9:8). But in His goodness He sojourned among us in these latter days and commanded the human free will to exchange sweat for sweat, not allowing us complete repose from all toil, but rather an exchange. In this manner He manifested His loving-kindness toward us, because of our prolonged and wearisome hardship upon the earth. If, therefore, we cease to sweat in the labor of prayer, we shall necessarily reap thorns; for cessation of prayer means a tilling of the earth's corporeality which by nature brings forth thorns. For the passions are thorns indeed, and they spring up from the seed that lies in our body. Insomuch as we bear the image of Adam, we necessarily bear his passions also. The earth cannot discontinue to bring forth shoots in accord with its nature. The earth of our body is an offspring of this earth according to the divine testimony, 'The earth from which thou wast taken' (Genesis 3:20). The first brings forth thorns; the second (which is rational) passions.

If by way of a mystery the Lord was for us in every respect a type and paradigm in all the diverse works of His dispensation, and even until the ninth hour of the Great Friday He did not rest from labor and wearisome toil (which is a mystery of the husbandry of our entire life) but reposed only in the tomb on the Sabbath, where are those who say that in this life there is a Sabbath, that is, repose from the passions?, (i.e. the Messalians). The Lord's day is, however, too great a thing even for us to speak of. Our Sabbath is the day of the grave; it is here that our nature truly keeps the Sabbath. Necessity, therefore, obliges us

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daily to uproot thorns from the earth of our nature so long as it exists, and because of our prolonged toil at this husbandry the thorns will diminish; but you will be unable entirely to cleanse yourself from them. If, therefore, it is the case that during a brief spell of sluggishness or because of a little negligence the thorns multiply, cover over the face of your earth, choke your seed, and obliterate your toil, then it is clearly necessary to purify your soil each day. Cessation from this causes a multitude of thorns to spring up, of which may we be cleansed by the grace of the consubstantial, only-begotten Son of God, to Whom together with the unoriginate Father and the life-creating Spirit be glory unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 30.

On Different Suitable Ways of Wise Guidance for the Instruction of Disciples.
(This homily is found only in Syriac).

All wisdom is from the Lord, as has been said (Cf. Ecclesiasticus 1:1). We are instructed in our own affairs so as to become wise with respect to the Lord's dealings with us. Now the Father of truth deals with His sons in different ways. For the profit of His sons He restrains Himself from uniformity that consists in always showing to them the same face. Nay rather, for their instruction He secretly withdraws His love. Thus He displays the appearance of a state that does not really exist (i.e. that He is devoid of love); but that which He is, He retains within. A wise son recognizes his father's care for him as well as his discerning love in the changes of his behavior toward him. The activity of true love will appear twofold when rightly understood: in what causes joy and also in what causes sorrow. That is to say, love is constantly ready to give pleasure to its beloved. Yet sometimes it causes its beloved to suffer by reason of its great love; and it suffers with its beloved when it causes pain. It firmly resists the stirrings of natural compassion, fearing lest its beloved should be harmed afterward. Love, on the one hand, urges communion; but knowledge, on the other hand, strengthens [love] to resist these sentiments. The diversity of the forms of wise love accords with voluntary variations (Literally, *the variations of choice*) corresponding to the recipients of these actions of love. Let us not ask foolish love of a wise friend. The man who kills his son by feeding him honey does not differ from the man who kills his son with a dagger.

It is unbecoming to love's wisdom to give the same sustenance to its beloved in times of health and illness. I mean here those variations which the will undergoes through the choice of dispositions, but not of what pertains to the body. If we know how to govern

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those times when with discernment we show our love for someone, especially when he is in obedience to us, is it not right that we should attribute to God the knowledge how to accomplish the appropriate deeds of His discerning love for us, even if we merely liken them to the variation of love that we manifest toward our loved ones? These variations are difficult to bear; I also know it myself. Howbeit, this is profitable. Your nature's proclivity to aberration causes you to be in need of these variations, if not as a recompense for things already past, then to instill fear of what will certainly occur. Distressing occurrences are to interior instruction what helpful medicines are to imbalance (Literally; *inequality*) of the body's constitution.

Every non-composite created thing is free of struggle in its way of life, whether it be corporeal or incorporeal. Labor naturally exists only amid ununiformity (Literally; *inequality*), and ununiformity exists only in composite beings because of their conjoined duality. And even though there are, and are said to be, among non-composite and simple beings those who are subject to aberration (or *turning aside*), this is entirely toward the right, and effortlessly, since they have no experience of the left (Literally; *the other*). Indeed, they can only be affected by the good (Literally; *they are only passible with respect to the good*). For their [tendency to] aberration is bridled by ardent love, and where there is love, there is neither struggle nor fear. Now this is so although they possess self-mastery (or *free will*); from self-mastery aberration is also said to originate, and for this reason they are worthy of even greater praise.

Good and evil deeds are the offspring of freedom (or *free will*). Where freedom is lacking, the doing of [good or evil] deeds is superfluous with respect to receiving a recompense. There is no recompense for what is natural. A reward is bestowed for a conflict, and one does not speak of a victory where there is no struggle. When opposition

is taken away, freedom also vanishes with it. Henceforth nature has no more struggle. A time is reserved for the abolition of freedom, and thereafter the faculty of reason will be bound, both in men and in angels. Here I speak of the faculty of reason, not the faculty of being sensibly moved. In the realm of intelligence the rational faculty possesses two properties, that is, two powers: the power of reason and the power of knowing. The former is altogether limited, but through the latter, nature is adorned, I mean, intelligent nature. Even so, this power also will be bound at that time; not by a compulsory bond, but by a bond of delight, a delightful coercion. Sometimes this happens even now to a very few in a mystery, in rapture, that is. This, indeed, is found in rational beings of the first [order] (i.e. the angels) in so far as possible, though they are not yet perfect. And what is that which they experience without

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rapture and without being perfect? There are mysteries that cannot be received before the appointed time. On this account they are imperfect, and not because they possess through rapture the state wherein they now abide. For they do not experience this (i.e. rapture) at all, but rather a constant state and not rapture. And though there be rapture, it is to things still more excellent. So then, rapture for them is a more excellent change, but for us it is abolition (i.e. of freedom) by reason of the weakness of the flesh.

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Homily 31.

Containing a Most Necessary and Extremely Beneficial Daily Reminder for the Man Who Has Chosen to Sit in His Cell and Give Heed to Himself Alone.

One of the brethren wrote the following and placed it before him continually, reminding himself thus and saying: 'You have wasted your life in senselessness, O miserable man, worthy of every evil; but at least be vigilant today, for this remains to you from the days that have passed away empty, devoid of every good work and filled with all evil. Do not ask concerning the world, nor life therein, nor concerning the monastics, nor what pertains to them, nor how they fare, nor how great are their labors, and do not concern yourself with anything of this nature. You took leave of the world in a mystery and reckoned yourself as dead in Christ; live no longer to the world nor to those in the world, so that rest forestall you and that you live in Christ. Be ready and well-prepared for every form of disgrace, outrage, mockery, and reproach from all men. Accept all this with joy as being truly worthy of it, and patiently endure every pain and affliction and every peril from the demons whose will you once did with gladness. Valiantly bear every necessity, that which occurs naturally, and all bitter trials. Through your trust in God endure deprivation of that which is necessary for the body, but soon will change to dung. Desire to receive all your needs through your hope in God and do not wait for deliverance from another quarter or for consolation from another man. "Cast thy care upon the Lord" (Psalms 54:22) and condemn yourself in every temptation as the cause thereof. Be scandalized with no man and blame no one who causes you sorrow, because you have eaten of the forbidden tree

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and acquired many passions. Joyfully accept bitter trials, that they may violently shake

you only for a brief moment, and that afterward you may be sweetened. Woe to you and your foul-smelling glory, for you have left your soul uncondemned, though she is full of every sin, and you have condemned others in word and thought. Enough, enough of this swine-like food which has been your sustenance until this very hour! What have you to do with men, O wretch? Are you not ashamed to have dealings with them, seeing that you have lived so senselessly? If you give heed to these things and keep them, perhaps you may be saved with God's help. But if you do not, you will depart to a place of darkness, to the dwellings of the demons, whose will you did with face unashamed. Lo, I have testified to you on all these matters. If, therefore, God were justly to turn men against you to recompense you for the outrages and reproaches which you have contemplated and spoken against them your whole life long, then the entire world would be engaged only with you (i.e. in order to repay you for your evils). Cease, therefore, from this moment and patiently endure the recompenses that come upon you.'

This brother reminded himself of all these things each day, so that whenever a trial or tribulation should assault him, he would be able to bear it with thanksgiving and be profited. May we also be able patiently to endure with gratitude all that comes upon us, and so receive profit with the aid of the grace of God, the Friend of man, to Whom be glory and dominion unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 32.

On the Power and Evil Activity of Sin, and on What Produces Them and What Causes Them to Cease.

A man is not freed from the pleasure of sin's working until he truly abhors the cause of sin with his whole heart. This is the fiercest struggle, the struggle that withstands a man unto blood, wherein his free will is tested as to the unity of his love for the virtues. This is the power which some call *enticement* and *pitched battle*, and by the scent of it the wretched soul is enfeebled because of the intense provocation which lies therein. This is the mighty power of sin by which the enemy is wont to trouble the souls (Syriac; *limpid purity, clearness*) of the caste and to compel the pure movements [of their souls] to experience what they had never in any wise experienced. It is here that we manifest our patience my beloved brethren, our struggle, and our zeal for this is the time of unseen contest (or *martyrdom*) in which it is said that the monastic order always excels. If the upright intellect does not securely guard itself, it will speedily be confounded by its encounter with this warfare.

A Prayer. O Lord, the Source of all aid, in these times, the times of martyrdom, Thou art mighty to support the souls of those who have with joy betrothed themselves to Thee, the heavenly Bridegroom, and who consciously with sincere motivations and not from duplicity have made the vows of holiness. Wherefore, grant them power to cast down with boldness the fortified walls and every high thing that exalts itself against the truth (Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:5) lest they miss their mark by reason of the irresistible and unsupportable violence of that moment when one must struggle unto blood!, (or, more literally; *that moment wherein the struggle of blood, [or bloody struggle], is fought*).

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In this time of fierce conflict the struggle is not always over chastity, for abandonment also sometimes occurs for the sake of trial. But woe to the weak man who is tried in this critical conflict because it gains great strength from the habitual actions of those who have surrendered themselves to defeat by consenting with their thoughts.

Be on your guard against idleness, O beloved, for it conceals a sure death, just as without it a monk cannot fall into the hands of those who strive to enslave him. On that day God will not judge us about psalmody, nor for the neglect of prayer, but because by abandoning them we have opened our door to the demons. Whenever they find room, they enter and close the doors of our inner chambers and of our noetic eyes, and then they accomplish tyrannically and impurely in us that which subjects its perpetrators to Divine judgment and most severe punishments. Thus, we become captives because we have forsaken small things which, nevertheless, very wise men deem worthy of attention for Christ's sake. As it is written, he who does not subject his will to God will subject it to his adversary. Hence you should consider these things that seem so small to you to be a bulwark against those who endeavor to take us captive. In the spirit of revelation these small things have been laid down to be accomplished in our cells for the preservation of our life by wise men who uphold the institutes of the Church, but the unwise consider their omission as of no consequence. Since they take no account of the ensuing harm, the beginning and middle of their way is unchastised license, the mother of many losses. It is more expedient to strive not to forsake these small matters than to make a place for sin through spacious living; for the end of unseasonable freedom is absolute slavery.

As long as your senses are alive to every occurrence, understand that you are [spiritually] dead, for the burning of sin will not be absent from all your members and peace will not be able to settle in your soul (Greek; *you will not be able to gain salvation for yourself*). If in such a condition a monk should say in his heart that he is vigilant, then he does not wish to know when he is being slapped. Whoever deceives his companion deserves the curse of the Law (*Vide* Leviticus 6:2). But when a man deceives himself, what apology will he make? For being conscious of the wickedness of the deed, he feigns ignorance that he does not know it, for which reason he begins to be censured by his conscience. And this he finds troublesome, because he knows that of which he pretends to be ignorant.

On the Passions.

(This title is found in the Greek printed text as the beginning of a new homily).

How sweet are the origins (Literally; *starting points*) of the passions! Sometimes a man can cut off the passions

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and be at peace because of his distance from them, and he rejoices that they have ceased; he cannot, however, extirpate the causes of the passions. For this reason we are tempted against our will. When it is by the passions, we are grieved; but we cherish their origins and would have them remain in us. We do not desire sin, but with pleasure we accept the causes which bring it upon us. For this reason the second (i.e. the causes) by their activity become the sources of the first (i.e. sins). The man who loves the origins of the passions is an involuntary bondsman and against his will he is enslaved to the passions. He who hates his sins will cease to sin, and he who confesses them will receive forgiveness. It is impossible for a man to forsake the habit of sin if he does not first acquire a hatred of sin;

and it is impossible to receive forgiveness before a confession of iniquities. With the latter (i.e. confession) there is real abasement, and with the former (i.e. hatred of sin) there is remorse arising from shame that cleaves to the heart.

If we do not hate those things which are blameworthy, we cannot smell the stench of their activity; and so long as we carry them in ourselves, we shall not be able to perceive their malodor. Therefore, until you cast away from yourself that which is unseemly, you will not comprehend the disgrace that entangles you, nor the shame that arises from it. But when you see your burden in others, understand the dishonor that covers you. Withdraw from evil (Greek; *the world*), and immediately you will comprehend its malodor. For if you do not withdraw, you will never learn it, nay rather, you will put on its stench like a beautiful fragrance, and you will reckon the nakedness of your shame to be a veil of glory.

Blessed is the man who has receded from this darkness and who sees himself, for within it clear vision and discernment cannot operate. How, indeed, could the beclouded discernment of such a man distinguish what is necessary? Blessed is the man who has put away the heavy-headedness of his intoxication and who has understood his own insatiable debauchery by seeing it in others. For then he will know his own shame. But so long as a man carries in himself the drunken debauchery of his sins, everything that he does appears comely in his eyes. For when nature leaves its rightful order, it is no matter whether it be intoxicated with wine or with lusts, for both alike drive it from its proper state, and both produce an identical inflammation in the body; the means may be different, but the resulting concoction is the same, and the derangement is identical. The different causes are not equal, but in their recipients there is no distinction (Greek; *but can be discerned according to each man's reception [of them]*).

Every rest (also; *ease, respite, relaxation*) is followed by hardship, and every hardship endured for God is followed

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by rest. Everything that is in this world is subject to change (Syriac; *transformation, variation*. This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has *corruption*, which is improbable in this context. There is a Syriac word meaning *to waste away* which resembles the word *change*; perhaps the mistranslation originated here), and furthermore a man undergoes change in contrary ways, whether in this age, or in the age to come, or at the time of his departure; and this is especially true with respect to the pleasure that comes from licentiousness, and the suffering that a man endures for the sake of sanctification and which opposes that pleasure. Now God provides in His compassion that a man will taste this punishment either while he is journeying on the road or when he reaches its end; then, by reason of His rich mercies, a man will pass through punishment as a sort of recompense (i.e. for pleasure), and rest as an earnest (i.e. for suffering endured for sanctification's sake). For God does not withhold the wages of good until the last hour (Syriac; *until the trumpet*); as for evil, however, yes [He does withhold its wages], for it is written: he who is chastised here (the printed Greek text and some MSS add here; *because of his own shamefulness*) eats away at his own Gehenna (i.e. if an evil man were punished every time he voluntarily committed evil, there would be no Gehenna).

Beware of the freedom that precedes an evil slavery. Beware of the consolation that precedes warfare. Beware of the knowledge that is acquired before an encounter with temptations; but especially beware of the ardent love that is prior to the completion of repentance. If we are all sinners and no man is superior to [[sin's]] temptations, it is

certainly true that no virtue is more pre-eminent than repentance. For a man can never complete the work of repentance. It is always suitable for every sinner and righteous man who wishes to gain salvation. There is no limit to perfection, for even the perfection of the perfect is truly without completion. And for this very reason repentance is bounded neither by periods of time nor by works until a man's death. Remember that every pleasure is followed by disgust and bitterness as inseparable companions.

Beware of joy that does not have conjoined to it the cause of [its] change (i.e. unchanging joy is perilous). For you cannot understand the term (or *limit, boundary*. This word is not found in the Syriac) and the cause of the change of anything that is provided by a hidden dispensation from above. Fear those things that are considered to possess uniformity (For this term see page 135. The Greek reads here; *which you consider to possess straightness*), for it is said that they are outside the path. He Who knows wisely to steer the raft of the world has conjoined change to everything that is His (i.e. everything in the world); and what is outside of this is a mere similitude (i.e. of the truth. Greek; *an adumbration*).

Relaxation of the members is followed by wandering and confusion of the thoughts; immoderate activity is followed by despondency; and despondency is followed by wandering. But the former wandering differs from the latter wandering. The former originating from relaxation is followed by the warfare of fornication, but the latter originating from despondency is followed by the forsaking of one's solitude and roaming from place to place. Righteous works with moderation and laborious perseverance are beyond price; slackening in them increases lust, but excessiveness, on the other hand, increases confusion. Patiently endure, my brother, the folly of your nature which prevails against you, for you ready yourself to attain the wisdom that holds the everlasting crown of sovereignty. Do not be frightened by the turbulence of your Adamitic body, fashioned to enjoy that delight (the knowledge of which surpasses the intellect of carnal man) when it will put on the heavenly Image, Who is the King of peace (Greek; *when the heavenly Image, Who is the King of peace, will stand close by*). Do not be troubled by the change and turbulence of nature, for the hardship caused by this quickly passes from the man who accepts it gladly. The passions are like dogs that are wont to spend their time before the butchers' shops; they run away at the sound of a man's voice, but if they are left unattended, they attack like great lions. Set every small desire at naught, that you may not ponder upon (variant in Syriac; *be besieged by*) the vehemence of its burning. For patience shown for a short time with respect to small matters disperses the danger of great ones. It is impossible to overcome great evils, if you do not subdue the lesser.

Remember, O brother, the state wherein you will be found, by which mortality is broken and which has no part in life that slowly takes its course and is maintained by means of humors (i.e. bodily fluids). In that state there is no warmth of the constitution, which by the enticements of pleasure causes hardship for the infantile nature. Patiently endure the toil of the struggle into which you have been led for trial, that you may receive a crown from God and, having passed away from this world, you may find rest. Remember also that rest which has no end, that life without enticements, that perfect state, that unchanging mode of life (Greek; *dispensation, governance*), and that compelling captivity of divine love (Greek; *that captivity that compels a man to love God*) that dominates nature, of which things may we be deemed worthy by the grace of Christ, to Whom with the unoriginate Father and the All-holy Spirit be glory both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 33.

That in Certain Conflicts Labor Is Better Than Being in Danger of Falling.

(This homily is found only in Syriac).

It is not possible to vanquish evil thoughts that are joined to bodily incitements, or rather, it is very difficult. They are called by some a two-edged sword used against us. There can be no rest from them as long as there is satiety in bread, water, and sleep, and we have access to things that can provoke us through the senses. Cessation of life is better than the shame of these things. When we are diligent in that which it befits us to do, the influence of the flesh will abate in our members.

It is not possible both to be solicitous over the things of the senses and to set aright our passions. Without fervent supplications and continual prostrations it is impossible to draw God's mercies toward us; and it is necessary for us always to continue practicing both one and the other. Without painstaking in small matters, it is impossible to escape from great evils.

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Homily 34.

On Guarding the Heart and on Subtler Divine Vision.

If you remain in your cell and you have not yet acquired the power of true divine vision, be always constant in your meditation upon the 'troparia', the 'kathismata' (Names of different kinds of hymns in the Orthodox Church), the recollection of death, and the hope of future things. For these collect the mind and do not permit it to roam about, until true divine vision should come; for the power of the spirit is greater than the passions. Ruminant upon the hope of future things, joining this with the recollection of God. Understand well the sense of the 'troparia', and guard yourself from externals that incite you to desire. Keep to the small works that you do in your cell, joining them with the aforementioned, and always examine your thoughts.

(Until this point the Syriac reads as follows: Do not let your intelligence forget the power that lies in spiritual hymns employed with insight. This power firmly leads the thoughts away captive from the world and also steals distraction from the mind, even though chanting is thought to be profitable [only] for youths. For the skittish intellect is helped by it at once. Spiritual yearning is more effective against the passions than the coercion of the intelligence. When you are by yourself, guard your heart by means of the hymns, if you do not yet possess the power to be vigilant within yourself through *theoria*, which is the occupation of the discerning intelligence. Or else, guard yourself by continual recollection of the departure from the body and the remembrance of those things to which our hope looks forward, joining to this those duties that cause sweetness, namely, withdrawal from things that incite us and the small observances done within the cell).

[[If you should find your harbor after the grater part of your servitude (which precedes it by reason of the free will) then grasp it. But if you should see that it (i.e. the harbor, which is rest from the passions) leads you to foolish deeds, yoke it to laws, for hereby it

can be easily governed. While you are proceeding on your way with the help of insight amid these and similar variations, voyaging in the ship of your cell loaded with goods—which indeed is a great festival filled with the merchandise of the

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ascetics—then examine with much scrutiny the dissimilar offspring that are born to you from perceptible variations. Truly you will see how every spiritual delight is preceded by the afflictions of the cross, and how the pleasure of sin is born of bodily ease. And furthermore you will see why in the harbor of chastity spiritual love is caused by the divine vision of the spirit, which also heals the intellect. There is nothing secondary that does not have a proper cause, and there is no tertiary virtue without a preceding one. Thus you will discover that the intellect's wings sprout up in the womb of chastity, and that on them the intellect ascends to divine love. And it is by love that a man ventures noetically to approach the dark cloud (i.e. wherein God resides). This thought will give a man much power to mingle watchfulness with his affairs and at the same time it will furnish him with the incentives of encouragement. Discipline practiced without eyes is done in vain, for it easily brings on despondency on account of distraction.]] Pray that you may acquire [vigilant] eyes in everything you do. From these things joy will begin to gush forth in you, and then you will find tribulations to be sweeter than honey [[and your mandra (i.e. a sheepfold, a cell) to be a wedding chamber]].

No man can conquer the passions except by the palpable virtues; and no one can conquer the wandering of the intellect except by the study of spiritual knowledge. Our intellect is volatile, and if it is not tied down by some reflection, it never stops wandering. Without attaining perfection in the aforesaid virtues, a man cannot acquire this safeguard. For unless a man does not vanquish his enemies, he cannot be at peace. And if peace does not reign, how can a man find those things that are stored up within peace? The passions are a wall impeding the hidden virtues of the soul. If the passions are not first cast down by means of externally manifest virtues, that which lies within cannot be seen; for a man who is outside a wall cannot keep company with what is inside. No man sees the sun in a cloud, nor the natural virtue of the soul in the constant turbulence of the passions.

Entreat God to give you to feel spiritual aspiration and yearning. For whenever this yearning of spirit comes upon you, you will stand aloof from the world and the world will stand aloof from you. It is, however, impossible to experience this without stillness, ascetic endeavor, and the converse of reading devoted to the same. Without the latter, do not seek the former (i.e. the yearning of the spirit); for if you seek after it, it will gradually be altered and become corporeal. Let him who has understanding understand. It was the wise Lord's good pleasure that we should eat this bread with the sweat of our brow. He did not ordain this spitefully, but lest it should oblige us to vomit and we die. For every virtue is the mother of a second. If, then, you abandon the mother which gives birth to the virtues and go out to seek the daughters before you have acquired their mother, those virtues will be vipers to your soul, and if you do not hurl them away from you, speedily you will die.

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Homily 35.

On the Signs and Workings of the Love of God.

Now that we have written above (i.e. at the end of Homily 34) about spiritual aspiration and yearning, the time has come to explain it. It is an indistinct power which is stirred in the heart by love, at first without perceptible causes, since it arouses a man's constitution without a real sight of something or active understanding or deliberation. On this account it is thought to have no cause as such, since the intellect is still clouded. It is thus to the inexperienced, but to the perfect the cause is revealed afterward. For indeed, with the searching out of the cause, spiritual yearning becomes much stronger, since sweetness then pervades the heart. Now the heart (Literally; *the receptacle*) sends a portion of this sweetness into the body and a portion into the faculties of the soul, because the heart is placed as the mediator between the soul's senses and those of the body: for the former it is so as an instrument, and for the latter naturally. The heart directs the sweet savor of its activity to both. For this reason the world is constrained to depart from the heart when the heart departs from the things of the world. Now it is necessary to investigate the cause of this.

The love of God is fervent by nature (Syriac; *love is fervent*. Throughout this paragraph Saint Isaac speaks both about love in general and the love of God in particular, describing the second in terms of the first) and when beyond measure it descends upon a man, it throws his soul into ecstasy. Therefore the heart of the man who has felt this love cannot contain it or endure it without an unaccustomed change being seen in him according to the measure of love's quantity. And these are its signs: his face becomes fiery, exceedingly joyous, and his body becomes heated. Fear and shame withdraw from

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him and he is like one deranged. The power that gathers the mind flees from him and he is as though out of his wits (Syriac; *impetuosity and turmoil prevail upon him*). [[From henceforth he esteems his life as nothing in comparison with his Beloved.]] He considers death a joy, though it be to him a thing most terrible. And further, the gaze of his intellect is fixed inseparably and deliriously upon Him. Though he is distant, he speaks with Him as one near at hand. Being hidden from sight, he muses upon His well-known hiddenness. His vision is natural, but inaccessible to sense perception. In his actions, as in his appearance, he is enflamed. He dwells in solitude, but his thinking converses, as it were, with Someone and is filled with awe.

This is the spiritual passion with which the apostles and the martyrs were inebriated. With it the first traveled the world over, toiling and being reviled, while the second, although their members were severed, and although they shed their blood like water and suffered the most dreadful torments, yet they did not grow faint-hearted but endured courageously, and being truly wise, were thought fools. Still others wandered in mountains and caves and dens of the earth (Cf. Hebrews 11:38), and amid disorder they were most well-ordered. [[Being grave, they were unrestrained; being dispassionate, they abode in the flesh; entreating always, they were silent without compulsion.]] May God grant us also to attain to such derangement!, (or *madness, mindlessness*).

If, before you have entered into the city of humility, you observe in yourself that you have found rest from the importunity of the passions, do not believe it, for this is a trap of the enemy who strives to ensnare you. Nay rather, await the onslaught of great disturbance and turmoil after this period of rest. For until you have passed through all the dwelling-places of the virtues, you will not find rest from your toil, nor will you have relief from the enemy's treacherous designs until you reach the abode of holy humility. O God, deem us worthy to attain this by Thy grace! Amen.

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Homily 36.

On the Modes of Virtue.

Ascetical endeavor is the mother of sanctification. From sanctification the first taste of the perception of Christ's mysteries is born, which is called the first stage of spiritual knowledge. But let no man deceive himself, and imagine divinations (Here reference is made to the pagan mysteries which claimed initiation into spiritual knowledge) for a polluted soul does not ascend to that pure kingdom [[either in an allegorical or in a real sense]], nor is such a soul joined to the holy spirits (i.e. the angels). [[But when the elements [of the body] mingle with those which are kindred to them (i.e. at death and the dissolution of the body), then in the absence of the natural unity (i.e. of the body with the soul) the wretched soul is preserved for the great Judgment to come.]] Wash the beauty, therefore, of your chastity with tears and fasting and the stillness of solitude.

[[Now when the straight course of the natural sphere comes to its end and reaches that great light which nourishes the spheres of the stars—which are manifold in their individual distinctions, as Paul says in his demonstration of the resurrection to come (*Vide* 1 Corinthians 15:41)—and when it is joined to the rays of that light (I do not mean in a natural sense) then (i.e. at the end of time) the chariot (Some MSS add, *of the will*. See page 146) will be bound fast with unknowing and the two abundantly flowing springs (i.e. the eyes) will cease to pour forth their streams. And then the priests (i.e. prayer) will depart from the sanctuary (i.e. the heart) from before the cloud of the glory of the lord (*Vide* 3 Kings 8:11). At that time the king of Israel will be Solomon, that is to say, the peace that is born of humility. He will build a house for the Lord and finish it with the adornment of all the sacred vessels.]]

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A small affliction borne for God's sake is better [[before God]] than a great work performed without tribulation, because affliction willingly borne brings to light the proof of love. But a work of leisure proceeds from a self-satisfied conscience. That is why the saints were proved by tribulations for Christ's love, and not by ease. For [good] works accomplished without toil are the righteousness of those in the world, who do righteous deeds (Syriac can also mean; *give alms*) with their possessions [but not their bodies], thus gaining nothing within themselves. But you, O struggler, taste (Greek; *struggle, endure*) within yourself Christ's suffering, that you may be deemed worthy of tasting His glory. For if we suffer with Him, then we are glorified with Him (Cf. Romans 8:17). The intellect is not glorified with Jesus, if the body does not co-suffer for Christ (Syriac; *Jesus*). He, therefore, who holds human glory in contempt, is deemed worthy of the glory of God, and his body is glorified with his soul. For the glory of the body is chastity's submission to God; but the glory of the intellect is true divine vision concerning God. True submission is twofold, in works and in revilings; thus, whenever the body suffers, the heart also suffers with it. If you do not know God, the love of Him cannot be stirred within you; and you cannot love God if you do not see Him. The sight of God comes by knowing Him; for the divine vision of Him does not precede the knowledge of Him.

A Prayer. Make me worthy, O Lord, to know Thee so as also to love Thee, not with knowledge arising from study's exercise and joined to the intellect's dispersion; but make me worthy of that knowledge whereby the intellect, in beholding Thee, glorifies Thy nature in divine vision which steals the awareness of the world from the mind. Account me worthy to be lifted above the will's wandering eye which begets imaginings, and to behold Thee in the constraint of the cross's bond, in the second part of the crucifixion of the intellect, whose liberty ceases from the activity of its thoughts by abiding in Thy continuous vision, which surpasses nature. Implant in me the astringent (Greek; *increase*) of Thy love, that being drawn away by fervent love for Thee I may come forth from this world. Awake in me understanding of Thy humility, wherewith Thou didst sojourn in the world in the tenement composed of our members which by the mediation of the Holy Virgin Thou didst bear, that with this continual and unfailing recollection, I may accept the humility of my nature with delight.

There are two ways of mounting the cross: the one, crucifixion of the body; and the second, ascent into divine vision. The first comes by freedom of the passions; and the second takes place by the operation of the works of the Spirit (Syriac; *the first is of free will, [or freedom], and the second is of operation, [Literally; being worked upon]*). The Greek has interpreted the meaning of this. It is probable, however, that *free will*, not *freedom from the passions*, is meant). Our intellect is not

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brought into submission unless our body is subject to it. The kingship of the intellect is the crucifixion of the body. The intellect is not subject to God unless the free will is subject to reason. It is hard to convey anything sublime to one who is still a beginner, and an infant in stature. 'Woe to thee, O city, when thy king is a child!' (Ecclesiastes 10:16). Whoever subjects himself to God is near to having all things subject to him. When a man knows himself, the knowledge of all things is granted to him, for to know one's self is the fullness of the knowledge of all things (The Syriac printed text adds here; *since, as all things are contained in you, the knowledge of all is contained in the knowledge of yourself*). In the submission of your soul all things will be submissive unto you. At the time when humility reigns in your manner of life, your soul will submit herself to you, and along with her, all things will be submitted to you, because the peace of God is born in your heart. But so long as you are outside it, you will be unceasingly persecuted not only by the passions, but also by accidents. Truly, O Lord, if we do not humble ourselves, Thou dost not cease to humble us. Real humility is the fruit of knowledge; and true knowledge, the fruit of trials.

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Homily 37.

A Discourse On Diverse Subjects in Questions and Answers [[On the Trustworthy Way of Life and Every Kind of Virtue. This Discourse Will Be Especially Useful for Those Who Have Stripped Off the World, Those Who Dwell in the Desert, Those Who Are Recluses, and Those Who Through Voluntary Mortification Look Forward to the Crown of Righteousness]].

Question: What bond fetters a man's mind (Greek; *heart*. The Syriac and the Answer show this to be a copyist's error) so that he cannot turn in pursuit of evil things?

Answer: There is no stronger bond for the mind's unruliness than continually to search after wisdom and to be insatiate for the doctrine of life.

Question: Until what limit shall the man run who pursues wisdom and where is [[the course of]] its instruction completed?

Answer: The limit of this journey is so truly unattainable that even the saints are found wanting with respect to the perfection of wisdom, because there is no end to wisdom's journey. Wisdom ascends even till this: until she unites with God him who follows after her. And this is a sign that the insights of wisdom have no limit: that wisdom is God Himself.

Question: What is the first path and beginning which conducts us to wisdom?

Answer: It consists in a man's going in search of God with all his strength, in striving with his whole soul until the end in his pursuit, and in not being negligent when it is necessary for the love of God to divest himself of and to cast off even his very life.

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Question: Who is the man that is worthily said to possess understanding?

Answer: The man who really understands that there is limit to this life is he who is able to set a limit to his sins. For what knowledge or understanding is greater than this, that a man should be so wise as to know how to depart from this life without corruption, having no member tainted by the odor of desire nor any spot in his soul from lust's sweetness? If a man endeavors to refine his intuitions, so as to enter into the mysteries of all natures, and to become enriched through discovery and progress in every field of knowledge, but his soul is blemished by the stain of sin and he has not acquired hope by his soul's good testimony that he will safely reach the harbor of certainty, then there is no man in the world more senseless than he, because his labors have, by their continual pursuit of the world, only brought him to a hope which belongs to this world.

Question: Who in truth is very strong?

Answer: He who is well-pleased to abide in temporal afflictions, wherein the glory of his victory lies hidden, and who has not desired spacious living, which conceals the malodor of shame and gives him who has partaken of it the cup of sighing to drink at all times.

Question: Does harm really occur to a man on his journey toward God if he turns aside from his labor (Greek: *turns aside from good works because of temptations*)?

Answer: It is not possible for any man to draw near to Christ without tribulation, and without afflictions his righteousness cannot be preserved unchanged. If he puts an end to the labors that make righteousness increase, he will put an end to that which guards it, and his righteousness will be like an unguarded treasure. And he will be like a gladiator surrounded by enemy ranks and stripped of his weapons, like a ship bereft of its

sails and tackle, and like a garden deprived of its source of water.

Question: Who is the man that is illumined in his intuitions?

Answer: Whoever has attained to a perception of the bitterness that is concealed in the world's sweetness; who has kept his mouth from drinking of this cup; who always seeks how to save his soul; who does not halt on his course until he is released from this world; who shuts the doors of his senses, lest the desire for this life should enter him and steal his hidden treasures from him.

Question: What is the world? How can we recognize it? And how can it do harm to those who love it?

Answer: This world is a harlot who, by lust for her beauty, entices those who behold her to love her. The man who in part is possessed by love for the world, and is enmeshed therein, cannot disentangle himself from her embrace until he divests himself of

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his own life. When the world has stripped a man of everything and thrust him from his dwelling in the day of his death, then only will the man understand that she is verily a deceiver and a beguiler. Even when a man strives to leave the darkness of this world, he will be unable to see her intricate bonds as long as he is still held therein. In this manner the world holds sway not only over her disciples, her children, and those who are held in bondage within her, but also over non-possessors, ascetics, and those who at one time severed her bonds and rose above her. For lo, by multifarious means the world has begun to ensnare them in her works, to trample upon them and put them under her feet.

Question: Since you have convinced me that the world truly strangles its inhabitants, and of how difficult it is to comprehend the craftiness of its bonds, firstly I beg to learn what is the origin of the intuition (Literally; *motion*) that instills doubt in the mind concerning the world, since all its bonds are so sweet and the form of its shackles is concealed.

Answer: When the thought of love for his soul is stirred within a man, the intuition of this thought begins to make the world hateful in his eyes and throws him into doubt concerning it.

Question: From whence does he possess this ability to be moved in such a manner, so that what he lauded at all times and always considered beautiful, now suddenly appears uncomely to him and he feels remorse over his life and his previous knowledge, as not having thought correctly about the world?

Answer: At the first it is nature which imparts to him this discerning intuition, when it silently indicates to him the unstable constitution of the world, the termination of its course, and the ephemeral nature of those who enter it, such that he sees the world to be a mere passageway for those who come into it, and for the many generations that preceded him, the precise number of which is unknown. They entered the world like an

inn for the night and they departed from it never to return, like wayfarers journeying on a path throughout the world. Some were kings, some rulers; some were wise, some honored; some were scribes, some orators; some were judges, some generals; some were opulent with riches, some were masters of possessions. But now, after their passing, there is no more the rank of their positions, nor the crown of their sovereignty, nor their mighty throne, nor their luxurious delicacies, nor the praise of their flatterers, nor the love of their friends, nor the indulgences of their flesh, nor the comely beauty of their elegant manners, nor the proud bearing of their dignity, nor their cultured intellect, nor their mind rich with ideas, nor the plenteous outpouring of the Gihon (Cf. Genesis 2:13, or 2 Chronicles 32:30) of their learning which spilled from their mouths and enraptured their hearers by its elegance. Lo, they have slept in

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Sheol (The realm of the dead. Originally this word referred to the grave, the place of the body, but later it came to refer to the place of souls. For this reason Sheol (or Hades) is often figuratively said to be under the earth) for long years as though it were one night! Nor is it known how long a time yet remains for them to sleep this lengthy sleep, or when the daybreak of the resurrection will dawn for them and awake them from their slumber. And when a man ponders over why they are left in such a state, he is sorely grieved. 'Lo, how many unknown generations', he thinks, 'are enclosed under the earth, and I also shall pass away as one of them. Accursed be riches and comfort!' While deliberating thus, great dismay overshadows his heart and his mind is filled with anguish. And from the oppression of his anguish his tears will fall in great sorrow. Then he will despise the world, mourn over his life, and bewail his soul with diverse and bitter lamentations. With sighs he will say to himself, 'Where will you be, my wretched soul, and where will you be found after my death?' And perhaps even this reflection will arise in him: 'Would that I had not entered this creation and come forth from my mother's womb!' (Cf. Job 3:10-11). In such lamentation he will shed sweet tears from the sighing of his heart and soak his garments with his weeping. Thereupon this world will be like a prison in his eyes and its former sweetness will be the bitterest of all things. The love of its life and its desirable beauty will be to him like a figure of Sheol.

Then his mind will turn to Scripture, which will instill in him faith in the resurrection and the end of all things in this world, and in the promises set down in Scripture for those who have lived well in this world, and he considers the Divine judgments which menace transgressors of the Law and those who have been pleased to walk on the broad way of sin during their short lifetimes. Then straightway, like a man who has encountered the light, he casts off the oppression of his sorrow and great joy stirs within him, as in a man who has found true and excellent hope. These things and their like a man's nature is unable to make manifest from its own activity, but by faith alone they are understood from the indications of Scripture. For a man cannot gain instruction concerning himself wholly from his nature and the discerning intuitions that arise in him. But we can learn about the future and past acts of God's providence only from the Scriptures, or from the revelation of the Spirit. Therefore the eye of a man's mind will be enlightened by means of the rays of faith and the Scriptures, and nature's faculty of discernment will shine, and he will be awakened to care for his soul. Thereafter he will devise means to set his life free from the world, so that, before departing from the body, he might prepare provisions that will avail him yonder.

Question: How can a man depart completely from this world?

Answer: By the yearning inspired from recollection of the good things to come, which the divine Scriptures sow in his heart with the sweetness of their sayings filled with

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hope. For unless a man counters the things that are considered to be glorious and delectable—wherein he is held fast—with the desire for better things, he will be unable to despise his former love.

Question: Lo, nature is feeble and cannot renounce suddenly its former habits and embrace a life of afflictions!

Answer: Unless a man with much wisdom compares in his mind the greatness of the life to come with the brevity of the sorrow of this short life, he will not be able to take such courage as to dare to endure afflictions, so that he might set out on his journey on the path to the new world. I entreat you, reckon up in your mind the number of the years of this place wherein we dwell, then elevate yourself as much as possible, and compare this number with the days of the world to come, and see whether the number of what you give will amount to the number of what you will receive in return. And consider whether you will make an equal exchange in what you will give up with what you will receive in return. Therefore the wise man, being astonished at the greatness of that world and the infinite life there, as compared with the brevity of this life here, will say, 'The number of a man's days, if he lives long, are a hundred years (Cf. Psalms 89:10), and this is like filling a bucket from the sea or taking up a grain of sand. But a thousand years in this world are not even like unto one day in the world of the righteous' (Cf. Psalms 83:11), (This passage has been translated from Bedjan's Syriac printed text. It is not found in the Sinai Syriac MS or the Greek).

Question: What should we do with our body when pain and heaviness encompass it, for together with the body the will is enfeebled in its aspiration for the good and loses its first strength?

Answer: It is often the case with some, that one-half of their soul goes out in pursuit of the Lord and one-half remains in the world, and so their heart is not severed from things here, but they are divided within themselves, and sometimes they look ahead, sometimes backward. I am of the opinion that the sage exhorted such divided men as these, who draw near to the way of God, with the words: 'Come not unto the Lord with double hearts' (Ecclesiasticus 1:28) but come unto His way as one who sows and as one who reaps. And our Lord also, seeing that among those who wish to make a total renunciation there are some whose wills are prepared to do so (This is the Syriac reading) but whose thoughts turn back by reason of the fear of tribulations and because they have not yet cast away the love of the flesh from themselves, uttered this definitive word to them, wishing to disperse the sluggishness of their minds: 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself' (Matthew 16:24), and so on.

Question: But what is it to deny oneself?

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Answer: [[It is denial of the flesh.]] Just as a man who is prepared to be crucified has only the thought of death in his mind, and he goes forth not supposing anymore to possess a share of the life of this present age, even so is the man who wishes to fulfill the Lord's word. [[And this is the meaning of 'take up his cross and follow Me' (Matthew 16:24).]] For the cross is a volition that is ready for every affliction. And when He wished to teach us why this is so, He said, 'He that wishes to live in this world, shall cause himself to perish from the true life; and he that makes himself to perish here, shall find himself there' (Cf. Matthew 10:39; 16:25). That is to say, the man who walks on the path of the cross and who has set his footsteps therein, but who once more takes concern for this life, has caused himself to perish from the hope for the sake of which he went forth to suffer tribulation. Not only does this concern prevent him from drawing near to affliction for God's sake, but by his involvement with it, it gradually draws him away and carries him out of the midst of the struggle for the life of blessedness; and this thought grows stronger in him until it conquers him. But he who consents in his mind to lose himself for the sake of finding Christ's love (Greek; *he who in his mind loses his life (or soul), for My sake because of My love*) will be without reproach and preserved unharmed for life everlasting. And this is the meaning of, 'He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it' (Matthew 10:39. The word for *life* is, *soul*). 'Therefore by yourself prepare your soul from now for complete dissolution from this life. And if loss of this life should overtake you while you are found in such a state of mind (Greek; *if you cause yourself to perish from this life, He will say to you in this sense (or mind)*), I will give unto you eternal life, even as I have promised you (Cf. John 10:28). If you remain in this life, I will show you here My promise in very deed and the confirmation of the future blessings.' You will find eternal life when you have despised this life. When you enter into the struggle with this preparation, then all things that are thought to be painful and grievous will be as naught in your eyes. For when the mind has been thus prepared, it has no struggle or affliction in the moment of the peril of death. For this reason we must know with all exactness that if a man does not hate his life in this world because of his desire for the blessed life to come, he will in no wise be able to bear the manifold tribulations and pains which come upon him at every hour.

Question: By what means can a man cut off his former habits and accustom himself to the life of poverty and asceticism?

Answer: The body cannot be persuaded to live in privation so long as it is surrounded by the causes of pleasure and slackness. And the mind cannot restrain it from these until it estranges the body from everything that produces slackness. For when the body beholds the sight of luxury and worldly things and nearly every hour sees the causes

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of laxity, a burning desire for them is enkindled in it. Therefore the Lord Redeemer very rightly commanded whomever would follow Him to strip himself and leave the world; for a man ought first to cast off from himself the causes of slackness, and then approach the work. When the Lord Himself began to wage war with the devil, He fought him in the arid desert (*Vide* Matthew 4:1). Paul also exhorts those who take up the cross of Christ to go forth from the city, saying: 'Let us go forth unto Him without the city and take up His

reproach, for He suffered without the city' (Hebrews 13:12). For by setting himself apart from the world and what pertains to it, a man speedily forgets his former habits and his mode of life and he will not struggle long with these. But if he should draw near to the world and its possessions, he will speedily enfeeble the strength of his mind. Wherefore one must know that separation from the world greatly aids a man and guides him on the way of progress in the fierce and saving struggle. It is proper, then, and helpful in this struggle if a monk's cell be in a poor and mean condition, and if his cell be empty and devoid of everything that could incite in him the desire of ease. For when the causes of slackness are distant from a man, he is not endangered by the twofold warfare, that is, the one which is both inward and outward. See how much easier is the struggle when a man desires things that are afar off than when the very things themselves are close at hand and by their sight inflame the thoughts; for the struggle in the latter case is twofold.

When the circumstance of a man is such that he is even in want of a dwelling and his needs are mean and contemptible, then not even when he obtains his need will he look upon it with desire. He will be able to persuade his body to be content with little, and even this he will easily despise; and he does not approach food on account of its delectability, but in order to aid and fortify his nature. Such external causes swiftly make a man engage in asceticism with a mind that is untouched by every affliction and sorrow. Therefore it is meet for the zealous monk to flee with a nimble foot everything that causes him warfare, and not to associate with that which fights against him, but to restrain himself from the mere sight of it and to make himself distant from its proximity in so far as he is able. I do not say this with respect to the belly alone, but of anything which by its trial and warfare tempts and tries a monk's freedom. For when a man comes unto God, he makes a covenant with God to separate himself from these things. And these are the things I mean: not to look upon the face of a woman ((or for a woman—not to look upon the face of a man; that is, Saint Isaac is presumably referring in this context to someone of the opposite gender)); not to look upon magnificent persons; to have no desire of anything nor to luxuriate; not to look upon elegant clothing (Syriac; *not to look upon magnificent things or magnificent persons and their luxury, nor upon elegant persons and their clothing*); not to behold the society of men of the world, nor to hear their words, nor to inquire concerning them. For the passions are greatly strengthened by the proximity of any of these things

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which make an ascetic grow slack and alter his understanding and his purpose if it is true that the sight of what is good and beautiful spurs on the volition of the man who is truly zealous to undertake labor on its account, it is evident that what is opposed to the good has also the power to take a man's mind captive. And if nothing more befalls the mind that practices stillness than that it gives itself over to the struggle of warfare, even this is a great injury; for the man who voluntarily casts himself from a peaceful state into turbulence suffers a great loss.

If one of the elders among the ascetics and strugglers reckoned it injurious to his thought and harmful to his struggle to see a beardless youth having the resemblance of a woman, who can afford to be heedless in other matters? For once this saint refused to enter a monastery and greet the brethren, because the wise elder reasoned in this manner: 'If during this night I merely reflect that there is such a person in this place, it will be a great harm to me.' Therefore he did not go in and he said to the brethren, 'I do not fear, my children, but why should I bring warfare upon myself for no reason?' (Abba

Abraham. See Budge, *The sayings of the Holy Fathers*, 1:569). The memory of things such as these produces unprofitable turmoil in the mind (Syriac; *that is, why should I exchange the limpid purity of my ascetic labor for the recollection of such things as these*). In all things that pertain to the body a man has warfare, and against it he must guard himself. By keeping distant from them he lessens his warfare against them. But whenever they are near at hand, then although he constrains himself to pursue the good, he is endangered by constantly seeing and desiring them (There are different readings in the Greek and Syriac MSS for the last three sentences).

We know that in the summer there are many medicinal herbs which lie concealed in the ground because of the heat and no one can see them; but when they are moistened by rain and they smell the potency of the air's coolness, each species reveals where it was hidden in the earth. So also a man is truly at rest from many passions when he is in the grace of stillness and in the heat of abstinence; if, however, he encounters the things of this world, he sees how each passion awakens and lifts up its head, especially if they smell the scent of repose. I have said this so that no one should grow confident so long as he lives in this body, nay, until he dies, and in order to show that flight and making oneself distant from the causes of evil are a great and excellent help in the ascetic struggle. We must always fear whatever produces shame in us by its recollection, and we must never trample upon and scorn our conscience. Let us therefore put our body to the test in a desolate place bereft of the causes [of warfare] and make it acquire patient endurance. But that which is greater than all is for a man, wherever he should be, to strive to be far re-

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moved from the cause of warfare. For although a man might suffer affliction [[in his mind]], yet he will have no fear of suffering a fall due to his proximity [to things] when, being confronted by a need, he is defeated by his thoughts.

Question: When a man has cast off from himself every hindrance and has entered into the struggle, what is the beginning of his war against sin and where does he start his fight?

Answer: This much is known to everyone, that the labor of vigil and fasting is the beginning of every struggle against sin and lust, and especially for the man who contends against the sin that lies within us. In those who wage this invisible war the sign of hatred of sin and of its desire is to be seen in the fact that they begin to fast, and afterward night-vigil works with fasting to establish their asceticism.

On Fasting and Vigil.

The man who during his whole life loves the conversation of this yoke-mate fasting is a friend of chastity. Just as the satisfaction of the belly is the source of all evils, and as the slackness of sleep kindles the lust of fornication, so fasting, vigil, and wakefulness in God's service by withstanding the sweetness of sleep through crucifying the body throughout the day and night, are God's holy pathway and the foundation of every virtue. Fasting is the champion of every virtue, the beginning of the struggle, the crown of the abstinent, the beauty of virginity and sanctity, the resplendence of chastity, the commencement of the path of Christianity, the mother of prayer, the well-spring of

sobriety and prudence, the teacher of stillness, and the precursor of all good works. Just as the enjoyment of light is coupled with healthy eyes, so desire for prayer accompanies fasting that is practiced with discernment.

When a man begins to fast, he straightway yearns in his mind to enter into converse with God. For the body that fasts cannot endure to sleep upon its pallet all the night through. [[Fasting naturally incites wakefulness unto God, not only during the day, but also at night. For the empty body of a faster is not greatly wearied by the battle against sleep. And even if his senses are weakened, his mind is wakeful unto God in prayer. It is better for a man to desist from his liturgy because of weakness due to fasting, than because of sloth due to eating.]] (This passage has been translated from the Syriac printed text). When the seal of fasting is set upon a man's lips, his thought reflects with compunction, his heart pours forth prayer, gloom lies upon his countenance, shameful thoughts are far removed from him, cheer cannot be detected in his eyes, and

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he is an enemy of lusts and vain conversations. No one has ever seen a discerning faster enslaved by evil desires. Fasting with discernment is a spacious mansion for every good thing (Syriac; *the best things* or *the virtues*); but he who neglects fasting makes every good totter. For fasting was the commandment that was given to our nature in the beginning to protect it with respect to the tasting of food, and in this point the progenitor of our substance fell. There, however, where the first defeat was suffered, the ascetic strugglers make their beginning in the fear of God as they start to keep His laws.

And the Saviour also, when He manifested Himself to the world in the Jordan, began at this point. For after His baptism the Spirit led Him into the wilderness and He fasted for forty days and forty nights (*Vide* Matthew 4:1-2). Likewise all who set out to follow in His footsteps make the beginning of their struggle upon this foundation. For this is a weapon forged by God, and who shall escape blame if he neglects it? And if the Lawgiver Himself fasts, who among those who keep the law has no need of fasting? This is why the human race knew no victory before fasting, and the devil had never experienced defeat from our nature; but this weapon has made him powerless from the outset. Our Lord was the first born Leader of victory, so as to set the first crown of victory upon the head of our nature. When the devil, that foe and tyrant, sees a man bearing this weapon, he is straightway frightened and he recollects and considers that defeat which he suffered in the wilderness at the hands of the Saviour; at once his strength is shattered and the very sight of this weapon, given us by our Commander-in-chief, burns him. What weapon is more powerful and gives more boldness to the heart in the time of battle against the spirits of wickedness, than hunger endured for Christ's sake? For the more the body toils and endures hardship when the phalanx of the demons encompasses a man the more his heart is given succor by [the power of] confidence. He who has armed himself with the weapon of fasting is afire with zeal at all times. Elias the zealot also pursued the work of fasting when he was zealous for God's law. Furthermore, fasting reminds the faster of the commandments of the Spirit and it is an intermediary between the old Law and the grace given us by Christ. He who is negligent with respect to fasting is slothful, heedless, and feeble in the other ascetical struggles as well and he manifests an inception and an evil token of slackness in his soul, thus giving his antagonist an opportunity for defeating him. It is evident that he who enters naked and unarmed into the struggle will retreat from it without gaining the victory; for his limbs were not shielded with the warmth of fasting's hunger. Such is the nature of fasting, that

whoever perseveres in it will possess an unshakable mind, one ready to encounter and repel all the troublesome passions.

It is said concerning many of the martyrs, that when they foreknew, either by reve-

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lation or by information received from one of their friends, the day on which they were to receive the crown of martyrdom, they did not taste anything the preceding night, but from evening till morning they stood keeping vigil in prayer, glorifying God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes, and they looked forward to that hour with joy and exultation, waiting to meet the sword in their fast as ones prepared for the nuptials. Therefore let us also be vigilant (Syriac; *let us also be in such a state of preparedness*), we who are called to an unseen martyrdom so as to receive the crowns of sanctification, so that we may never give our enemies a sign of denial with any member or part of our body.

Question: How is it that many who, perhaps, practice these works, do not sense tranquility from passions and peace from thoughts?

Answer: Bodily labors alone, my brother, do not quell the passions which are hidden in the soul, nor do they prevent thoughts from being continually awakened by the senses. For these labors protect a man from lusts, lest he be vanquished by them, and from the delusion of the demons (Syriac, *and from the demons, lest he be somehow injured*. The Greek translators read *deluded* for *injured*, the two words in Syriac being very similar in spelling, and their reading might indeed be the correct one), but they do not give the soul peace and tranquility. Works and labors give the soul dispassion, deaden the members which are upon the earth (Cf. Colossians 3:5), and grant rest from thoughts only when we partake of stillness, and the outer senses cease to be disquieted and continue for a long time in the service of wisdom. For until a man should be freed from encounters with men, and his members be liberated from the dispersion of thoughts, and he gather himself into himself, he will never be able to recognize his passion. Stillness, as Saint Basil says, is the beginning of the soul's purification (Letter 2, *To Gregory*). For when the outward members cease from their outward activity and from the distraction caused thereby, then the mind turns away from distractions and wandering thoughts that are outside its realm and abides quietly within itself, and the heart awakens for the searching out of deliberations that are within the soul. If a man perseveres well in this, he will begin gradually to make his way into pureness of soul.

Question: Is it really impossible for the soul to be purified while engaged with affairs outside the doors [of the cell]?

Answer: Will a tree that is watered daily ever dry up from the roots? Will the contents of a vessel that is filled daily ever diminish? And if purity is nothing else save forgetting an unfree mode of life and departing from its habits, how and when will the man purify his soul who, actively of himself or through others, renews in himself the memory of his former habits (which is the knowledge of vice) by means of the senses? When can

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he cleanse his soul from this? Or when will he have rest from the battles that assail him from without, so as to be able to see what lies within [[and establish peace]]? If the heart is defiled every day, when will it be cleansed from defilement? But if he cannot even withstand the action [upon him] of outward things, how much less will he be able to purify his heart, seeing that he stands in the midst of the camp and every day hears urgent tidings of war? And how could he dare proclaim peace to his soul? If, however, he should withdraw from this, little by little he will be able to make the first inner turmoils cease. For until the upper portion of a river is dammed, its lower waters will not dry up. Only when a man enters stillness can his soul distinguish the passions and prudently search out her own wisdom. Then the inner man also awakens for spiritual work and day by day he perceives the hidden wisdom which blossoms forth in his soul.

Question: What are the exact tokens and accurate signs that the fruit which is hidden in the soul has begun to appear from a man's labor?, (Greek; *appear as a man*).

Answer: When a man is deemed worthy to receive the gift of abundant tears which come over him without effort. For tears are established for the mind as a kind of boundary between what is bodily and what is spiritual and between passionateness and purity. Until a man receives this gift, the activity of his work is still in the outer man and he has not yet at all perceived the activity of the hidden things of the spiritual man. But when a man begins to relinquish the corporeal things of the present age and crosses this boundary to that which lies inside of visible nature, then straightway he will attain to the grace of tears. And from the first hospice of this hidden discipline tears begin to flow and they lead a man to perfection in the love of God. The more he progresses in this discipline, the more he is enriched with love, until by reason of his constant converse with tears he imbibes them with his food and drink.

This, therefore, is the exact sign that the mind has left this world and perceived that spiritual world. But the more a man draws near in his mind to the present world, the more tears subside. And when his mind is totally enmeshed in the world, a man is totally deprived of these tears. This is a sign that a man is completely buried in the passions.

On the Difference in Tears.

There are tears that burn and there are tears that anoint as if with oil. All tears that flow out of contrition and anguish of heart (Greek; *and a holy heart*. Perhaps the original reading was, *unholy*, which transliterates, but does not translate, the Syriac word) on account of sins dry up and burn the

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body, and often even the governing faculty feels the injury caused by their outflow. At first a man must necessarily come to this order of tears and through them a door is opened unto him to enter into the second order, which is superior to the first; this is the realm wherein a man receives mercy (The Syriac printed text reads here, *this is the sign that a man has received mercy*. In Syriac the words *realm* (*place*) and *sign*, are similar in appearance). These are the tears that are shed because of insight; they make the body comely and anoint it as if with oil, but they also alter a man's countenance. 'When the heart rejoiceth', he says, 'the countenance gloweth, but when it is in sorrows the countenance is downcast' (Proverbs 15:13). [[While the thinking is silent these tears are

poured forth over the entire countenance. The body receives from them a sort of nourishment, and gladness is imprinted upon the face. He who has had experience of these two alterations will understand]] (This passage is added from the Syriac printed text).

Question: What is the resurrection of the soul, of which the Apostle speaks, saying, 'If ye be risen with Christ?', (Colossians 3:1).

Answer: When the Apostle said, 'God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts' (2 Corinthians 4:6) the resurrection, he showed this resurrection to be the exodus from the old state [[which in the likeness of Sheol incarcerates a man so that the light of the Gospel will not shine mystically upon him. This is a breath of life through hope in the resurrection, and by it the dawning of divine wisdom shines in his heart]], so that a man should become new, having nothing of the old man. This the prophet also says, 'And I shall give them a new heart and a new spirit' (Ezekiel 36:26). Then the image of Christ is formed in us through the Spirit of wisdom and the revelation of the knowledge of Him.

Question: What, in brief, is the power of the work of stillness?

Answer: Stillness mortifies the outward senses and resurrects the inward movements, whereas an outward manner of life does the opposite, that is, it resurrects the outward senses and deadens the inward movements.

Question: What is the cause of visions and revelations? For some men see them, but in others who labor more than the former, vision is not so active.

Answer: There are many causes of visions and revelations. Some have the Divine oeconomy and the common profit of all as their cause; others come to pass for the comfort, encouragement, and instruction of the weak. But chiefly, all visions and revelations are providentially bestowed through God's mercy for men, and for the most part they are granted to men of three classes: to the very simple and surpassingly guileless; to certain

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perfect and holy men; and to those who have flaming zeal for God, who have despaired of the world and completely renounced it, who have withdrawn from the habitations of men and gone out naked in pursuit of God, expecting no help from anything visible, and at a time when fear has overcome them because of their solitary existence, or when peril of death from starvation or illness or some dire circumstance and tribulation encompasses them, such that they come near to losing hope. Now the first cause that such consolations are granted to some men of this sort, but are not granted to others who surpass them in labors, is purity or non-purity, of the conscience I mean. The second cause is precisely this: inasmuch as a man enjoys consolation from men or from anything visible, the consolation of visions and revelations is not granted to him, save for the sake of God's universal providence. Our discourse is, however, concerning anchorites. A witness of what has been said is one of the fathers who made entreaty concerning this matter and heard, 'The consolation and the converse of men suffice you.'

And another witness to this is he who led a solitary life in reclusion, who, when he lived in withdrawal from men, enjoyed at every hour consolation bestowed by divine grace; when, however, he drew near to the world, he sought for this consolation as was his custom and did not find it. He therefore entreated God to reveal the cause of this, saying, 'Is it not, O Lord, because of the episcopacy that grace has departed from me?' And he was told, 'No, but because God makes special providence for those who live in the desert and vouchsafes them these consolations' (Abba Apos (or Aphi). See Budge, *The Sayings of the Holy Fathers*, 1:24. In the Syriac the answer given to Abba Apos is, *No, but yonder was the desert and God provided for you*). For it is impossible that any man should both enjoy consolation from visible things and receive this consolation of grace, unless it be on account of a hidden Divine oeconomy (one of those mentioned above) understood only by Him Who dispenses such things.

Question: Are vision and revelation the same, or different?

Answer: No, they are different. Revelation is often said with respect to the two, because what is hidden is revealed [[and something once hidden now becomes manifest by some means]]. Not every revelation is a vision, but every vision is called a revelation [[because what is hidden is revealed. Still, not all becomes revealed and known through a vision]]. Revelation is received for the most part concerning things that are known, tasted, and perceived by the intellect. But vision comes to pass in many ways, as it were in a likeness and in types, even as it was given in olden times to the ancients, whether in deep sleep or waking. Sometimes it was precise, sometimes as though in an apparition and somehow obscurely. For often the very man who beholds the vision does not know whether he is awake or asleep. [[And even after he comes to himself, he does not know whether the thing had truly taken place or it occurred as though in a dream.]] It also happens that a voice of

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succor is heard, at times a certain form is seen, at times a more distinct vision, that is, face to face, and sight, and speech, and questions and the ensuing intercourse. And holy powers are also beheld by the worthy and bring revelations to pass. These things occur in desert wildernesses and places far removed from men, where a man is by necessity in great need of them because he has no help or comfort from any quarter. But the revelations that are perceived by the intellect through its purity are received by perfect men alone who are replete with knowledge.

Question: What is the sign that a man has attained to purity of heart, and when does a man know that his heart has entered into purity?

Answer: When he sees all men as good and none appears to him to be unclean and defiled, then in very truth his heart is pure. For how could anyone fulfill the word of the Apostle, that 'A man should esteem all better than himself' (Cf. Philippians 2:3) with a sincere heart, if he does not attain to the saying, 'A good eye will not see evil?', (Cf. Habakkuk 1:13).

Question: What is purity and where is its boundary?

Answer: Purity is the forgetting of the contranatural modes of knowledge which in the world are invented by [human] nature. And its boundary is when a man is liberated from, and found outside of, these modes of knowledge and he enters into the primordial simplicity and guilelessness of his nature and he becomes like an infant without, however, the deficiencies of an infant.

Question: Is it possible for a man to enter this order?

Answer: Yes. For behold, some have reached this measure, as Abba Sisoës, who used to ask his disciple whether he had eaten bread or not. And another one of the Fathers entered such a nearly infantile simplicity and innocency, that having so completely forgotten the things of this age, he would have eaten before receiving Holy Communion, had not his disciple hindered him; and his disciple led him like a babe to receive Communion [[so limpidly pure and simple was that blessed man]]. To this world he was an infant, but his soul was perfect before God.

Question: What meditation and occupation should the ascetic have while he abides in stillness in his secluded cell, so that his intellect should not be engaged with vain thoughts?

Answer: You ask with respect to meditation and occupation, how a man can become dead in his cell? In truth, what need has a zealous man, who soberly attends to his soul, to ask how to pass his time when he is by himself? What meditation can a monk have in his cell save weeping? Could he have any time free from weeping so as to turn his gaze to another thought? And what occupation is better than this? A monk's very cell

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and his solitude, which have a likeness to life in a tomb, far from human joys, teach him that his work is to mourn. And the very calling of his name urges and spurs him on to this, because he is called 'the mournful one' (The Syriac, *abila*, means this), that is, bitter in heart. All the saints have left this life in mourning. If, therefore all the saints mourned and their eyes were ever filled with tears till they departed from this life, who would have no need of weeping? He whose loved one lies dead before him and who sees himself dead in sins, has he need of instruction concerning the thought he should employ for tears? Your soul, slain by sins, lies before you, your soul which is of greater value to you than all the world. Could there be no need for you to weep over her? If, therefore, we enter stillness and patiently persevere therein, we shall certainly be able to be constant in weeping. So let us entreat the Lord with an unrelenting mind to grant us mourning. For if we are granted this free grace, which is more excellent and surpasses every other gift, then with its help we shall enter into purity. And once we have come into purity, it will not be taken from us until our departure from this life.

Blessed, therefore, are the pure in heart, for there is no time when they do not enjoy the sweetness of tears, and in this sweetness they see the Lord at all times. While tears are still wet in their eyes, they are deemed worthy of beholding His revelations at the height of their prayer; and they make no prayer without tears. This is the meaning of the Lord's saying, 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted' (Matthew 5:4). For a man comes from mourning into purity of soul. But when the Lord said that they will be comforted, He did not explain what sort of comfort. When by means of tears

a monk is deemed worthy of traversing the land of the passions and of reaching the plains of purity of soul, then he encounters there consolation which does not pass away from those who have found it, and he comes upon consolation which is not to be discovered in this world. Then he understands what consolation is received (Syriac; *that this is the consolation received*) through purity at the completion of mourning, when God wills to give it to those who weep. For it is not possible that a man who continually mourns and weeps should be disquieted by the passions, since the gift of weeping and mourning belongs to the dispassionate. And if the tears of a man who for a long time weeps and mourns can not only lead him to dispassion, but even completely cleanse and free his mind of the memory of the passions, what can we say of those who night and day devote themselves to this activity? No one, therefore, accurately knows the help that comes of weeping, save those only who have surrendered their souls to this work. All the saints strive to reach this entrance-way, because by means of tears the door is opened

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before them to enter the land of consolation, wherein the good and saving footsteps of God (The words, *good and saving*, are lacking in the earliest Greek MSS. The Syriac printed text reads, *the footsteps of the love of God*) are imprinted through revelations.

Question: Because some are unable to mourn unceasingly by reason of the feebleness of their body, what should they do to safeguard their mind, lest when it is idle, the passions should rise up against it?

Answer: When an ascetic's heart is cut off from the affairs of life by his solitary dwelling, far distant from every distraction (The Syriac reads here, *by his solitary dwelling in the complete silence of the desert, withdrawn from noises and cries of turbulent creation*) the passions cannot rise up against his soul and trouble him, unless he should grow slothful and neglect his duties. And he will certainly remain unvexed by the passions if he passes his time in the study of the divine Scriptures, seeking out their meanings. For vain thoughts hastily flee from him because of the understanding of the divine Scriptures which grows and abides in him, and his mind is not able to separate itself from its yearning and recollection of the Scriptures, nor will it be able to give any attention whatever to this life by reason of the great sweetness of its rumination, whereby it is exalted in the ascetic's profound stillness in the desert. Wherefore he even forgets himself and his nature, he becomes like a man in ecstasy, who has no recollection at all of this age. With special diligence he ponders and reflects upon what pertains to God's majesty and he says, 'Glory be to His Divinity!' And again, 'Glory be to His wondrous acts! Strange and marvelous are all His works! To what heights has He exalted my worthlessness, on what things has He deemed me worthy to meditate, what thoughts to dare to entertain, wherein my soul may take delight!' And so the ascetic, being engrossed in these marvels and continually struck with wonder, is always drunken and he lives as it were in the life after the resurrection. This grace is very greatly aided by stillness, because the solitary's intellect finds therein a place to remain with itself in the peace which stillness endows. Furthermore, his intellect is moved to the recollection of that which accords with his manner of life. For, setting before his intellect the glory of the age to come, the hope laid up for the righteous in that spiritual life originating in God, and that new restoration, he neither reflects upon nor remembers what pertains to this world. And when he becomes intoxicated with these things, he is once again translated from

thence hither by his divine vision concerning this age in which he still abides and he says, stricken with astonishment: 'O the depth of the riches of the wisdom, knowledge, insight, prudence, and oeconomy of the inscrutable God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!' (Cf. Romans 11:33). For when He made ready that other wondrous age, so as to bring therein all rational creatures and to keep them in that infinite life, what indeed

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was the cause for Him to fashion this world first, to extend its borders, to enrich it with such a multiplicity and abundance of species and natures, and to place in it the causes, materials, and conflicts of the many passions? And how was it that in the beginning He set us in this world and instilled in us a love for longevity here, and then He suddenly translates us from hence by death and keeps us for no small time in insensibility and motionlessness? How is it that He thus causes our form to perish, pours out our constitution and mingles it with the earth, permits our structure to dissolve, perish, and melt away, until the human frame completely ceases to be? And then at a time which He wills and has decreed by His adorable wisdom, He will raise us up in another form, which He Himself knows, and will bring us into another state. And we men are not alone in our hope for these things, but the holy angels, who have no need of this world by reason of their wondrous nature and who are but a little short of perfection, also await our resurrection from corruption, when our race will rise out of the dust and its corruptible nature will be made anew. For it is because of us that they are prevented from entering, and they await that opening of the door of the new age which will occur once only. 'This creation,' that is to say, the angels, 'groaneth' (Romans 8:22. The Greek has, *will find rest with us*. In Syriac, *groan*, and *find rest*, are almost identical in appearance) with us from the oppressiveness of the body which it sees weighing upon us, and the Apostle says: 'This creation waiteth for the manifestation of the children of God (Cf. Romans 8:19, 21), after the total dissolution of this age from its entire constitution and the restitution of our nature to its primordial state.

And then from this he is raised up noetically to that which was before the foundation of the world, when there was no created thing, neither heaven, nor earth, neither angels, nor anything which has now come into being. He considers how the Lord brought all things suddenly from non-being into being simply by being well-pleased to do so, and how everything as it is brought to perfection stands before Him. Then once more he descends in mind to all God's creations and he carefully surveys the wonders of His creatures and the wisdom of His works and he says to himself in awestruck astonishment: 'O the wonder, how greatly His oeconomy and His providence transcend every conception, how wonderful and mighty is the power of His creative works! How did He bring creation, that innumerable multitude of diverse creatures, out of non-being into being? And how will He again cause creation to perish from its wondrous harmony, the beauty of natures and the well-ordered course of its creatures; times and seasons, the union of night and day, the beneficial changes of the year, the many-hued flowers of the earth, the beautiful buildings of the cities, their magnificent palaces, the swift course of men and their nature which

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endures hardship from its beginning in life till its departure? How will He suddenly abolish this wondrous order and establish another age, wherein the memory of the former

creation will never again enter into the heart of any man, but a change of another sort will come to pass, and other deliberations, other concerns?' Then human nature will in no wise remember the world or the way of life which was therein. For the mind of man (Syriac; *the gaze of man's mind*) will be held in bondage by the vision of that state and it will never again have time to turn back [[in recollection]] to the conflict with flesh and blood. At the destruction of that former age, the future age will commence straightway. Then each man will say: 'O mother, forgotten of thy children, whom thou didst bear and nurture and make wise, who in the twinkling of an eye were gathered into a stranger's bosom and became genuine sons of her who was barren and never gave birth! "Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not," (Isaiah 54:1), yea, in the children which the earth hath borne unto thee!'

Then as one in ecstasy he muses and says: 'How long will this age continue? When will the future age commence? How long will these tabernacles (i.e. our bodies) sleep in this state and our bodies be mingled with earth? How will that mode of life come to be? In what form will this nature be resurrected and framed? In what manner will it undergo a second creation?' And musing upon such things and their like, ecstasy, awestruck wonder, and a still silence overcome him (This is the Greek printed text. Sinai Syriac and many Greek MSS read; *simply stillness overcomes him*. Syriac; *and stillness overcomes him and his perception of his corporeality is stolen away, and for a long time he abides in silence, wondering at God's incomprehensible deeds*), whereupon he stands up, then bends his knees, and with many tears offers up thanksgiving and glorification to the God Who alone is wise, Who is ever glorified in His works which are surpassingly wise.

Blessed, therefore, is the man who has been deemed worthy of such things! Blessed is the man whose meditation this is both day and night! Blessed is the man who dwells upon these things and their like all the days of his life! [[To be thus minded is useful for every man, but especially so for the hesychast, and it is fitting that he be continually reflecting upon these recollections at all times. A man must lay hold of these indications with his thoughts and, having finished prayer, he should ruminate and meditate upon them. When he is engaged in these occupations and this reflection, there will be no place in his mind for a foreign memory that could remove him from his continuous memory of God.]], (This passage is translated from the Syriac printed text). But if in the beginning of his life of stillness a man does not experience the power of such divine visions because of his mind's distraction, and he cannot yet raise himself up toward the power of the aforesaid wonders of God, let him not become despondent and abandon the serenity of his quiet life. For when the husbandman is sowing the earth he

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does not immediately see the ear as he sows the seed; for despondency, hardship, painful limbs, cutting off of friendships, and separation from acquaintances accompany the work of sowing. But after a man has endured these things, another season comes wherein the husbandman is filled with gladness, leaps, exults, and rejoices. And when is this? When he eats the bread furnished by his own sweat and his rumination is held fast in stillness. For stillness and the aforesaid patient meditation enjoyed therein kindle great and endless sweetness in the heart and swiftly draw the intellect to unspeakable astonishment. Blessed is the man who perseveres in stillness, for before him is opened access to this divinely-flowing spring; he has drunk from it and been sweetened, and without cease he will drink therefrom, always and at every hour of the night and day, until the completion

and the end of this, his temporal life.

Question: What embraces all the labors of this work, that is to say, stillness, so that when a man has attained it, he can know that he has reached perfection in his manner of life?

Answer: When a man is deemed worthy of constant prayer. For when he reaches this, he has reached the pinnacle of all the virtues and has become a dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. For unless a man has received in all certainty the grace of the Comforter, he will be unable to perform constant and unceasing prayer restfully. When the Spirit dwells in a man, as the Apostle says, he never ceases to pray, since the Spirit Himself always prays [within him] (*Vide* Romans 8:26). Then, whether he sleeps or wakes, prayer is never separated from his soul. If he eats, or drinks, or lies down, or does something, or even in deep slumber, the sweet fragrances and perfumes of prayer effortlessly exhale in his heart. He does not possess prayer in a limited way, but even though it should be outwardly still, at every moment it ministers within him secretly. For the silence of the limpidly pure is called prayer by one of the Christ-bearers, because their thoughts are divine motions. The movements of a pure heart and mind are meek and gentle cries, whereby the pure chant in a hidden manner to the Hidden God.

Question: What is spiritual prayer, and how is a man who struggles deemed worthy of it?

Answer: Spiritual prayer is the motions of the soul which partake of the energy of the Holy Spirit through exacting chastity and purity. One man in ten thousand is accounted worthy of spiritual prayer. It is the mystery of the future state and life, for herein a man is raised on high and his nature remains inoperative and unmoved by any motion or memory of things present. The soul does not pray a prayer, but in awareness she perceives the spiritual things of that other age which transcend human conception;

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and the understanding of these is by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is noetic divine vision, not the movement and entreaty of prayer, although it has its starting-point in prayer. For this reason some have already reached the perfection of purity, and there is no time when their inward motions are not confined in prayer, even as we said above. And when the Holy Spirit overshadows them, He always finds them in prayer. He brings them forth from prayer into *theoria*, which means 'vision of the spirit'. They have no need of the form of prolonged prayer, nor of the standing and definite order of much liturgy, for it is sufficient for them to remember God and straightway they are taken captive by the love of Him. So as to render honor to prayer, however, they do not neglect standing at prayer; and in addition to their unceasing prayer, they stand on their feet at the prescribed times.

We see that when Saint Anthony was standing at the prayer of the ninth hour, he perceived that his intellect was taken up. And when another Father stretched out his hands while standing at prayer, he entered an ecstasy for the period of four days. And likewise many others through prayer were taken captive by their strong recollection of God and their love for Him, and thus came to ecstasy. A man is accounted worthy of this when he strips himself of inward and outward sin by the keeping of the Lord's commandments, which oppose sin. And if a man practices these commandments in their

order, of necessity he will slip away from the manifold affairs of men; that is, he will, so to speak, disrobe himself of the body and be outside of it: not its nature, but its function. There is no man in whom sin continues to dwell who walks in the pathways of the Lawgiver and practices His commandments. For this reason our Lord promised in the Gospels that He will make His abode with him who keeps His commandments (*Vide* John 14:23).

Question: What is the perfection of all the fruits of the Spirit?

Answer: When a man is deemed worthy of the perfect love of God.

Question: And whence does a man know that he has attained this?

Answer: When the recollection of God is stirred in his mind, straightway his heart is kindled by the love of Him and his eyes pour forth abundant tears. For love is wont to ignite tears by the recollection of beloved ones. A man who is in this state will never be found destitute of tears, because that which brings him to the recollection of God is never absent from him; wherefore even in sleep he converses with God. For love is wont to cause such things. This is perfection for men in their life here.

Question: If, after a man has greatly toiled, labored, and struggled, the thought of pride shamelessly assails him—taking occasion from the beauty of his virtues—and reckons

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up the magnitude of his toil, by what means should he restrain his thoughts and achieve such security in his soul that he cannot be persuaded by it?

Answer: When a man comes to know that he can fall away from God as a dry leaf falls from a tree, then he knows the power of his soul. When the Lord withdraws His help from a man and permits him to enter alone into battle with the devil, and He does not go with him as He is wont to go with those who struggle in the contest and to assist them, then that man's strength is made manifest, nay rather, his defeat and consternation, and whether by his own strength he has acquired the aforesaid virtues and has endured every struggle on their behalf. For God's providence accompanies the saints at all times, protecting and strengthening them. With the aid of divine providence a man overcomes all classes of men, whether he enters the contest and sufferings of martyrdom or the other hardships that are undertaken and endured for God's sake. This is clear and evident and cannot be doubted. For how else could human nature vanquish the power of the allurements which are incessantly active in a man's members and grieve him and are able mightily to overpower him? How is it that other men desire and covet victory over them, but though they vehemently contend against them, they are daily defeated; they abide in pain, lamentation, and toil on behalf of their souls, whereas you can easily bear the troubles of the body, which are so very distressing, and be little vexed thereby? And how else could a passionate body contend against a sharp blade, endure the breaking of its limbs and every sort of torment, and not be vanquished by the passions—though a man cannot bear the pain of a thorn under his fingernail—nor even feel the manifold tortures according to the law of nature, save only if another power besides his natural power

comes to him from elsewhere and allays the force of the torments? And since we have discussed God's providence, we should not be slothful and neglect to recount a certain soul-profitting tale which can uplift a man in his struggles.

A certain young man, Theodore by name (Celebrated by the Church on November 30), having been tormented over his entire body, was asked by someone how keenly he had felt the tortures. He replied: 'In the beginning I felt them, but afterward I beheld a youth who wiped away the sweat of my struggle with a sponge, strengthened me, and refreshed me in my contest.' O the compassions of our God! How near is His grace to those who enter the contest for His name's sake, that joyfully they can undergo sufferings on His behalf!

Therefore, O man, do not show ingratitude to the providence which God manifests on your account. If it is obvious that you are not the victor but merely an instrument, as it were, and that it is the Lord Who is victorious in you, and that you receive the title of victor as a free gift, then what can hinder you from asking at all times for that same

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strength, what can hinder you from winning the same victories while you give thanks to God for this? Have you not heard, O man, how many champions from the foundation of the world and the beginnings of time have fallen from the height of their struggle because they did not give thanks for this grace? As the gifts of God to the race of men are many and diverse, so there are many differences in the gifts received, corresponding to those who receive them. There is also [the element of] smallness and greatness in God's gifts, and though they are all sublime and marvelous, still one transcends the other in glory and honor, and one degree surpasses another degree. It is one of the chief gifts of Christ that a man consecrates himself to [[the doing of good works and]] the practice of a virtuous discipline. For there are many who forget this grace, even that they have been accounted worthy that in God's eyes there be a distinction between them and the rest of men, that they have consecrated themselves to God (This phrase is not found in the Syriac), that they are among those who receive His gifts, and that they have even been chosen to serve and minister unto God; and instead of unceasingly thanking Him with their mouths for these things, they turn aside to pride and self-esteem. Their thinking is such, that they are not as men who have received the grace of liturgy so as to serve God with a pure life and spiritual doing, but as ones who give God a present (the Syriac could mean this, or *as ones whom God has assigned to this as being adjudged righteous*) instead of reckoning that He took them out from the midst of men and made them His intimates and initiates into the knowledge of His mysteries. Their souls do not tremble when they reflect on such things, nor even when they behold how their predecessors, who fostered the same thoughts, were suddenly deprived of their lofty rank, how in the twinkling of an eye the Lord cast them down from the very great glory and honor which they enjoyed, and how they turned aside to impurity, licentiousness, and shameless acts in the manner of brute beasts. For because they did not understand their lack of strength, nor remember unceasingly Him Who gave them the great gift of ministering unto Him, of abiding within [[the honor of]] His Kingdom, of being comrades with the angels, and of drawing nigh an angelic discipline, He cast them down from their work. And so by their change of life from one of stillness, He demonstrates to them that it was not by their own strength that they adhered to a well-ordered manner of life, though oppressed by the harassment of nature, the demons, and other adversities, but that this power belongs to God's grace.

Things which the world cannot receive or hear of on account of their difficulty they patiently endured for a great length of time without being overcome, because a certain power accompanied them, sufficient to help and protect them in every circumstance. But because they forgot this power, the word of the Apostle was fulfilled in them: 'And even as they did not try to retain in their knowledge God, their Master, Who united

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clay to spiritual liturgy, He gave them over to a reprobate mind' (Cf. Romans 1:28), and, as was meet, they received in their persons the disgrace which their error deserved.

Question: Is it possible that a man who dares spontaneously to renounce completely the habitation of men and suddenly with a good zeal to go forth [(naked) like Adam] into the uninhabited and terrible wilderness, could for this reason die of hunger on account of lack of shelter and the other necessities of life?

Answer: He that made ready dwelling-places for the irrational animals before He created them and took concern for their needs, will in no wise overlook His creatures, and especially those who fear Him and who follow Him with simplicity and an unquestioning mind. The man who surrenders his will to God in every matter is never concerned with his body's needs or hardships and sufferings, but his whole desire is to remain within the squalor (Greek; *obscurity*), of his ascetical discipline and patiently to endure his life of lowliness. He is not as one who quails before afflictions, but he reckons as sweet and delectable his estrangement from all the world. For the sake of purity he suffers hardship amid hills and mountains and becomes like a wanderer in the country of brute beasts, in no wise accepting to give rest to his body, or to live a wretchedly defiled life. And when at every hour he surrenders himself over to death, lest he should be deprived of the pure mode of life which is dear to God, he receives help from Him (The Syriac reads here; *live a wretchedly defiled life, lest he should surrender his soul to hourly death which is deprivation of the holiness of a pure mode of life directed unto God*). To our God be glory and honor, and may He preserve us in His purity and sanctify us by the holiness of the grace of the Holy Spirit unto the honor of His name, that in purity we may glorify His holy name unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 38.

That the Body Which Fears Temptations Becomes a Friend of Sin.

One of the saints said that the body which fears temptation becomes a friend of sin, lest it should endure hardship and lose its life. Therefore the Holy Spirit forces it to die, for He knows that if it does not die, it will not vanquish sin. If a man wishes the Lord to dwell in him, he constrains his body, he serves the Lord, he labors in the Spirit's commandments (The Syriac printed text reads; *he serves the Lord with the fruits of the Spirit* [Vide Galatians 5:22]) recorded by the Apostle, and he preserves his soul from the works of the flesh which the Apostle has written down (Vide Galatians 5:21). The body that is mingled with sin finds rest in the works of the flesh; but the Spirit of God finds repose in His own fruits (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek adds a negative, which gives *but the Spirit of God does not find repose in its* [presumably the body's] *fruits*).

When the body is weakened by fasting and lowliness the soul is spiritually strengthened in prayer. When it is straitened in many ways by the tribulations of stillness and is in privation and necessity, coming near even to losing its life, it is wont to entreat you, saying: 'Leave me be a while, so that in moderation I can struggle; already I walk righteously, for lo, I have been tried by these many evils.' But when you give it rest from afflictions and grant it some small ease as having compassion on it, then however little it might be at rest, it will whisper falsehoods to you in a cajoling manner, little by little, until it causes you to quit the desert (for its cajoling is very powerful). It will say to you: 'Even close to the world we can maintain an excellent discipline, living in our present practices, for greatly have we been tried. Just put me to the test, and if I am not as you wish, we can always return. Lo,

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the desert will not run away from us.' Do not trust it, however hard it implores you and whatever promises it makes, for it will not do as it says. Once you have granted its request it will hurl you into great falls, from whence you will not be able to rise up or depart.

Whenever you grow despondent because of trials and you weary of them, say to yourself: 'Again you long for an impure and shameful life.' And if the body says to you: 'It is a great sin to kill oneself,' answer it: 'Yes, I am killing myself, because I cannot live a pure life. I will die here rather than see afterward the true death of my soul away from God. It is better for me to die here for the sake of purity than to live an evil life in the world. I have willingly chosen this death on account of my sins. I slay myself because I have sinned before the Lord and no longer shall I anger Him. What is life to me, if it be afar off from God? I will endure these hardships, lest I should become a stranger to my heavenly hope. [[And why have I been created in the world, if I simply enter and leave it?]] And what would God profit by my life on this earth, if therein I live wickedly and anger Him?'

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Homily 39.

On the Different Methods of the Devil's Warfare Against Those Who Journey on the Narrow Way That Transcends the World.

On the First Method.

Our adversary, the devil, has the long-standing habit of artfully choosing modes of warfare against those who enter upon the ascetic contest according to the form of their weapons (Syriac; *according to [or after] an examination of their weapons*), and he changes the manner of his struggle against them according to the aim of each. He observes those who are indolent in their volition and whose thoughts are infirm, and from the very beginning he vehemently wars upon them, raising up against them vigorous and potent temptations. He does this in order to make them taste the modes of his wickedness at the start of their course, so that they should be overcome by fear and their pathway should seem to them rugged and impassable. Thus they will say to themselves, 'If the beginning of the way is so arduous and harsh, who until the end can confront the many struggles that lie herein?' Thenceforth they are unable to withstand anymore, to make any

further progress, or even to take anything else into consideration, because their thought is so obsessed with apprehension. The devil has only for a little while to straiten them with his warfare before they turn to flight. Nay rather, it is God Himself Who permits the devil to prevail upon them, and He gives them no aid whatever. And this is because they entered the Lord's contest with doubt and coldness. For the prophet says: 'Cursed is the man who does the works of the Lord carelessly, keeping back his sword from blood' (Jeremiah 31 (48):10); and again, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that fear Him' (Cf. Psalms 84:9). For God

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commands us to confront the devil with fearlessness and ardor, saying: 'Start now to destroy him, rush to war against him, grapple with him manfully, and I shall put the fear of you upon your foes that are under heaven, saith the Lord' (Cf. Deuteronomy 11:25). For if you do not voluntarily die a sensory death for the sake of God's goodness, involuntarily you will die a noetic death, [falling] away from God.

Whatever your portion should be, without misgivings voluntarily accept temporary sufferings for its sake, that you may enter into the glory of God. For if you suffer bodily death in the Lord's contest, the Lord Himself will crown you, and God will give your venerable relics the honor of the martyrs. Therefore, as I said above, those who are negligent and slothful at the beginning and have not undertaken mightily to surrender themselves to death, are found always to be inferior and cowardly in every battle. Nay rather, God permits them to be pursued and warred upon, because they did not truly seek Him, but as tempters and mockers of God they endeavored to do His work. Hence the devil himself knew them from the beginning and tested their thoughts, revealing those men to be cowardly, self-loving and, moreover, sparrers of their bodies. So he drives them like a hurricane, since he does not see in them the noetic power that he is accustomed to see in the saints. For in proportion to a man's volition to strive toward God, and in proportion to his purpose to attain his goal for God's sake, God works with him, helps him, and manifests His providence in him. The devil cannot draw near to a man or attack him with temptations unless it be permitted by the bidding of Heaven (Greek; *unless a man grows negligent, or God permits it*. The Syriac literally reads; *unless there be toward him the negligence of that heavenly nod*. The Syriac word, *negligence*, was sometimes used with the meaning of, *permission*. Apparently the Greek translators construed it to refer to a man's negligence), or he grows lax and surrenders himself to shameful thoughts and to distraction, or he becomes proud and conceited, or he accepts thoughts of doubt and cowardliness.

Now the devil does not so ask God for such men as these, for unskilled and inexperienced beginners, in order to tempt them, as he does for holy and great men, for he knows that God will not permit the former to fall into his hands. God knows that they do not have the strength for the devil's temptations, and so He does not surrender them unless they have within them one of the causes aforementioned; in such a case, the power of God's providence withdraws from them. This is the first method of the devil's warfare.

On the Second Method of the Devil's Warfare.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

Whenever the devil sees men who are courageous and strong, who reckon death as nothing, who go forth with great zeal, who give themselves up to every trial and death,

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and who set at naught the life of the world and of the body and every temptation, he does not confront them immediately, nor does he openly reveal himself to them, but he restrains himself, giving place to them; and he does not go out to meet them at their first assault, nor does he draw himself up to do battle with them. For he knows that a man's beginning in every war is more fervent, and that zealous warriors are not lightly vanquished, and he sees how his antagonist has great zeal. It is not, however, that the devil does this from fear of them, but it is the Divine power that covers them which frightens him (Syriac; *but of that Divine power that inflames them by means of their material nature, until of their own volition they cast it off little by little when they become self-confident*). So long as he sees them in this state, he dares not touch them; but he waits to see them cool from their zeal and cast off the weapons they had fashioned for themselves in their minds by the diverse Divine words [of Scripture] (Syriac; *fashioned for themselves and by which they armed their minds, that is, by the diverse Divine words*) and recollections which assist and help them. He watches for the time when they are lax, and when they turn aside a little from their former thoughts, and when through the seductive reflections that well up in their minds they begin of themselves to devise inventions for their own defeat. They, by themselves, dig a pit of perdition for their souls with the wandering thoughts arising in their minds from indolence, through which coldness reigns within them, that is, in their hearts. When the devil refrains from warring against them and, as it were, spares them, he does not do so voluntarily, nor does he fear them, nor is he put to shame by them. For he holds them in contempt. But I think that it is because a certain power encompasses those who strive toward God with ardent zeal, who go forth like children, who renounce the world indiscriminately, hoping and believing on God, and who have no conception of him against whom they must fight. For this reason God repels from them the violence of the devil's wickedness, that it might not come near them. For the enemy is bridled when he beholds the guardian [angel] who always shields them. If they do not cast off from themselves the causes of their being helped, that is to say, their prayers, labors, and humility, then their defender and helper will never depart from them.

See, and write these things in your heart; for the love of pleasure and ease is a cause of abandonment. But if a man perseveres and keeps himself firmly from this, God's assistance will never leave him, and the enemy will not be permitted to attack him. And if it happens that one time he is permitted to attack him, it is for instruction; but the holy power continues to accompany and support him, and he does not fear the devil's temptations, for his thought is confident, and because of that [holy] power he despises them. The Divine power teaches him just as a man teaches a small boy to swim. When the boy begins to sink, the man raises him up, because the boy swims above the hands of his teacher.

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And when he begins to grow fearful that he will drown, the teacher who holds him in his arms cries out to him encouragingly, 'Do not fear, I am holding you!' And just as a mother who, in teaching her infant son to walk, steps back from him and calls him, and as he comes toward her on his little feet he begins to tremble and is about to fall by reason of their softness and delicacy, and she runs and catches him in her embrace, so the grace of God also embraces and teaches men who purely and with simplicity have surrendered

themselves into the hands of their Creator, and who have renounced the world with their whole heart and follow after Him.

But you, O man who has set out in pursuit of God, always remember throughout your life of struggle the first beginning and first zeal you had when entering upon the path, and the ardent thoughts with which you left your home (the Syriac word has the further meaning; *manner of life*) and enrolled yourself in the fighting ranks. In this manner examine yourself each day, that there should be no cooling of your soul's ardor with respect to any of the weapons that you carry, nor in the zeal which blazed up within you at the commencement of your struggle, lest you lose any of those weapons with which you were arrayed at the start of your contest. Constantly raise your voice in the camp, encouraging and urging to valor the sons of the right (that is, your own thoughts) and show the others (that is, the enemy's forces) that you are keeping watch. If at the beginning you see that the tempter violently assaults you to frighten you, do not grow faint-hearted, for perhaps this is profitable for you. For He Who saves you does not permit anything to approach you, unless He should bring about thereby some provision for your profit.

Do not be slothful at the beginning lest, having been lethargic now, you should fall when you try to advance, and be no longer able to withstand the afflictions that come upon you, I mean from hunger, sickness, terrifying apparitions, and the like. Do not pervert the intention of Him Who has set your contest, because it procures help for you against your adversary, so that he will not find you as he hopes. But entreat God unceasingly, weep before His grace, lament, and toil until He sends you a helper (i.e. a guardian angel). For if but once you see him that saves you at your side, you will no longer be defeated by your enemy who opposes you. Thus far two methods of the devil's warfare have been described.

On the Third Method of the Enemy's Warfare Against Strong and Courageous Men.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

After all this, the devil again rises up against a man, but he has not the power to with-

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stand him in the contest; nay rather, he cannot withstand the angel who strengthens and helps the man. Because of his helper the man is exalted above the devil, and from him he receives strength and patience, such that his dense, material body can vanquish a bodiless and noetic being. When, therefore, the enemy sees all this strength the man has received from God, and that his external senses are not overwhelmed by his (i.e. the devil's) enticements and panderings, then the crafty one seeks a way to part the angel, the man's helper, from him. Nay more, the crafty one wishes to blind the intellect of the man who receives help, that he may be helpless, and to stir up proud thoughts within him, that he might think that all his strength originates from his own forces, that he acquired this wealth by himself, and that by his own power he keeps himself safe from the adversary and manslayer. Sometimes he thinks that he defeated the enemy by chance, sometimes because of the enemy's powerlessness (I shall remain silent concerning the enemy's other methods and the blasphemous thoughts which cause the soul terror by the very memory of them alone). Sometimes the enemy introduces his delusion under the guise of divine

revelations, and he shows diverse things to the man through dreams. When the man is awake, the wily one transforms himself into an angel of light (Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:14). He tries all of this in order little by little to persuade a man to concur with it, so that the man will surrender himself into his hands. But if the prudent man keeps his thoughts in safety, or rather, if he can hold fast to the memory of Him Who aids him, and fix the eye of his heart steadfastly upon Heaven, that he may not see those who whisper these things to him, then the enemy will be diligent once again to devise other methods of warfare.

On the Enemy's Fourth and Obdurate Warfare.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

Finally there remains for him only this warfare, since nature is kindred to it, and for this reason he has a special expectation that he will destroy the man thereby. What is this device? It is to attack a man through his natural functions (Syriac; *under every pretext to cause him to meet with [or to attack him in] those things because of which he often sins due to nature*). For often the athlete's intellect is blinded by the sight and nearness of the objects of sense, and he is easily defeated in his struggle when he is near to them, and particularly when they are before his very eyes. The villainous devil employs this method with knowledge and experience, that is, the experience he has with many ascetics, mighty men, and the great who have fallen by means of these things, and he does this very shrewdly. Although he cannot force a man to

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do anything in actual deed, because of the safety that stillness furnishes the man, and because his dwelling-place is far from the occasions and causes of sin, yet he endeavors to delude his intellect with illusions and to represent to him false phantasies in the mask of truth. And to the end that a man will begin to desire these things, the devil stimulates him and makes movements to arise within him; thus he brings him to ponder upon them with shameful thoughts, to consent to them, and to become guilty of them, so that the man's helper might depart from him. For he knows well that a man's victory, defeat, treasure, succor, and simply everything that pertains to an ascetic, are secured through his thought and are gained in an instant, such that his thought need only move from its place, and descend from the heights (Syriac; *from that nest of life*) to earth, and his volition show its consent but for an instant, as has happened to many of the saints through phantasies of a woman's beauty ((or for a woman—through phantasies of a man's attraction; Saint Isaac is presumably referring in this context to someone of the opposite gender)). And many times he has devised means actually to bring women to those who dwell a mile or two miles or a day's journey from the world. But since he is unable to do this to those who remain far withdrawn from the world, he shows woman's beauty to them in phantasies: sometimes adorned with elegant clothing and lascivious in appearance, and sometimes he shamelessly shows them a woman's nakedness. For by these things and such as these he has conquered some in the actual deed, some he has mocked in phantasies by reason of the laxity of their thoughts, so that he might throw them into the abyss of despair; and this becomes cause for them to return to the world and their souls to fall away from their heavenly hope.

But other men, stronger than these, who were enlightened by grace vanquished both him and his phantasies, and trampled upon the pleasures of the flesh, and were found to be approved in their love of God. Often, too, the enemy has caused them to

behold apparitions of gold, precious things, golden treasures; and at times he showed these things to them in reality, that by means of these different phantasies he might, perhaps, stop some one of them in his course and trip him up by one of his snares and nets.

A Prayer.

But Lord, O Lord, Thou Who knowest our infirmity, lead us not into these temptations, for mighty and proven men hardly emerge from this gate victorious!

The devil and tempter is allowed to make war upon the saints in all these ways of temptation, that thereby their love of God may be proven, and that it may become evident whether, when they are separated, secluded, deprived, and destitute of these objects of sense, they remain lovers of God, abiding in His love and truly loving Him; and whether, when they draw near to such things, they endeavor to despise and repudiate them because of their love for God, and being enticed by them, they remain undefeated and do not alter their love for God. They are tried in this manner, that they may be singled out

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not only by God, but also by the devil. For the enemy greatly desires to tempt and try every man, if this were possible to him, and to ask God for them all that he might tempt them, even as he asked for the righteous man Job (*Vide* Job 1:9 ff). And when for a brief time God gives His permission, the devil draws nigh to tempt them vehemently, in proportion to the strength of those whom he tempts; thus the iniquitous one assails them as he desires. By this means, however, those who are true and steadfast in the love of God are proven as to whether they despise all these things and reckon them as nothing in comparison with the love of God. Ever humbling themselves in this manner, they ascribe glory to Him Who works with them in all things and is the Source of their victory; and in their struggle they surrender themselves into His hands, saying to God, 'Thou art the Mighty One, O Lord, and Thine is the contest: wage war on our behalf and be therein victorious, O Lord.' At such a time they are proven as gold in the furnace.

But when alloyed and spurious men are tested and known in these temptations, they fall away from God as dross, since giving way to the enemy they leave the field of battle laden with guilt, either because of the laxity of their mind or because of their pride. They were not worthy to receive the power that the saints had working within them, for the power that helps us cannot be defeated. The Lord is almighty and more powerful than all, and at all times He is victorious in the bodies of mortal men when He descends to aid them in their warfare. But if they are defeated, it is evident that they are defeated without Him. These are men who have voluntarily stripped themselves of God by reason of their ungratefulness, since they have not been accounted worthy of that power which assists the victorious, and they perceive that they are even devoid of their own power which they were accustomed to have at the times of their violent battles. How do they perceive this? They see that their defeat is pleasurable and sweet in their eyes, and that it is difficult for them patiently to endure the hardship of their struggle with the enemy, the same hardship they were wont zealously to overcome completely by the impulse inherent in their nature's movement, which was formerly so fervent and keen. But now they do not find this in their souls.

Those who are slothful and lax when they begin are overcome not only by these struggles and their like, but they are even frightened and troubled by the rustle of a leaf,

and are vanquished by some brief necessity due to hunger and by some slight illness; thus they renounce and turn back. But those who are proven and true do not even take their fill of greens and vegetables; and even if they eat nothing but the roots of dried herbs, they cannot be persuaded to taste any food before the established meal-time. Moreover, they lie upon the ground because of their body's enervation, their eyes are dimmed

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by their extreme physical exhaustion, and their very soul is constrained and nigh to depart from their body, but even so they do not give themselves over to defeat, nor do they abandon their firm volition. For they long for and yearn to do violence to themselves for the love of God, and they freely choose to labor for virtue's sake rather than to possess this transient life and its every comfort. And whenever temptations come upon them, they especially rejoice and are the more perfected by them (Syriac; *because they know that temptations render them perfect*). Nor do the arduous labors which they endure make them doubt the love of Christ, but until they quit this life, they much prefer valiantly to accept abuse and they do not retreat. But to our God be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 40.

On Continuous Fasting, and Remaining Collected in One Place, and What Are the Consequences of This; and That by the Knowledge of Discernment I Have Learned the Exact Use of These Things.

Having been tempted over a great length of time in things from the right hand and from the left, and testing myself often in both, and having received countless blows from the adversary, and been deemed worthy of great and secret aid, I have carried on an examination of myself for many long years; and through experience and God's grace I have learned that the foundation of all good things, the return of the soul from the enemy's captivity, and the path which leads to the light, and itself brings life, are these two virtuous activities: to remain collected in one place, and to fast perpetually. I mean, to set for yourself the rule of wise abstinence in food, of prudent and immovable continuance in one place, and of unremitting study and rumination on God. From this is born the submission of the senses; from this is born the watchfulness of the intellect; by this the ferocity of the passions which rage in the body is tamed; from this comes meekness of thoughts; from this come the mind's luminous movements; from this is born the zeal for the practice of virtue; from this are born sublime and subtle intuitions; from this are born boundless tears which flow at all times, and the remembrance of death; from this is born pure chastity which is remote from every imagination that tempts the mind; from this come clairvoyance and the keen knowledge of things afar off; from this are born the most profound of mystic perceptions which the mind can apprehend, that is, the strength of Divine

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utterances (Syriac; *from this comes profound insight that fathoms and apprehends the hidden things of all the depths, the strength of the Divine utterances*), the innermost movements which arise in the soul, and the discrimination and discernment of spiritual

things: those which are of the holy powers and true visions, and those from empty phantasies; from this arises fear of the pathways and channels in the open sea of the mind, a fear which cuts off slothfulness and heedlessness; from this is kindled the flame of zeal which tramples upon every peril and overstrides all dismay, and the fervor which despises every desire, blots it out of the thinking, and engenders oblivion to the memory of every transitory thing and all else of this nature. But to put it succinctly: from these two are born the freedom of the true man, the soul's renewal (the Greek & Sinai Syrian MS have; *the soul's joy (hadutha)*. Syriac printed text has; *renewal (hudatha)* which in context seems more likely), and resurrection with Christ in the Kingdom.

Yet if a man is negligent in these two activities, he should know that not only will he bereave himself of all the foregoing blessings, but by disdaining these two he will also profoundly shake the foundation of all the virtues. And just as these are the origin and chief of the soul's divine activities, and the door, and the way of leading to Christ (if a man acquire them and persevere in them) so, in like manner, if he should depart and leap away from them, he will descend to their opposites, I mean, to wandering from place to place and to lawless gluttony. These are the beginnings of the things opposed to the aforesaid and they prepare a place in the soul for the aforesaid passions.

At the very beginning the first, that is, wandering, releases the submissive senses from the bonds of self-constraint (Syriac; *the bonds of a quiet life*). And what comes of this? From this are born: improper and unexpected encounters which border upon falls; the turmoil of mighty waves awakened by the vision of the eyes; a fierce flame which masters and possesses the body; sudden stumbling in conscious thinking; unrestrained thoughts which precipitate toward a fall; tepid love for the works of God; gradual effacement (or *abatement*) of the special characteristics of stillness; and a complete abandonment of a man's rule of life. As a result of that which assails the man through the involuntary and diverse spectacles which he beholds in his peregrinations from country to country and from place to place, long-forgotten wicked deeds revive, and he learns new ones which he had not formerly known. And the passions, which by God's grace had been already mortified in his soul, and whose memory had already perished from his mind, are stirred to motion anew and begin to compel his soul to work their wont. But so as not to recount all the rest, I say that these things come upon a man as a result of wandering and of not patiently enduring the hardships of stillness.

And what are the consequences of the second vice, that is, of pursuing the work of swine? What indeed is the work of swine, if not to set no bounds upon the belly and to

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fill it incessantly, and to have no appointed time to satisfy the body's need, as rational beings have. What, therefore, are the consequences of this? From this are born drowsiness and a great heaviness of the body joined with loosening of the shoulders. Thereupon follow: compulsion to leave off God's liturgy; a lassitude which hinders a man from making prostrations during his prayers, and indifference to the usual acts of worship; darkness and coldness of the mind; an intellect which is fat and rendered undiscerning by agitation and great obscuration of the thoughts; thick clouds and tenebrity spread over the entire soul; great accidie in every godly work as well as in reading, since he does not taste the sweetness of the Divine sayings; frequent neglect of necessary things; an unrestrained intellect which roams throughout (Syriac; *an unrestrained intellect that is blinded by its roaming throughout*) the whole world; many humors collecting in the limbs; impure, nocturnal imaginings of sordid phantasies, and

improper images pervaded with lust which penetrate the soul and pollutedly do as they please. The bed of the wretched man, his clothing, and his entire body are defiled by the great stream of shameful matter which issues forth from him as from a fountain. And this occurs to him not only at night but during the day also. His body continuously exudes matter and thereby defiles his intellect, such that on account of these things the monk disavows his chastity. Delectable titillations produce an incessant, insufferable burning throughout his body. Seductive thoughts come to him, depicting beauty before his eyes, stimulating him at every time and titillating his intellect by converse with them. Because his faculty of discretion has been overclouded, the monk unhesitatingly joins himself to these thoughts in his meditation and in his desire. And the prophet has said the same thing: 'This is the requital of thy sister Sodom, who, reveling, ate bread in abundance' (Cf. Ezekiel 16:49). One of the great philosophers said: 'If a man satiate his body with delicacies, he delivers his soul up to warfare. And if ever he comes to himself and endeavors to compel himself to abstinence, he cannot, because of the mightily burning movement of his body and the violence and coercion of the incitements and titillations which enslave his soul according to their pleasure.' Do you see the refinement of this man bereft of God? And again the same sage says, 'Fresh and tender nourishment swiftly imparts to the soul the lust of passion; then, death becomes to her something grievous, and she stands in terror of God's judgment' (Greek; *imparts to the soul the passions of youth, and death encompasses her, and thus the soul becomes subject to Divine judgment*).

The soul, however, that devotes herself to the recollection of profitable things, finds rest in her freedom; her cares are small, and she repents of nothing. She takes forethought for virtue, she bridles the passions, she keeps guard upon excellence, and thus she enjoys growth [[that is unhindered]], joy free of solicitude, a good life and a perilless haven.

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Bodily pleasures not only strengthen the passions and give them power against the soul, but also tear the soul away from her very roots. Together with this, they incite the belly to intemperance and lack of rule as regards the hours [for eating], that is, to untimely satisfaction of the body's need. The man who is harried by these things does not wish to suffer hunger even for the briefest time so as to control himself, because he is a slave of the passions.

These are the fruits of the shameful passion of gluttony, and those stated beforehand are the fruits of not (The negative is added from the Syriac printed text. Though it is not found in the Sinai Syriac MS and the Greek, the context demands it) leading a life of stillness. The enemy knows these times—in that he always follows us about—and that especially in these two instances our nature can be easily shaken and provoked to passion (This is the Syriac reading), and he knows that the intellect especially strays when the eyes wander and the belly is at ease. Therefore, he tries and endeavors precisely at these times to make us add to our nature's weakness and to sow in us diverse kinds of evil thoughts, so that (if possible) in the intensity of the combat the passions might gain ascendancy over nature and destroy a man in his fall. Since the enemy knows these times, it behooves us to be conscious of our weakness and the strength of our nature, and that it cannot withstand the onsets and excitations of those times, and the subtlety of the thoughts which, like fine dust, are blown into our eyes, so that we cannot see ourselves or bear up against what befalls us. But through the many

trials that we have undergone, often in great distress by reason of the enemy's temptations, we have finally learned to be prudent and not to allow ourselves heedlessly to obey the will of our ease, nor to be vanquished by hunger, nor straitness, not to be shaken from the place of our stillness (lest we find ourselves in a place where the things we have spoken of can easily come upon us) nor fabricate for ourselves pretexts and ways whereby we may leave the wilderness. Such things are manifest machinations of the devil. If you patiently endure in the desert, you will not be tempted, for there you will see no women ((or for women—'you will see no men'; that is, someone of the opposite gender. Cf. *The Life of Saint Mary of Egypt*)), nor anything harmful to your mode of life, nor will you hear unseemly cries.

'And what hast thou to do with the way of Egypt, to drink the water of Geon?' (Jeremiah 2:18; The Peshitta has; *the water of the Nile*). Understand what I say. Show the enemy your patience and experience in small matters so that he will not seek great things from you. Let these small matters be a pattern for you, that through your struggles in small things you may lay a trap for him (Greek; *may cast him down*. Here *cast down* has replaced the original *catch*) and give him no leisure to contrive great snares for you. For how could the man who cannot be persuaded by the enemy to take even five steps from his solitary dwelling be convinced to abandon

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the wilderness or to draw nigh to a village? And how can the hermit who refuses to peek out the window of his hermitage be persuaded to leave it? Or will the man who can be scarcely induced to take a scanty portion of food late in the evening be enticed by thoughts to eat before the appropriate time? Will the man who is ashamed to take his fill of contemptible food long for expensive dishes? And how can the enemy entice a man to gaze after foreign beauty when he will not even look upon his own body?

It is evident that a man is vanquished only when at the beginning he despises such small matters, thus giving the enemy ground to wage war against him in great ones. Will the man who takes no thought for this fleeting life and wishes not to remain alive, even for the briefest moment, be dismayed by suffering and afflictions which bring him closer to his longed-for death? This is warfare fought with discretion; for wise men do not allow themselves to make preparations for great ascetic struggles (Syriac; *do not allow their enemy to induce them to great ascetic struggles*), but rather they know that the patience which they manifest in small matters preserves them from having to undergo great labors.

Firstly, therefore, the devil strives to extinguish the unceasing prayer of the heart, and then he persuades a monk to disregard the fixed hours of prayer and the rule which he performs bodily. Thus, at first the thinking becomes lax and permits the monk to partake of some paltry, meager bits of food before the appointed time; and after this fall, whereby he ruins his abstinence, the monk slips into intemperance and dissipation. First, the monk is vanquished, or rather, it becomes a trifling thing in his eyes to gaze upon the nakedness of his body or upon some other beautiful aspect of his limbs when he disrobes himself or when he goes out to fulfill a bodily want or to pass water and he loses control over his senses, or he audaciously introduces his hand under his clothes and touches his body; one thing after another will then rise up within him. The man who in these small things does not preserve the safeguard of his mind, but rather dissipates it and displays laxity in one of these matters, opens up against himself great and dangerous inroads. For thoughts, I say by way of example, are like water, and so long as they are confined on all sides, they proceed in their right order. If they once find a small outlet, however, they

escape and destroy the dyke and cause great devastation. The enemy stands before us day and night, waiting, watching, and observing us to spy out a door for him to enter when we have opened wide our senses. As soon as we have been negligent in one of the aforementioned ways, this cunning and shameless cur lets fly his arrows at us. At times it is our nature itself which loves ease, boldness, laughter, wandering of the mind and slothfulness, and becomes a source of passions, a sea of turmoil. But at other times it is the adversary himself who instills these things into the soul. Let us therefore exchange our great labors

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[[and the causes of grievous peril]] for small ones. If indeed these small things are neglected, though they be nothing, then, as we have demonstrated, through them will be generated great struggles, arduous labors, tortuous battles, and serious wounds. Who for a small outlay would not choose to gain a peaceful sleep?, (This is the Syriac reading).

O wisdom, how wondrous art thou! And how thou dost foresee all things from afar! Blessed is the man who has found thee, for he is free from the indolence of youth which, by a little neglect, purchases great calamities (Greek; *If a man purchases for a small price the healing of great sufferings, he has done well*). Well did one of the philosophers say, that once he fell under the influence of lethargy, but becoming aware of this, he sat up with a start. Another, seeing him, laughed because of it. Yet the first retorted, saying: 'It was not this I feared, but negligence, for a little negligence can be the agent of great perils. By the fact that I sat up straightway when I transgressed my rule, I showed myself to be vigilant and that I am not found negligent even in those things which are unworthy of fear.' This is love of wisdom for a man: ever to be watchful even in the small and insignificant things he does; for in this manner he lays up for himself great consolation. He does not drowse, lest something contrary should befall him, but he cuts off occasions in good time. He disperses slight grief through very small labors, and by them he redeems himself from great grief and treads it under foot (The Greek printed text and some Greek manuscripts read here; *He endures some small grief through slight labors, and by this tribulation he disperses great grief*).

Fools prefer brief comfort that is near at hand to a distant kingdom, not knowing that it is better for a man to suffer torments in his struggle than to take his ease upon a royal bed of this world under the condemnation of slothfulness. Wise men greatly prefer death to the censure that they have accomplished some work without sobriety. Hence the sage says, 'Be vigilant and sober with respect to your life, for slumber is natural to the mind, and is the image of true death.' And the Godbearing Basil, the lover of wisdom, writes, 'Do not expect the man to be eminent in great things who is slothful in small ones.' Do not be disheartened in the works by which you wish to find life, nor shrink from dying for them.

(Here the Syriac begins a new homily entitled, *Brief Sections Distinguishing the Mind's Motions*).

Faintness of heart is a sign of despondency, and negligence is the mother of both. A cowardly man shows that he suffers from two diseases: love of his flesh and lack of faith; but love of one's flesh is a sign of unbelief. He, however, who despises the love of the flesh proves that he believes in God with his whole heart and awaits the age to come.

If there could exist a man who has drawn nigh unto God without perils, struggles,

and temptations, imitate him! A courageous heart and scorn of perils comes from one of

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two causes: either from hardness of heart or from great faith in God. Pride accompanies hardness of heart, but humility accompanies faith. A man cannot acquire hope in God unless he first does His will with exactness. For hope in God and manliness of heart are born of the testimony of the conscience, and by the truthful testimony of the mind we possess confidence in God. The testimony of the mind consists in the fact that a man's conscience does not accuse him of negligence in anything within his powers that it is his duty to do. 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we boldness toward God' (1 John 3:21). Thus boldness comes from the achievements of virtue and a good conscience. It is a bitter thing to be enslaved to the body. He who is aware of his hope in God, even to a small extent, will never more be compelled to serve this austere master, the earthly, perishable body.

A man remains in continual silence and perseveres in stillness for one of three reasons: either for the glory of men, or from ardent zeal in virtue, or because he has some divine converse within himself and his mind is drawn away to this. But if a man does not have one of the latter two, he will necessarily be afflicted by the malady first mentioned. Virtue is not the manifestation of many and various works performed by the agency of the body, but a heart that is most wise in its hope and which unites a right aim to godly works. Often the mind can accomplish that which is good without bodily works, but the body without wisdom of the heart can gain no profit for all it may do (Syriac; *for often when actions do not uphold praxis, the mind is able to do so, and even without them it can gain profit*. The Greek tries to interpret this rather obscure statement). Yet when he finds an opportunity to do good, the man of God will not be able to refrain from showing his love for God by the toil of his deeds. The first discipline always prospers, the second often, but sometimes not. Do not consider it a small thing that a man be always far removed from the causes of the passions. To our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 41.

On the Motions of the Body.

The motion of the lower members of the body which becomes fierce without thoughts, or rather, the impure pleasure which throbs hotly beneath the navel and drives the soul to frenzy against her will, undoubtedly wells forth into the body from the satiety of the belly (Greek; *without thoughts of impure pleasure which throbs hotly and draws the soul to calamity against her will is undoubtedly from the satiety of the belly. But in the absence of this cause, know that the passion wells forth in the body itself*). In this struggle, count withdrawal from all that incites you and from the sight of women ((or for women; the sight of men)) as a stout and invincible weapon, for even the adversary cannot work within us what nature does by its power. Do not suppose that nature ever forgets what God has naturally sown into it for the begetting of children and for testing those who carry on this fight. But withdrawal from the objects of desire mortifies all lust in our members, surrendering the memory (this word has been lost in the Greek) thereof to oblivion and destruction.

The thoughts of things afar off, which simply pass through the mind and produce

a cool and faint motion, differ from the thoughts which submerge the mind by the indelible sight of some material object and evoke the passions by its proximity, which nourish lust in a man as oil nourishes the flame of a lamp, which re-ignite a passion already flickering and nearly extinguished, and which trouble the sea of the body by rocking the ship of the mind. Without some supplement from without, this natural movement (which inhabits us simply for the sake of procreation) cannot shake the will from *limpid purity* or unsettle chastity, since God has not given nature the power to subdue a man's good volition to strive toward Him. Whenever a man is defeated either by anger or by lust, it is not a power

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of nature that compels him to leave his nature's confines and to withdraw from what is his duty, but it is something which we add to nature by the intermediary of the will. All things that God has made, He has made beautiful and in due proportion. And so long as measure in natural things is rightly preserved in us, the provocations of nature cannot constrain us to stray from the path [[of God's laws, being carried off, as it were, by a flood]]. Then the body is only stirred by orderly, gentle impulses, which merely inform us that there is passion within us, but which produce no titillation or fierce turmoil so strong as to interfere with chastity or to darken the mind by anger and to move us from peace to wrath. But if at any time we greedily desire the things of the senses (whereby anger usually takes on its contranatural fury), or food, or drink, or immoderation, or proximity to women ((i.e. someone of the opposite gender)) and gazing at them or at comely faces, or conversation about them (from which things the flame of lust is kindled and surges through the body), then we change the gentleness of our nature to fury: be it on account of the many humors [in the blood], or because of various sights of physical objects.

At times, too, the movement of our members is permitted (Syriac; *is from abandonment*) [by God] because of our conceit, yet this movement is not like the former; those we call the conflicts of liberty, and they belong to the common way of nature. But we may recognize the warfare that comes upon us by [God's] permission because of our self-esteem, when we have passed many years in prayer and labors and presume that we have accomplished something thereby; for then it is that God permits warfare to besiege us, that we may learn humility. The other conflicts that surpass our strength, and are not from this cause, come upon us because of our slothfulness. For when by gluttony we add to nature some palpable thing, nature can no longer be persuaded to keep the order with which it was endowed from its creation. The man who forgoes tribulations (Some Greek MSS add here; *of ascetic struggle*) and constant seclusion [in his cell] is involuntarily compelled to love sin; for without these two we are not able to separate ourselves from the inducements of our thought, which diminish as our pains multiply. Tribulations and perils kill the sweetness of the passions, but ease (Greek; *rest, comfort, relaxation*) nourishes and increases them.

Thus I have clearly come to know that God and His angels rejoice at hardships, but the devil and his helpers at the delight, pleasure, and ease of the flesh. For if the commandments of God are performed with afflictions and straitness and yet we despise the latter, then it is evident that for the love of the passions born of ease and of the pleasures of the flesh we seek ways to disdain Him Who has commanded these things. We nullify the cause of virtue, I mean straitness and tribulation, while to the extent of the ease which we have achieved we make room in ourselves for the passions. When the

body is found in

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straitness, the thoughts cannot wander about in vain concerns; and when a man joyfully endures toils and afflictions, he can soundly bridle his thoughts, since his very thoughts are quelled by labors. If a man remembers his former sins and chastens himself (The Syriac printed text adds; *with afflictions*), God will then take care to give him rest, because the Lord rejoices in that he, as a sinner, has laid a penance on himself for straying from the way of God; and this is a mark of the true path of repentance. The more a man constrains his soul, the more the honor he receives from God increases. Every joy whose cause is not in virtue immediately awakens lustful movements in him who has partaken of it; yet keep in mind that we have said this with respect to every passionate desire, not [[only]] concerning the desire inherent to nature. To our God be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 42.

On the Kinds of Different Temptations; and on How Sweet Are the Temptations That Come to Pass and Are Endured for the Truth's Sake; and on the Levels and Disciplines Through Which the Sagacious Man Makes His Way.

The virtues follow one another in succession, so that the path of virtue does not become grievous and burdensome, and so that by being achieved in order progressively they may be made light; thus the hardships endured for virtue's sake should be cherished by a man as is the good itself. No one can achieve true non-possessiveness unless he resolves within himself to endure tribulations (Greek; *temptations*) with gladness. And no man can endure tribulations (Greek; *temptations*) unless he believes that there is something more excellent than bodily comfort, the which he will receive in recompense for the afflictions that he has prepared himself to undergo. The love of afflictions must first have stirred in the man who has prepared to deprive himself of possessions, for only thereafter does the thought come to him to possess none of the things of this world. And every man who draws nigh to affliction is first made steadfast by faith, and then he approaches afflictions. A man who deprives himself of material things, but has not cast off the activity of the senses (I mean sight and hearing) has procured for himself a double portion of affliction and will doubly suffer hardship and tribulation. Nay rather, what profit is there for a man to deprive himself of sensory things, and yet through the senses still to delight in them? For by the passions which they cause he experiences exactly the same thing which formerly he suffered in actual deed, since the recollection of his accustomed intercourse with sensory things has

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not been effaced from his thinking. If mental images of things, in absence of the things themselves, cause a man to feel distressed, what are we to say if the things themselves are near and round about us? How excellent in this respect is the discipline of solitude, how greatly does it aid! For with a strong hand it silences the thoughts, provides strength for endurance, and teaches a man great patience in the afflictions which must necessarily come upon him,

Do not seek advice from a man who does not lead a life similar to your own, even if he be very wise. Confide your thoughts to a man who, though he lack learning, has experience in [spiritual] things, rather than to a learned philosopher who speaks on the basis of speculations, having no actual experience. And what is experience? Experience is not that which is gained when a man approaches and gazes upon things (for since he does not pass time with them, he secures no true knowledge of them) but when he clearly perceives by trial their profit and detriment. For often a thing will seem harmful, yet within, it is found to be wholly full of profit; and in like manner understand the converse of this also: I mean, a thing often appears to be profitable, whereas within, it is filled with much harm. So it is that many men are harmed by what seems very profitable, and the testimony of their knowledge is not true. Therefore follow the counsel of a man who knows how with patience to make trial of things that demand discernment. Not every man is able to give trustworthy advice, but only he who has first governed himself well, who possesses knowledge gained from experience in all things, who does not love himself, and who does not shy away from calumnies (Greek; *first governed his freedom well and is not afraid of accusations and calumnies*).

Whenever in your path you find unchanging peace, beware: you are very far from the divine paths trodden by the weary feet of the saints. For as long as you are journeying in the way to the city of the Kingdom and are drawing nigh the city of God, this will be a sign for you: the strength of the temptations that you encounter. And the nearer you draw nigh and progress, the more temptations will multiply against you. Whenever, therefore, you perceive in your soul diverse and stronger temptations in your path, know that at that time your soul has in fact secretly entered a new and higher level, and that grace has been added to her in the state wherein she was found; for God leads the soul into the afflictions of trials in exact proportion to the magnitude of the grace He bestows. I speak not, however, of worldly trials that come upon some to bridle their wickedness and their manifestly evil deeds, nor yet of bodily disturbances, but of trials that are suitable to monks dwelling in stillness; these we shall specify later. But if a man's soul has an infirmity and has not strength enough for great temptations, and she therefore asks that she should not enter into them, and God hearkens to her, then know for a certainty that inasmuch as

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the soul is insufficient for great trials, in the same measure is she insufficient for great gifts; and in so far as great temptations are prevented from entering upon the soul, to the same degree great gifts are withheld from her. For God does not grant a great gift without a great trial. In His wisdom, which is beyond the understanding of His creatures, God has ordained that gifts be bestowed in proportion to temptations. You may comprehend, therefore, from the difficult afflictions which befall you through God's providence, the degree of the gift your soul has received from His majesty. And in proportion to the affliction, consolation is given.

Question: Does, then, the trial come first and afterward the gift, or the gift first and the trial follow behind it?

Answer: A trial does not come unless the soul has first secretly received both a portion greater than the measure which she had formerly received and the Spirit of grace. The Lord's temptation and the trials of the apostles testify to the truth of this, for they

were not permitted to enter into temptation until they had received the Comforter. It is fitting that those who partake of good should endure also their trials, because their affliction is mingled together with the good, for so it was pleasing to the wise God to do. If it be so, therefore, that a gift is before trial, nevertheless it is most certain that for the testing of a man's freedom, his awareness (See page 11, last note, to whit; this word also means: *consciousness, sensation, awareness*, or in this sense, *experience*. This the *earnest* of which Saint Isaac speaks) of temptations precedes his awareness of a gift; for grace never enters a man before he has tasted temptations. Hence, in reality (Greek; *in the intellect*. The Syriac words *reality* and *intellect* are very similar in appearance) grace comes first, but in the awareness of the senses, it delays [to manifest itself]. At the time of these trials we should have within us two contradictory things which are wholly unlike each other. These are joy and fear. Joy, because we are found in the path trodden by the saints, nay rather, by Him Who gives life to all things; and this becomes evident to us when we carefully discern our temptations. But we should have fear because perhaps we are being tried through these things by reason of our pride. Humble-hearted men are, however, made wise by grace to be able to discern all such things, and to know what kind of trial is the fruit of pride, and what kind of trial is a blow inflicted by Divine love. For the trials resulting from a man's diligent practice, struggle, and progress in good differ from trials that are permitted to come upon a man for his chastisement because of the pride of his heart.

The Trials of the Friends of God, That Is to Say, the Humble.

The trials that are inflicted by the paternal (the Greek printed text reads; *spiritual*) rod for the soul's progress and growth,

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and wherein she may be trained, are the following: sloth; oppressiveness of the body; enfeeblement of the limbs; despondency; confusion of mind; bodily pains (This is the reading of the MSS and the Syriac. The Greek printed text has; *suspicion of bodily illness*); temporary loss of hope; darkening of thoughts; absence of help from men; scarcity of bodily necessities; and the like. By these temptations a man's soul feels herself lonely and defenseless, his heart is deadened and filled with humility, and he is trained thereby to come to yearn for his Creator. Yet divine providence proportions these trials to the strength and needs of those who suffer them. In them are mingled both consolation and griefs, light and darkness, wars and aid. In short, they straiten and enlarge. This is the sign of the increase of God's help (Many Greek MSS and Greek printed text read; *the sign of a man's progress (increase) with God's help*).

The Trials of the Enemies of God, That Is to Say, the Proud.

But the trials that God allows to fall upon men who are shameless, whose thinking is exalted in the face of God's goodness, and who abuse His goodness in their pride, are the following: manifest temptations of the demons which also exceed the limit of the strength of men's souls; the withdrawal of the forces of wisdom which men possess; the piercing sensation of the thought of fornication which is allowed to assault them to humble their arrogance; quick temper; the desire to have one's own way; disputatiousness; vituperation; a scornful heart; an intellect completely gone astray;

blasphemy against the name of God; absurd notions that are entirely ridiculous, or rather, lamentable; to be despised by all men and to lose their respect; to be made by the demons both openly and secretly by every kind of means a disgrace and a reproach among men; the desire to mingle and have intercourse with the world; always to speak and behave foolishly; endlessly to seek out some new thing for oneself through false prophecy; to promise many things that are beyond one's strength. These are the trials of the soul.

To the trials of the body which befall them belong: painful adversities, always prolonged, intricate, and difficult to resolve; constant encounters with wicked and godless men; to fall into the hands of men who afflict us; the heart's being suddenly seized (and always without reason) by terror; many times to stumble severely on rocks, and to have grave falls from high places, and similar mishaps which do the body great injury; and finally, the heart's being entirely destitute of reliance upon God's care and of the confidence of its faith (Greek; *the absence of things that help a man's heart by the power of God and by the hope of his faith*). In brief, whatsoever is impossible and beyond the strength of such men

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comes upon them and those who dwell with them. These things which we have set forth and enumerated belong to the trials of pride.

Temptations of this sort commence in a man when he begins to appear wise in his own eyes; and to the extent that he accepts proud thoughts, he goes through all these evils. Therefore, you may comprehend the subtle pathways of your mind by the kinds of trials that beset you. But if you see that you have some of these trials mingled with the trials aforementioned (i.e. the trials of the humble), then know that insomuch as you have them, pride has broken in upon you.

On Patience.

Hear yet another consideration. Every adversity and affliction, if not accompanied by patience, produces double torment; for a man's patience casts off his distress, while faintness of heart is the mother of anguish. Patience is the mother of consolation and is a certain strength which is usually born of largeness of heart. It is hard for a man to find this strength in his tribulations without a gift from God, received through his ardent pursuit of prayer and the outpouring of his tears.

On Faint-heartedness.

When it is God's pleasure to subject a man to even greater afflictions, He permits him to fall into the hands of faint-heartedness. This begets in him a mighty force of despondency, wherein he feels his soul to be suffocated. This is a foretaste of Gehenna. From this there is unleashed upon him: the spirit of aberration (from which ten thousand trials gush forth); confusion; wrath; blasphemy; protesting and bemoaning one's lot; perverted thoughts; wandering from place to place; and the like. And if you should ask what the cause of these things is, I answer that it is you yourself (Greek; *both you and negligence*. Another reading is; *your negligence*), for the reason that you have not taken pains to find the remedy for them. The remedy for them all is one, and therein, in its very hand, a man can find immediate consolation for his soul. And what is it? Humility of heart. Without this no man can destroy the barrier of these evils, nay rather, he will see

them triumph over him.

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Do not be angry with me that I tell you the truth. You have never sought out humility with your whole soul. But if you wish, enter into its realm, and you will see how it disperses your wickedness. For in proportion to your humility you are given patience in your woes; and in proportion to your patience the burden of your afflictions is made lighter and you will find consolation; in proportion to your consolation, your love of God increases; and in proportion to your love, your joy in the Holy Spirit is magnified. Once men have truly become His sons, our tenderly compassionate Father does not take away their temptations from them when it is His pleasure to 'make for them a way to escape' (1 Corinthians 10:13), but instead He gives His sons patience in their trials. All these good things are given into the hand of their patience for the perfecting of their souls. May Christ God deem us worthy by His grace with a thankful heart to be patient in evils for His love's sake. Amen.

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Homily 43.

An Explanation of the Modes of Discipline: What the Force of Each One of Them Is, and What the Difference of Each One of Them Is.

Discipline (Greek; *virtue*) performed by the body in stillness purifies the body of the [unclean] matter within it. But the discipline of the mind (or *noetic discipline*. The Greek reads here; *virtue of the mind*) humbles the soul, filters out her crass notions of things that perish, and draws her from the state where the thoughts are passionately engrossed to the state where they are moved by her divine vision (Greek; *so that she might not deliberate upon them in a passionate manner, but rather be moved by her divine vision*). This divine vision brings her close to the nakedness of the intellect which is called immaterial *theoria*. And this is the spiritual discipline. For it lifts up the understanding from earthly things, brings it close to the spirit's pristine *theoria*, and presents it to God through the divine vision of that unutterable pristine glory (and this is a movement of the intuitions of His nature's majesty), and separates it from this world and the awareness thereof. By this we are thoroughly convinced of our hope which is laid up for us (Cf. Colossians 1:5), and we stand in full assurance of its state. This is the 'persuasion' of which the Apostle spoke (Galatians 5:8), that is, the divine assurance by which the intellect is noetically gladdened in that hope which has been promised us. But hear what things these are, and in what each of them subsists.

The bodily discipline that is pleasing to God is called bodily labors which are done for the purging of our flesh with the practicing of virtue through visible deeds, by which the impurity of the flesh is filtered out. Noetic discipline is: a work of the heart carried

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on without pause in pondering upon judgment, that is, upon God's righteousness and the judgments He has decreed (Syriac; *upon the great Judgment to come*); unceasing prayer of the heart; mindfulness of the providence and care of God active in this world particularly and universally at once; and a watching for secret passions, lest you

encounter any of them in the secret and spiritual realm. This work of the heart is called the noetic discipline. By the work of this discipline, which is also called the righteous activity of the soul, the heart is refined and is separated from communion with life that is both ephemeral and contrary to nature. Because of this fineness and separation, she begins to be moved at all times by an understanding of (Greek; *at times to understand by the theoria of*) sensory things which were created for the body's use and growth and through whose ministry, vigor is given to the four elements in the body.

But spiritual discipline is an activity apart from (or *without*) the senses. This is the discipline written about by the Fathers, namely that whenever the intellects of the saints receive hypostatic *theoria*, then even the body's grossness is taken away, and from thenceforward their vision becomes spiritual. Now *hypostatic theoria* refers to the created state of [man's] primordial nature (This seems to mean that *hypostatic theoria* is the vision that human nature possessed in its primordial state (i.e. before the fall). See also Homily 3 and the parenthetical note on *limpid purity*). And from this hypostatic vision a man is easily moved and led up to what is called unitary knowledge (Syriac; *solitary* or *unitary knowledge*, which is a translation of a Greek term meaning *unitary knowledge*. When *solitary* was retranslated into Greek, it was construed as referring to the solitary life, and so the Greek reads *the knowledge of the solitary discipline*. This error could also have originated with the copyists. The use of the word for *solitary* seems to indicate that the original translation was correct, then altered by scribes) which is, in plain terms, awestruck wonder at God. This is the state of the majestic way of life to come (or *discipline*. This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has; *This is the majestic state of the good things to come*) which is granted in the freedom of immortal life in existence after the resurrection. There human nature never ceases from its awestruck wonder at God, and entertains no thought at all concerning created beings. For if anything else were like unto God, the intellect would also move itself toward it, being at times in God, and at times in it. But since all the beauty of things to exist in the newness to come is inferior to His beauty, how can the intellect depart from the beauty of God by its [faculty of] divine vision? What, then? Does such a man sorrow at death? Nay, at the heaviness of the flesh? Nay, at remembrance of kindred? Nay, at the constraint of nature? Nay, at misfortunes? Nay, at adversities? At the unconscious wandering of his thoughts? At the imperfection of nature? At wandering motions of the elements? At a chance visit of another man? At despondency? At the body's wearisome toil? In no wise. But even though all these things occur in the world, yet at the moment when the veil of the passions is lifted from the eyes of his mind and a man espies that glory, his intellect is

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straightway exalted in awestruck astonishment. But if God had not set a limit on such wonders in this life with regard to how long a man may linger in them, and moreover, if they were permitted him throughout his whole life, he would never come away from his divine vision of them (Syriac; *from there*). How much more so, then, should this be the case there, where all these things we have just mentioned do not exist (for that virtue is without limit) and we shall be in reality and hypostatically within the King's courts, if we are deemed worthy by our discipline!

How, then, is our mind able to come away again, and remove itself from that wonderful and divine vision (Syriac; *from the vision of wonders of God*), and fall into other matters? Woe unto us! For we neither know our own souls, nor to what mode of life we have been called; and this life of infirmity, this estate of beasts, the world's

tribulations, and this world itself and its ills and consolations, these we count as something!

A Prayer. Yet notwithstanding, O Christ, Who alone art mighty, 'Blessed is he whose help is from Thee; he hath made ascents in his heart!' (Psalms 83:6). Lord, turn Thou our faces away from the world by the desire of Thee, that we may see it for what it is, and no longer believe in a shadow as in truth. Having fashioned us anew, O Lord, renew and give our mind zeal before death, so that in the hour of our departure we may know the purpose of our entrance and departure from this world. And so, having completed the work by reason of which Thy will called us to come first into this life, may we then hope, with our mind full of confidence, to receive those great things which, according to the Scriptures' promise, Thy love hath prepared in the second, new creation (*Vide* 1 Corinthians 2:9), things the remembrance of which is guarded in the faith of Thy mysteries.

On the Purification of the Body, the Soul, and the Intellect.

Purification of the body is holiness free of the defilement of the flesh. Purification of the soul is freedom from secret passions concentrated in a man's thinking. But purification of the intellect comes to pass by the revelation of mysteries. For it is cleansed of all things that fall under the reach of sensation because of their grossness. Little children, too, are virginal of body and passionless of soul, yet no one calls them purified in intellect. For purity of the intellect is perfection through the exercise of heavenly divine visions, when the intellect is moved without the senses by the spiritual powers of those worlds

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on high which possess wonders without number. These beings are distinct in their modes of existence but united (Another MS reading is; *and subtle*) in their invisible ministry, which consists in the motion of the divine revelations that are perpetual in their alterations at all times (This sentence is rendered according to the Syriac, since the Greek is quite obscure, though perhaps close to the Syriac in meaning. The Greek interprets the word *motion*, as *intellection*). May our God Himself make us worthy always to behold Him with the nakedness of our intellect, and hereafter, without mediation, unto the ages of ages. His be the glory. Amen.

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Homily 44.

An Epistle of Our Father Among the Saints, Isaac the Syrian.

Written to a Certain Brother Possessed of the Love of Stillness, on How the Devil Contrives to Make Those Who Constantly Endeavor to Practice Stillness to Desist From Their Constant Stillness by Means of the Love of a Relative or Honored Men, and on How It Behooves the Hesychast to Disdain All Things for the Sake of the Knowledge of God Which Is to Be Found in Stillness, Even As It Has Been Shown in the Case of Our Fathers of Old.

Because I know that you love stillness, O good brother, and that the devil, knowing your mind's intention, entangles you in many affairs under the pretext of accomplishing good, until he should completely divert you and hinder you from that virtue (i.e. stillness) which embraces many good disciplines, I was anxious to aid your good desire with a profitable word, as one limb helps its fellow limb. For this reason, then, I have taken pains to set down a few things I have gathered from men wise in virtue, from the Scriptures, from the Fathers, and from experience. If a man does not despise honors and dishonors, and if, for the sake of stillness, he does not patiently endure reproach, mocking, injury, and even blows and become a laughing-stock, considered by all who see him to be a fool and a half-wit, he cannot persevere in the good aim (Syriac; *good things*) of stillness. For if a man only once opens the door to the causes, the devil will not cease to bring him men and continual, innumerable encounters under every pretext. Therefore, my brother, if you love the life of genuine stillness which knows no diversion, break, or interruption in its course (by this the men of

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old became victorious) you will accomplish your praiseworthy desire by imitating your Fathers and by retaining in your mind the history of their lives. For those of them who loved perfect stillness were not concerned with maintaining the love of their neighbors, nor did they endeavor to extend themselves so as to give the latter comfort, nor were they ashamed to avoid association with persons reputed to be in honor.

These men made their way in this manner, and those who were wise and knowledgeable did not judge them to be despisers of their brethren, or scornors, or negligent, or ones who lacked discretion. This was also affirmed by one of them as a defense of whoever esteems stillness and withdrawal above association with men. 'The man', he says, 'who through experience learns the sweetness of stillness in his cell, does not avoid meeting his neighbor because he despises him, but on account of the fruit he harvests from stillness.' How was it that Abba Arsenios fled and was not pleased to meet any man? And Abba Theodore, though he met men, his meeting was like a sharp sword, and he greeted no one when he was found outside his cell (See Budge, *The Sayings of the Holy Fathers*, 1:29). And Abba Arsenios did not even greet those who came to him to salute him. Once one of the fathers went to see Abba Arsenios, and the elder, thinking he was the brother who served him, opened the door to him. Yet when the elder saw who it was, he threw himself upon his face; and although the other father greatly entreated him to stand up and merely to bless him and thus he would depart, the saint refused, saying, 'I shall not get up until you have departed' (Ibid. 1:13). The blessed one did this, lest once having stretched out his hand to them, men should return again to him.

But consider also what follows in the narration, lest perhaps you should say that Abba Arsenios despised the man (and others as well) on account of his lowly estate, whereas he showed partiality to another because of the honor which the latter enjoyed. For in very truth he fled equally from all, both small and great. He had one thing only before his eyes: to despise association with both great and small alike for the sake of stillness and to endure the reproach of all men against him in honor of stillness and silence. For we know well how the blessed Theophilos, the Archbishop [of Alexandria], visited him in the company of the judge of that place, because of their desire to see him and to enjoy that honor. But when he sat before them, he did not comfort them even with a single word on account of their honorable estate, though they longed to hear many words from him. And when the Archbishop entreated him concerning this, the monk was

silent for a moment, and then said, 'If I tell you something, will you observe it?' And they consented, saying, 'Yes.' Whereupon the elder said to them, 'Wherever you hear that Arsenios is found, do not draw nigh to that place' (See the *Alphabetical Patericon*. Arsenios: 7). Do you see how marvelous the elder

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was? Do you see his shunning of association with men?, (Syriac; *honor of men*). This is the man who harvests the fruit of stillness! For the blessed one did not take into account that this was a Katholikos (Katholikos is a title equivalent to that of Patriarch) and a head of the Church, but he deliberated within himself, 'I have died once and for all to the world; what profit is a dead man to the living?' Even Abba Makarios reproached him with a reproach filled with love, saying, 'Why do you flee us?' And the elder made his defense with a wonderful and praiseworthy defense, saying, 'God knows that I love you, but I cannot be with both God and men' (See the *Alphabetical Patericon*. Arsenios: 13). Another time the Archbishop sent word to him that he might see him, and the elder sent to him his reply, saying, 'If you come, I shall open to you; but if I open to you, I shall open to all men; and if I open to all, I shall not be able to remain in this place' (Ibid. 8). He did not learn this wonderful knowledge from anywhere else save from a divine voice which said to him, 'Arsenios, flee men and be saved' (Ibid. 1).

Let none of the idle, therefore, and lovers of chatter become so audacious as to oppose the aforesaid with subversive words and slander it, saying that it is a human invention, employed as an excuse for stillness; for this is a teaching from Heaven. But lest we should think that he was told to flee only so as to leave the world, but not to flee his brethren as well, he once again prayed to God after he had abandoned the world and come to dwell in the Lavra, to learn how he should live rightly, and he said, 'Lord, guide me as to how I may be saved.' And he fancied that he would hear something different. But again he heard the Master's voice a second time, saying: 'Arsenios, flee, be silent, be still. Though the sight and intercourse of the brethren be very profitable, yet association with them will not profit you so much as to flee them' (Ibid. 1, 2).

When the blessed Arsenios received in a divine revelation the command to flee he was in the world, and when he was with the brethren, again the same was told to him; he then received assurance and knew that it was not sufficient to flee only the men of the world, but he must flee all alike in order to achieve the good life. For could any man oppose or speak against the voice of God? And it was also said to the divine Anthony in a revelation, 'If you wish to practice stillness, withdraw not only to the Thebaid, but even to the inner desert' (See the *Life of Saint Anthony* by Saint Athanasios the Great). If, therefore, God commands us to flee from all men and thus to love stillness, since those who love Him persevere in stillness, who then should make excuses in order to remain in the intercourse and vicinity of men? If flight and watchfulness are profitable for Anthony and Arsenios, how much more are they for the infirm? And if God esteemed the stillness of these men—whose words, presence, and help the whole

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world was in need of—higher than succor given to all the brethren, nay rather, to all mankind, how much more will this be the case with the man who is unable perfectly to guard himself?

We know of another saint whose brother after the flesh, a recluse in another cell, fell ill. During the whole period of his brother's sickness he restrained his compassion and

did not go forth to visit him. Now at the time of his departing from this life, his brother sent word to him, saying, 'Though you have not yet come to me, come even now, though it be during the night, and I shall see you before my departure from the world and embrace you and I shall be at peace.' But that blessed man was not persuaded, not even at that hour when nature is wont to be compassionate to other men and to overstep the limit set by the will. He said, 'If I go out, my heart will not be pure before God, because I have neglected to visit my spiritual brothers, whereas I would have honored nature above Christ.' And his brother died and did not see him (See Budge, *The Sayings of the Holy Fathers*. 1:395).

Let no one, therefore, by reason of his indolent thoughts make the excuse that these things are impossible and dismiss them and nullify his stillness, having scorned God's providence on his behalf (The Syriac printed text has the variant reading; *let no one, therefore, employ for the nullification of stillness the weakness (or indolence) of the thoughts as an excuse that [these things] are impossible and unachievable, or a providential act from on high*). If the saints overcame nature, whose bonds are so strong, and Christ loves to see stillness honored by holy men, even though they neglect His children, then what other necessity could befall you, which you could not despise when it encompasses you? The commandment that says, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind' (Matthew 22:37), more than the world, nature, and all that pertains thereto, is fulfilled when you patiently endure in your stillness. And the commandment that speaks of the love of neighbor is included within the former. Do you wish to acquire in your soul the love of your neighbor according to the commandment of the Gospel? Separate yourself from him, and then the heat and flame of the love of him will burn in you and you will rejoice over the sight of his countenance as though you beheld an angel of light. And do you wish that those who love you should thirst for you? See their faces on fixed days only. Truly, experience is the teacher of all. Farewell.

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Homily 45.

An Epistle of Our Father Among the Saints Isaac the Syrian to His Natural and Spiritual Brother, Who, Dwelling in the World and Thirsting to See Him, Exhorted and Entreated the Saint by Letters to Come to Visit Him.

We are not so strong as you think, O blessed one, and perchance you are ignorant of my weakness, because you reckon my destruction as a slight thing. For this reason you continually beseech me (being fired up by nature, as nature is wont to do) for a thing about which we should have no concern and to which you should pay no heed. This alone do not ask of me: what gives comfort to the flesh and the mind thereof (Cf. Romans 8:6); but rather, my brother, be solicitous for the salvation of my soul. In a short time we shall pass out of this world. How many people shall I be obliged to meet if I come thither? How many practices of men and diverse places shall I see, until I return to my own place? How many causes of thoughts will my soul assimilate by encountering these things? And how much confusion will she undergo on account of the passions which will be awakened in her, the same from which she had found a little repose? And you are not ignorant of this. For the sight of the worldly, not only of women, but of men also, is extremely harmful for a monk, and you know this. Observe what a great change comes to

pass in the mind of a man who has passed a long time practicing stillness by himself, when suddenly he chances upon these things and sees and hears what he is unaccustomed to see and hear. If even a meeting with monks whose state does not correspond with his own injures the monk who is engaged in the

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struggle and still wages war with his adversary, how shall we not fall into a great pit and be transfixed by the darts of our foe? Therefore, so that we may be delivered from the arrows of the enemy, understand into what a pit we should fall, especially those of us who have gained knowledge through much experience. For this reason do not entreat me to do this thing without necessity. Be not deceived by those who say that we are not harmed by hearing and seeing something, that with respect to our thoughts we are the same in the desert and in the world, in our cell and without, that by reason of our repose from turmoil (Greek; *and that we are not shaken from our modesty*) we are not subject to a change for the worse, and that we do not sense any disturbance arising from the passions because of our encounter with persons and things. Those who say these things do not even know when they are struck by a blow. But we have not yet attained to such a degree of health of soul. We have stinking wounds, and if we leave them even for one day uncared for and unbandaged, and plasters are not applied to them, and they are not bound tightly, they will breed worms.

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Homily 46.

Containing Profitable Subjects Replete With the Wisdom of the Spirit.

Faith is the door to mysteries. What the bodily eyes are to sensory objects, the same is faith to the eyes of the intellect that gaze at hidden treasures. Even as we have two bodily eyes, we possess two eyes of the soul, as the Fathers say; yet both have not the same operation with respect to divine vision. With one we see the hidden glory of God which is concealed in the natures of things; that is to say, we behold His might, His wisdom, and His eternal providence for us which we understand by the magnitude of His governance on our behalf. With this same eye we also behold the heavenly orders of our fellow servants. With the other we behold the glory of His holy nature. When God is pleased to admit us to spiritual mysteries, He opens wide the sea of faith in our minds.

Repentance is given to man as grace after grace, for repentance is a second regeneration by God. That of which we have received an earnest by baptism, we receive as a gift by means of repentance. Repentance is the door of mercy, opened to those who seek it. By way of this door we enter into the mercy of God, and apart from this entrance we shall not find mercy. 'For all have sinned,' according to divine Scripture, 'being justified freely by His grace' (Romans 3:23,24). Repentance is the second grace and is begotten in the heart by faith and fear. Fear is the paternal rod which guides our way until we reach the spiritual paradise of good things. When we have attained thereto, it leaves us and turns back.

Paradise is the love of God, wherein is the enjoyment of all blessedness, and there the blessed Paul partook of supernatural nourishment. When he tasted there of the tree of life, he cried out, saying, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the

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heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him' (1 Corinthians 2:9). Adam was barred from this tree through the devil's counsel. The tree of life is the love of God from which Adam fell away, and thereafter he saw joy no longer, and he toiled and labored in the land of tares. Even though they make their way in righteousness, those who are bereft of the love of God eat in their work the bread of sweat, which the first created man was commanded to eat after his fall (*Vide* Genesis 3:19). Until we find love, our labor is in the land of tares, and in the midst of tares we both sow and reap, even if our seed is the seed of righteousness. We are continually pierced by the tares, and however much we render ourselves righteous, we live by the sweat of our brow. But when we find love, we partake of heavenly bread, and are made strong without labor and toil. The heavenly bread is Christ, Who came down from Heaven (Cf. John 6:50) and gave life to the world. This is the nourishment of the angels.

The man who has found love eats and drinks Christ every day and hour and hereby is made immortal. 'He that eateth of this bread', He says, 'which I will give him, shall not see death unto eternity' (Cf. John 6:58). Blessed is he who consumes the bread of love, which is Jesus! He who eats of love eats Christ, the God over all, as John bears witness, saying, 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). Wherefore, the man who lives in love reaps the fruit of life from God, and while yet in this world, he even now breathes the air of the resurrection; in this air the righteous will delight in the resurrection. Love is the Kingdom, whereof the Lord mystically promised His disciples to eat in His Kingdom. For when we hear Him say, 'Ye shall eat and drink at the table of My Kingdom' (Cf. Luke 22:30), what do we suppose we shall eat, if not love? Love is sufficient to nourish a man instead of food and drink. This is the wine 'which maketh glad the heart of man' (Psalms 103:15). Blessed is he who partakes of this wine! Licentious men have drunk this wine and felt shame (The Syriac word also means *became chaste*); sinners have drunk it and have forgotten the pathways of stumbling; drunkards have drunk this wine and become fasters; the rich have drunk it and desired poverty; the poor have drunk it and been enriched with hope; the sick have drunk it and become strong; the unlearned have taken it and been made wise.

As it is not possible to cross over the great ocean without a ship, so no one can attain to love without fear. This foetid sea, which lies between us and the noetic paradise, we may cross by the boat of repentance, whose oarsmen are those of fear. But if fear's oarsmen do not pilot the barque of repentance whereby we cross over the sea of this world to God, we shall be drowned in the foetid abyss. Repentance is the ship and fear is the pilot; love is the divine haven. Thus fear sets us in the ship of repentance, transports us over the

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foul sea of this life (that is, of the world), and guides us to the divine port, which is love. Hither proceed all that labor and are afflicted and heavy laden (Cf. Matthew 11:28) in repentance. When we attain to love, we attain to God. Our way is ended and we have passed unto the isle that lies beyond the world, where is the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to Whom be glory and dominion, and may He make us worthy of His glory and His love through the fear of Him. Amen.

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Homily 47.

On How Great Are the Measures of Knowledge and the Measures Pertaining to Faith.

There is a knowledge that precedes faith, and there is a knowledge born of faith. Knowledge that precedes faith is natural knowledge; and that which is born of faith is spiritual knowledge. What is natural knowledge? Knowledge is natural that discerns good from evil, and this is also called natural discernment, by which we know to discern good from evil naturally, without being taught. God has implanted this in rational nature, and with teaching it receives growth and assistance; there is no one who does not have it. This power of natural knowledge is a rational soul's discernment of good and evil, which is constantly active in her. Those who have been deprived of it are inferior to rational nature, but those who possess it stand aright in their soul's nature, and do not have any deficiency in those things that God has granted their nature to honor its rationality (The Greek here reads; *rational creatures*. The Syriac shows this to be a copyist's error). The prophet reproaches those who have destroyed this insight which discerns good from evil, saying, 'Man, being in honor, did not understand' (Psalms 48:12). The honor belonging to rational nature is the discernment that tells good from evil, and those who have destroyed it are justly compared to 'mindless cattle' (Ibid), which have no rational and discerning faculty. With this discernment it is possible for us to find the pathway of God. This is knowledge that is natural; this is the predecessor of faith; and this is the pathway to God. By it we know to discern good from evil and to accept faith. The power of nature attests that it behooves man to believe in Him Who brings forth all things in His creation, to believe the words of

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His commandments, and to do them. From this belief is born the fear of God. When a man joins righteous works to the fear of God and makes a little progress in this activity, the fear of God gives birth to spiritual knowledge, which we have said is born of faith.

Natural knowledge, which is the discernment of good and evil implanted in our nature by God, persuades us that we must believe in God, the Author of all. Faith produces fear in us, and fear compels us to repent and to set ourselves to work. And thus man is given spiritual knowledge, which is the perception of mysteries, and this perception engenders the faith of true divine vision. Spiritual knowledge is not, however, thus simply begotten of mere faith alone; but faith begets the fear of God, and when we begin to act from the fear of God, then, out of the steady action of the fear of God, spiritual knowledge is born, just as Saint John Chrysostom has said, 'For when a man acquires a will that conforms to the fear of God and to right thinking, he quickly receives the revelation of hidden things.' And by 'revelation of hidden things' he means spiritual knowledge.

It is not, however, the fear of God that gives birth to this spiritual knowledge (because what is not inherent in a nature cannot be engendered by it), but rather this knowledge is conferred as a gift upon that working which belongs to the fear of God. As soon as you search well into the work of the fear of God, you will find this to be repentance, and from this arises spiritual knowledge. Concerning this we have written, 'That of which we have received an earnest by baptism, we receive as a gift by means of repentance' (Homily 46, page 223). And the gift which we said we shall receive by means of repentance is spiritual knowledge, which is conferred as a gift through the work of the fear of God. But spiritual knowledge is the perception of what is hidden. And when a

man perceives these invisible and by far more excellent things (from which it takes the name spiritual knowledge) then there is begotten by the perception proper to this knowledge another faith, not one which is opposed to the first faith, but one which confirms it. And this is called 'the faith of divine vision'. Until then, hearing; but now, divine vision (Cf. Romans 10:17; Job 42:5). But vision is more certain than hearing.

All these things are born of that knowledge inherent in nature which discerns good from evil. This is the good seed of virtue, and concerning it we have spoken. When we veil this natural knowledge by means of our pleasure-loving will, we forfeit all these good things. Natural knowledge is accompanied by a continual pricking of conscience, an unceasing remembrance of death, and a certain anxiety which is a torment until a man departs from this life. Afterward come: sorrow, sadness, fear of God, shame proper to nature, grieving over all former sins, diligence in our duties, remembrance of our common path and concern over provisions for it, supplication of God with mourning to make a good entry in at that gate through which all nature passes, contempt for the world, and a

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great struggle for virtue. All these good things are found through natural knowledge. So, let every man compare his works with these. For when a man is found amid these things, he is walking on the path that is natural. But when he surmounts them and attains to love, he is raised above nature, and the struggle, the fear, the toil, and the weariness in all things he does, pass away from him. These things are consequences of natural knowledge, and we find them in ourselves when we do not veil it by means of our pleasure-loving will. We are amid these things until we attain to love, which frees us from them all. Let a man compare himself with what has been said, and let him examine himself to see in what manner of things he is making his way: in those that are contrary to nature, in those that are natural, or in those that are above nature. From the indications mentioned a man can clearly and quickly discover the governing trait of his entire life. When he does not find himself amid the things which we have [[here]] defined as natural, and he is not in those which are above nature, then it is plain that he has cast himself into things contrary to nature. But to our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 48.

Containing Counsels Replete With Profit, Which With Love He Spoke to Those Who Listened to Him Humbly.

A good notion falls into the heart only by a divine gift, and an evil thought approaches the soul only to tempt and to try a man. The man who has reached the knowledge of the extent of his weakness has reached perfect humility. A heart that is continually moved to thanksgiving is a guide that leads the gifts of God to a man. A murmuring disposition always active in the heart is a guide that leads trials to the soul. God bears with all the weaknesses of men, but He will not suffer to leave without chastisement a man who murmurs continually. A soul that is devoid of every illumination of knowledge will be found in such dispositions. A mouth that always renders thanks receives a blessing from God, and grace descends into the heart that perseveres in thanksgiving. Humility runs in advance of grace, and conceit runs in advance of

chastisement. The man who has become proud (The Syriac printed text adds *because of knowledge*, as in *outward knowledge*) is permitted to fall into blasphemy; the man who has become exalted by his practice of virtue is permitted to fall into fornication; and he who is filled with presumption because of his own wisdom is permitted to fall into the murky snares of ignorance.

The man who has no recollection of God whatever carries in his heart suspicion of (Literally; *anxiety against*) his neighbor through wicked recollections. But the man who honors every man because of his recollection of God receives help from every man by God's secret command. He who speaks in defense of a man who suffers injustice has God as his Champion. He who lends his arm to help his neighbor receives the arm of God as his Helper. The man who accuses his brother on account of his evil deeds has God for his own Accuser. A man who

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corrects his brother in his private chamber cures his evil; but a man who makes accusation against another in a public gathering worsens his wounds. He who cures his brother in secret makes manifest the strength of his love; but he who puts his brother to shame in the eyes of his companions gives a proof of the strength of his envy. A friend who rebukes another in secret is a wise physician; but he who wishes to cure in the eyes of many is in reality a reviler. A sign of compassion is forgiveness of every debt; a sign of an evil mind is offensive speech to one who has fallen. The man who administers chastisement with a view to healing, chastises with love; but he who seeks vengeance is devoid of love. God chastises with love, not for the sake of revenge—far be it!—but seeking to make whole His image. And He does not harbor wrath until a time when correction is no longer possible, for He does not seek vengeance for Himself (Greek; *this kind of love is from uprightness and does not passionately resort to revenge*). [[This is the aim of love. Love's chastisement is for correction, but it does not aim at retribution.]] A righteous wise man is like unto God, for he never chastises a man to requite and avenge his wickedness, but to correct him, or so that others might fear. That, however, which does not resemble this is not chastisement. [[Now hereby the Spirit depicts, as in an image, the design that God has had everlastingly. But the man who chooses to consider God an avenger, presuming that [in this manner] he bears witness to His justice, the same accuses Him of being bereft of goodness. Far be it, that vengeance could ever be found in that Fountain of love and Ocean brimming with goodness! The aim of His design is the correction of men; and if it were not that we should be stripped of the honor of our free will, perhaps He would not even heal us by reproof (i.e. God would heal us even against our will, forcibly, if this would not deprive us of free will). The boundary of free will in our deeds is the power that boldness (or *confidence*. Literally; *openness of face*) bestows on our rational faculty; and reason also worships the greatness of His goodness. For He wills that we should rejoice not as it were in what is His, but as it were in the recompenses of our own deeds. For although all things are His, yet He is not pleased that we should consider them His, but that we should delight in what is His as if it were ours.]]

A man who does good for the sake of [[future]] reward, changes quickly. But the man who, on the strength of his knowledge, wonders at the vision of God's love will neither become uplifted in his mind, nor will he ever turn aside from virtue, even though his flesh be cut to pieces. The man whose mind is illumined concerning the recompenses which God bestows upon us (This is the Syriac reading) descends into the depth of

humility in both body and soul. For before a man can approach knowledge he must ascend and descend in his manner of life; but when he actually draws nigh to knowledge, he is altogether raised on high. However much he is exalted, his ascent in knowledge will not be completed until that age of glory comes, and then he will receive the full measure of his riches. The more a man becomes

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perfect with respect to God, the more he follows after Him. But in the age of truth, God will show him His face, although not what He is (Syriac; *not His essence*). For however much the righteous enter into the divine vision of Him, they behold an enigma of His vision, like an image that is seen through a mirror (Greek; *only His image as in a mirror*. Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12); but yonder they behold the revelation of the truth.

Fire that has flared up in dry wood is difficult to extinguish, and the flame of divine fervor that descends into the heart of a man who has renounced the world will not be extinguished and is fiercer than fire. When the power of wine enters the members, it makes the intellect oblivious to the precise [nature] of all things; and when the memory of God takes possession of a pasture in the soul, it causes every memory of visible things to vanish from the heart. A mind that has found spiritual wisdom is like a man who finds a fully equipped ship at sea, and once he has gone aboard, it brings him from the sea of this world to the isle of the age to come. In like manner, the perception of the future age while in this world is like an islet in the ocean; and he who approaches it toils no longer amid the billows of the appearances of this age.

When a merchant has finished his business, he hastens homeward. And so long as a monk has not completed his term for righteous labor, he suffers anguish at the thought of departing from his body; but when he perceives in his soul that he has redeemed his time (Cf. Ephesians 5:16) and received his earnest, then he longs to see the age to come. While the merchant is at sea, he has fear in his members, lest the waves should rise against him and engulf the hope of his labor. And so long as a monk is in this world his life is dominated by fear, lest a tempest should suddenly rise up against him and destroy the work at which he has labored from youth to old age. A merchant fixes his eye upon dry land, and a monk upon the hour of his death.

When a sailor voyages in the midst of the sea, he watches the stars and in relation to them he guides his ship until he reaches harbor. But a monk watches prayer, because it sets him right and directs his course to that harbor toward which his discipline should lead. A monk gazes at prayer at all times, so that it might show him an island (Greek; *by prayer a monk sees an island at all times*) where he can anchor his ship and take on provisions; then once more he sets his course for another island. Such is the voyage of a monk in this life: he sails from one island to another, that is, from knowledge to knowledge, and by his successive change of islands, that is, of states of knowledge, he progresses until he emerges from the sea and his journey attains to that true city, whose inhabitants no longer engage in commerce but each rests upon his own riches. Blessed is the man who has not lost his course in this vain world, on this great sea! Blessed is the man whose ship has not broken up and who has reached harbor with joy!

A swimmer dives naked into the sea until he finds a pearl; and a wise monk, stripped

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of everything, journeys through life until he finds in himself the Pearl, Jesus Christ; and

when he finds Him, he does not seek to acquire anything else besides Him. A pearl is kept in a vault, and a solitary's delight is preserved within stillness. A virgin is harmed in gatherings and crowds of people, and the mind of a monk in conversation with many men. A bird, wherever it may be, hastens back to its nest to hatch there its young; and a monk possessing discernment hastens to his cell to produce there the fruit of life. A serpent guards its head when its body is being crushed, and a wise solitary guards his faith at all times, for this is the origin of his life. A cloud obscures the sun, and much talk obscures the soul which has begun to be illuminated by the divine vision of prayer.

The bird called the heron rejoices and is glad, so wise men say, when it separates itself from the inhabited world and goes to a desert place and nests there; so the soul of a solitary is filled with celestial joy when she takes leave of mankind and goes to dwell in the land of stillness and there awaits the hour of her departure. It is told concerning the bird called the siren, that every man who hears the melody of its voice is so captivated, that he follows it into the desert and forgets life itself by reason of the sweetness of its song, and he falls to the ground and dies. This resembles what happens with the soul. For when the heavenly sweetness descends into her from the sweet melody of the sayings of God which perceptibly penetrates into the intellect, then the whole soul so runs after this, that she even forgets this corporeal life, deprives the body of its desires, and is raised up out of this life toward God. [[The life of this world is sweet to the man who lives it in a carnal manner, but not so sweet as separation from life to the man who separates himself by perception in God.]]

Unless a tree first sheds its old leaves, it cannot grow new shoots; and until a solitary casts out from his heart the memory of his former actions, he cannot bear new fruit and sprout new shoots in Jesus Christ. Wind ripens the fruits of trees, and the Spirit of God (The Greek has *reflection on God* or *solicitude for God*. This translation is supported by the Sinai Syriac MS, but the Syriac printed text has *spirit*, which in context seems more likely because the one word means both *wind* and *spirit*), the fruits of the soul. They say that in a shell, where a pearl is born, lightning produces a kind of spark and the shell draws matter from the air, whereas until then it is merely flesh; and until a monk's heart receives heavenly matter through intuitions, its labor remains barren, and its shell holds no fruit of consolation. [[The fruits of trees are hard, repugnant to the taste and unfit for consumption until the sweetness that comes from the sun has fallen upon them. Even so the first labors of repentance are bitter and extremely repugnant and give the solitary no consolation until they receive the sweetness that comes from divine vision which translates the heart from earthly things such that it even forgets itself.]]

A dog that licks a rasp drinks its own blood and does not know its own harm because

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of the sweetness of the blood; and a solitary who stoops to drink vainglory, consumes his life and does not perceive his harm because of the fleeting sweetness. Worldly glory is a reef in the sea covered by water; for as this lies unknown to the sailor until his vessel strikes it, bottoms out, is filled with water and sinks, so vainglory does to a man until it drowns and destroys him. The Fathers say concerning vainglory, that passions once conquered and cast out return again to a vainglorious soul. A small cloud is wont to cover the disk of the sun, but after the cloud has passed, the sun shines very brilliantly; so a little despondency is wont to cover the soul, but the joy that follows is great. [[The minstrel who plays a flute is not nourished by the sound of its melodies, and when he

ceases to play, a greater hunger afflicts his belly. And sweet words [chanted] without works do not make a man full; and when he abandons them, he is the more confounded. As it is impossible for a man to drink wine and not to exhale its odor from his mouth, so it is impossible that a man who is deemed worthy of spiritual consolation in his discipline and of a change of his state should not be recognized by a wise man. A heart which has received the heavenly seed is changed in its speech, changed in its thinking, changed in its way of life, changed in its senses. In all that pertains to him such a man is different from the rest of men, and he is like a man who slumbered and has arisen from sleep.]]

Do not approach the words of the mysteries contained in the divine Scriptures without prayer and beseeching God for help, but say: Lord, grant me to perceive the power in them! Reckon prayer to be the key to the true understanding of the divine Scriptures. When you desire to draw nigh to God with your heart, first show Him your yearning by bodily labors. For a man begins his discipline with these. The heart draws very near to God through the privation of necessities and through struggling to eat only one kind of food while found in labors. Indeed, the Lord by this has laid the foundation of perfection (*Vide* Matthew 6:11; 10:9, 10). Reckon idleness as the beginning of darkness of soul, garrulous gatherings as darkness upon darkness, and the second as an occasion for the first. For if even profitable words, spoken without measure, produce darkness, how much more so does vain talk? The soul is abased by an excess of lengthy conversations, even when they are held in the fear of God. [[Consider darkness of soul to be the producer of confusion.]] The darkening of the soul, however, originates from disorderliness in way of life.

Measure and long duration in discipline enlighten the mind and drive away confusion. When the mind is made turbulent by disorderliness, it is dark. And when the mind is dark, the soul is confused (Greek; *the mind's confusion due to disorderliness produces darkness in the soul, and darkness—turmoil*). Good order generates peace; peace gives birth to light in the soul; and peace makes the pure air in the mind radiant (The Syriac word also means *joyous*). The more a man's heart draws near to

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wisdom, the more it receives joy from God. This is how a man can distinguish spiritual wisdom from worldly wisdom: a man perceives in his soul that spiritual wisdom causes silence to reign within him, but worldly wisdom produces a fountain of distraction. When you have discovered spiritual wisdom, you will be filled with much humility, gentleness, and peace that holds sway over your thoughts; and as a result of this, your members will be at rest and be undisturbed by turmoil and wantonness. When, however, you have become possessed of the second wisdom, you will acquire a proud mind, unspeakably perverted thoughts, a disturbed intellect, shameless and haughty senses.

(Here the Syriac begins a new homily with the title *Other Maxims*).

Do not imagine that a man who is fettered by things pertaining to the body will be able to possess boldness in prayer before God. The soul of a pinchpenny is bereft of wisdom, but the soul of a merciful man is made wise by the Spirit. As oil feeds the flame of a lamp, so mercy feeds knowledge in the soul. The key to divine gifts is given to the heart by love of neighbor, if only its cares do not distract us from the love of God! How sweet is conversation with our spiritual brothers, if only together with it we can preserve our conversation with God! It is good, therefore, to undertake such things in so far as due

measure permits, that is, so long as this does not serve as a cause for us to fall away from our hidden work, discipline and unceasing converse with God. The confusion of the latter is caused by the establishment of the former (i.e. converse with God is confused by constant converse with men); for the intellect is not sufficient to maintain two forms of converse.

The sight of people of the world causes confusion in the soul that has renounced them for the sake of divine work. Continuous intercourse even with spiritual brothers causes harm, while the mere sight of worldly men from a distance causes the same. The encounters, however, which the senses experience do not hinder bodily labor. But he who wishes to reap joy from the peace of his mind by means of hidden endeavor will be troubled in the stillness of his heart even by voices, without the sight of anything. Inner mortification cannot exist without inactivity of the senses. Discipline of the body requires keenness of the senses, but discipline of the soul—keenness of the heart.

As the soul in its nature is better than the body, so the work of the soul is better than the work of the body. And just as in the beginning, the existence of the body preceded that of the soul (Greek; *the fashioning of the body preceded the inbreathing*, i.e. of the soul. *Vide* Genesis 2:7), so the works of the body precede the labor of the soul. A small but always persistent discipline is a great force; for a soft drop falling persistently, hollows out hard rock.

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When the spiritual man draws near to being resurrected within you, a deadness to all things will awaken in you, a joy will burn in your soul the like of which there is nothing in creation, and your thoughts will be confined within you by reason of the sweetness in your heart. But when the world is about to rise up in you again, your mind's distraction and the triviality and instability of your thinking will increase. By the world I mean the passions which are engendered by distraction. When they are born and come to maturity, they become sins and kill a man. As children are not born without a mother, so passions are not born without distraction of the mind, and sin is not committed without converse with passions.

When patience greatly increases in our soul, it is a sign that we have secretly received the grace of consolation. The power of patience is stronger than the joyful thoughts that descend into the heart. Life in God is the downfall of the senses; when the heart lives, the senses fall away. The resurrection of the senses is the deadening of the heart; when the senses are quickened, it is a sign that the heart has died to God.

The conscience does not derive uprightness from the virtues practiced among men. A virtue that a man performs in behalf of other men cannot purify the soul; still it is reckoned before God for the receiving of a reward for labor. A virtue, however, that a man performs within himself accomplishes both: it is reckoned for the receiving of recompense, and it produces purity. For this reason, separate yourself from the first [mode of virtue] by pursuing the second. If a man takes no concern for the latter and desists from the former, he suffers a manifest fall away from God. The second, however, can entirely fill the place of the first, without the first being performed at all. [[Be dead in this life, that you may be a free man in your deadness. Be dead to this world, that you may be liberated from laws; for not one of those who observe them can perfectly fulfill them in this life. But the man who is dead in his life is free while he lives and lives while he is dead. Undue diligence in adorning words is recognized by God-given simplicity of heart. The soul that perceives the life that is above the body does not resort to this world.

But the man who has not discovered the former [life] will scarcely be able to despise the latter, and to despise it completely will be utterly impossible for him. If he forces himself to this, he will stir up great conflict against himself. But as soon as he has discovered that life, he will be able to renounce this one without conflict.]]

Ease and idleness are the destruction of the soul and they can injure her more than the demons. [[The demons are unable to act where the soul resides in light, that is, in the laudable labors of virtue. But the soul that is darkened guides even the demons to herself so as to commit every evil.]] If you compel your body when it is weak to labors that exceed its strength, you will instill darkness upon darkness into your soul and bring greater confusion upon her. But if you surrender a strong body to ease and idleness, every

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wickedness will be committed by the soul that dwells in it, even though a man greatly desires the good; for after a short time it will despoil the very concern that he had for the good. When the soul is drunken with the joy of hope and with the gladness which is in God, the body becomes insensible to tribulations, even if it be feeble. Then it can bear redoubled hardships without growing weary and it enjoys and works together with the soul in her spiritual delight. Thus it is when the soul enters into spiritual joy even though the body may be weak.

If you guard your tongue, my brother, God will give you the gift of compunction of heart so that you may see your soul, and thereby you will enter into spiritual joy. But if your tongue defeats you—believe me in what I say to you—you will never be able to escape from darkness. If you do not have a pure heart, at least have a pure mouth, as the blessed John said.

Whenever you wish to exhort someone toward the good, at first give comfort to his body and honor him with words of love. For nothing so persuades a man to feel shame and causes him to exchange his evils for what is better as the bodily benefactions and the honor which he receives from you. [[And a second means of persuasion is a man's diligent effort to make himself a laudable example. He who has succeeded in taking hold of himself by prayer and vigilance will easily be able to draw his neighbor to life, even without the toil of speaking and audible exhortation. Negligence, however, and laxity do not only harm those who yield to them, but also those who observe them. No words can express how greatly that man is blessed who by diligent solicitude over himself can instill zeal in his comrades for beautiful deeds and make the slothful feel shame by the very sight of him. The silent deed has more power to reform other men than solicitous words of rebuke conjoined with a lax way of life. For when you set yourself aright, you will help your neighbor to no small degree.]]

The more a man enters into the struggle for God's sake, the more his heart waxes bold in his prayer; and the more he is drawn away by many affairs, the more he is deprived of God's help. [[The soul that has rest from the vexation of the body will possess tranquility in her thoughts. Be a free man with respect to your body, that you may be deemed worthy of the freedom of the spirit (Literally; *which is in the spirit*). Be yoked to your freedom, lest you be harnessed to the yoke of servitude to your enemies. If once you have manifested in yourself an image of dissolution from this life, then through repose from the dealings of life be completely dead, as presenting a likeness of that abolition (or *cessation*) to come, since every concern for material things will be abolished from you by death.]] Neither fear nor grieve over the

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burning (i.e. from the passions) of the body, for death will completely take it from you. Do not fear death, because God has made preparations to raise you above it. To Him be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 49.

On the Angelic Movement That Is Awakened in Us by God's Providence for the Soul's Advancement in Things Spiritual.

The first thought (Syriac; *movement*) that by God's loving-kindness descends into a man, that enters into his heart and guides his soul to life, is the thought of his departure from this nature (Syriac; *the transitoriness of this nature*). This thought is naturally followed by disdain for the world, and every good movement that leads a man to life enters him from this. And it is this that the divine power which accompanies man lays as a foundation when it wishes to manifest life in him. If he does not extinguish this thought by involvement in the affairs of life and by vain talk, and if he rears it in his soul by continual concentration within himself and by contemplating it (Greek; *rears it in stillness, and abides within himself, beholding and reflecting on it*), this thought will lead him to profound divine vision which no man can express. Satan greatly abhors this thought and makes war upon it with all his might to expunge it from man's heart. And if it were possible, he would give a man dominion over the whole world, could he but by this distraction erase this thought from his mind. And if he were able, as it was said, he would gladly do this, for the cunning one knows that if this thought abides in a man, his mind will no longer remain on this earth of delusion, and his machinations against him will not touch him. Now we do not say this concerning that first thought which stirs in us the remembrance of death by reminding us, but concerning the fullness of this activity, which unshakably establishes in a man the remembrance of death, and which, by his meditation upon it, brings him to a state of continual wonder. The former

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thought is corporeal, but the latter is a spiritual *theoria* and wondrous grace. This divine vision is arrayed in luminous intuitions. He who possesses it will not gaze searchingly at the world again nor will he cleave to his body.

In very truth, O beloved brethren, if God would send forth this true *theoria* to mankind but for a short while, the world would remain without succeeding generations. This divine vision is a bond before which nature cannot stand, and it proves to be for the man who has received this meditation in his soul a God-given grace stronger than all the particular activities bestowed upon those found in the middle order, who desire repentance with an upright heart. It is given especially to those concerning whom God knows that they must truly withdraw from the world to a better life because of the good volition that He has found in them. But it increases and abides with them when they dwell in a secluded and solitary place. Let us make entreaty for this divine vision in our prayers. Let us keep long vigils for the sake of it. And let us beseech the Lord with tears that He grant us this as a gift which has no equal. Let us no longer be faint-hearted in the toil of this world. This is the commencement of the thoughts of life, and it perfects in a man the fullness of righteousness.

On the Second Activity Upon Man.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

When a man progresses in good discipline and succeeds in mounting the step of repentance, when he draws nigh the experience of the divine vision that results from his righteous works (Greek; *divine vision and its practice*), and when a gift from on high descends upon him that he may taste the sweetness of spiritual knowledge, a second activity after the first will arise. Firstly he becomes certain of God's providence for every man, he is illumined by His love for creation, and he is filled with wonder at His governance of rational beings and at His great care for them. This is the beginning of the sweetness of God and the fire of His love, which is kindled in the heart and consumes the passions of the soul and body. A man will be conscious of this power when he ponders thoughtfully upon, scrutinizes, and discerns in a spiritual manner all the diverse natures of creation and everything he encounters. Wherefore, through such zealous and divine diligence and through his good conscience a man begins to be stirred to divine love and straightway he is made drunk by it as by wine; his limbs become limp, his mind stands still in awestruck wonder, and his heart is captivated by God (Literally; *follows God as a captive*). He becomes, as I said, like a man drunk with wine. The more the inner senses

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grow strong, the more this divine vision gains in strength. And the more a man struggles to live a righteous life, to be watchful, and to labor in reading and prayer, the more its (Greek; *their*. This is a copyist's error) power is established and made fast within him. In very truth, O brethren, a man comes to this (i.e. awestruck wonder. This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has *this comes to a man*) at times when he does not remember himself, that he is clad with a body, and he does not know that he is found in this world.

The second activity is the beginning of spiritual *theoria* in man, and this is the beginning of every revelation in the intellect; by this activity the intellect grows and becomes powerful in hidden things, and by this the intellect advances to other revelations which surpass the nature of man. In a word, guided by the hand of the second activity, all Divine *theoria* and all revelations of the Spirit which the saints receive in this world, and whatever gifts and revelations human nature can come to know in this life, pass over to a man. This is the root of our perception of our Creator (This is the reading of most Greek MSS and the Syriac. The Greek printed text has *this is the root of the [faculty of (spiritual)] perception that our Creator has implanted in us*). Blessed is the man who has kept well this good seed once it has fallen into his soul, and has given it increase, and has not lost it by scattering it in vain concerns and in the distractions of transient and fleeting things! But to our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 50.

On the Varying States of Light and Darkness That Occur in the Soul at All Times, and Her Training in Matters of the Right and of the Left.

Let us see, my beloved, whether in our soul at the time of prayer we possess divine vision into the verses of psalmody and prayer. For this is born of true stillness.

And let us not be troubled when we are found in darkness, especially if the cause of this is not in us. But reckon this as the work of God's providence for a reason which He alone knows. At times our soul is suffocated and is, as it were, amid the waves; and whether a man reads the Scriptures, performs his liturgy, or approaches anything whatever, he receives darkness upon darkness. He leaves off [prayer] and cannot even draw nigh to it. He is wholly unable to believe that a change will occur and that he will be at peace. This hour is full of despair and fear; hope in God and the consolation of faith are utterly effaced from his soul, and she is wholly and entirely filled with doubt and fear.

Those who are tried by the billows of this hour know from experience the change that follows upon its completion. God does not leave the soul in these things an entire day, for otherwise she would perish, being estranged from the Christian hope; but He speedily provides her with an 'escape' (1 Corinthians 10:13). But even if the oppression of this darkness should be prolonged, you should expect that a change to the better (Literally; *to life*) will proceed swiftly from the midst of it.

I admonish and counsel you, O man, if you do not have the strength to master yourself and to fall upon your face in prayer, then wrap your head in your cloak and sleep until this hour of darkness pass from you, but do not leave your dwelling. This trial befalls

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those especially who desire to pass their life in the noetic discipline (or *the discipline of the mind*. See Homily 43), and who throughout their journey seek the consolation of faith. For this reason their greatest pain and travail is the dark hour when their mind wavers with doubt. And blasphemy follows hard upon this. Sometimes a man is seized by doubts in the resurrection, and by other things, and we have written of this struggle for the comfort of many.

Those who pass their life in physical works are entirely free of these trials. They are assailed by another kind of despondency, one which is familiar to everyone, and which differs in its mode of action from the trials mentioned and others of similar kind. The healing of these wells up from stillness itself. This is the man's consolation. But he will never receive the light of consolation from intercourse with men, and their converse will never heal him, but only briefly give him rest; thereafter these trials will rise up against him with great force. Of necessity he must have a man who is enlightened and has experience in these matters, so that by him he can be enlightened and strengthened at the time of his need, but not at all times. Blessed is he who patiently endures these things within the doors [of his cell]! Afterwards, as the Fathers say, he will attain to a magnificent and powerful dwelling. This struggle, however, does not cease immediately, nor in an hour; nor does grace come once and for all and dwell in the soul, but little by little of one and the other: sometimes trial, sometimes consolation. A man continues in these things until his departure. In this life we should not expect to receive perfect freedom from this struggle, nor to receive perfect consolation. For thus is God pleased to govern our life here and that those who journey in the way should be amid these things. To Him be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 51.

On the Harm of Foolish Zeal That Has the Guise of Being Divine, and on the Help That

Comes of Clemency and on Other Subjects.

A zealous man never achieves peace of mind. But he who is a stranger to peace is a stranger to joy. If, as it is said, peace of mind is perfect health, and zeal is opposed to peace, then the man who has a wrong (The Syriac omits this word) zeal is ill with a grievous disease. Though you presume, O man, to send forth your zeal against the infirmities of other men, you have expelled the health of your own soul; be assiduous, rather, in laboring for your own soul's health. If you wish to heal the infirm, know that the sick are in greater need of loving care than of rebuke. Therefore, although you do not help others, you expend labor to bring grievous illness upon yourself. Zeal is not reckoned among men to be a form of wisdom, but as one of the illnesses of the soul, namely narrow-mindedness and deep ignorance. The beginning of divine wisdom is clemency and gentleness, which arise from greatness of soul and the bearing of the infirmities of men. For, he says, 'Let the strong bear the infirmities of the weak' (Cf. Romans 15:1), and 'Restore him that has fallen in the spirit of meekness' (Cf. Galatians 6:1). The Apostle numbers peace and patience among the fruits of the Spirit (*Vide* Galatians 5:22).

A heart full of sorrow on account of its feebleness and impotence regarding outward physical deeds takes the place of all physical works. Deeds of the body performed without sorrow of mind are like a body without a soul. The man who is sorely grieved in his heart but

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gives rein to his senses, is like a sick man who suffers physically but who opens his mouth to every kind of harmful food. The man who is sorely grieved in his heart but gives rein to his senses is like a man with an only son, whom he slaughters with his own hands, little by little. Sorrow of mind is a precious gift before God; and the man who bears this gift as he ought is like a man who bears holiness in his members. A man who unleashes his tongue against other men for good or for evil is unworthy of this grace. Repentance joined with conversations is a shattered vessel. Liberality joined with blows is a knife fixed and concealed in honey. Chastity and conversation with a woman ((or for a woman—with a man; Saint Isaac is presumably referring in this context to someone of the opposite gender)) is like a lioness and a lamb in one dwelling. Good works and mercilessness are before God like a man slaughtering a son before his father. The man who corrects his companions while his soul is infirm is like a blind man who shows others the way.

Mercy and justice (This can also be translated *just judgment*) in one soul is like a man who worships God and the idols in one house. Mercy is opposed to justice. Justice is the equality of an even scale, for it gives to each as he deserves; and when it makes recompense, it does not incline to one side or show respect of persons. Mercy, on the other hand, is a sorrow and pity stirred up by goodness, and it compassionately inclines a man in the direction of all; it does not requite a man who is deserving of evil, and to him who is deserving of good it gives a double portion. If, therefore, it is evident that mercy belongs to the portion of righteousness, then justice belongs to the portion of wickedness. As grass and fire cannot coexist in one place, so justice and mercy cannot abide in one soul. As a grain of sand cannot counterbalance a great quantity of gold, so in comparison God's use of justice cannot counterbalance His mercy.

As a handful of sand thrown into the great sea, so are the sins of all flesh in

comparison with the mind of God (This is the Syriac reading. The word *mind* has the sense of *way of thinking*. The Greek reads here *the providence and mercy of God*). And just as a strongly flowing spring is not obstructed by a handful of dust, so the mercy of the Creator is not stemmed by the vices of His creatures. As a man who sows in the sea and expects to reap a harvest, so is he who remembers wrongs (or *bears a grudge*) and prays. As the flame of fire cannot be checked from rising upward, so the prayers of the merciful are not hindered from ascending to Heaven. The current of a stream runs swiftly in a narrow place, and likewise the force of anger whenever it finds a place in our mind. The man who has acquired humility in his heart is dead to this world. He who is dead to the world has died to the passions. For to the man who has died in his heart to his kinsmen, the devil is dead. He who has found malice, with it has found him who originally found it (i.e. the devil).

There is a humility that comes from the fear of God, and there is a humility that comes from the fervent love of God. One man is humbled because of his fear of God;

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another is humbled because of his joy. The man humbled from fear of God is possessed of modesty in his members, a right ordering of his senses, and a heart contrite at all times. But the man humbled because of joy is possessed of great exuberance and an open and insuppressible heart.

Love does not know shame, and for this reason she does not know to give a form of propriety to her members. Love is naturally unabashed and oblivious to her measure. Blessed is the man who has found thee, the haven of all joy! The assembly of the humble is beloved of God like the assembly of the Seraphim. A chaste body is more precious before God than a pure offering. These two, humility and chastity, prepare in the soul a tabernacle (There are two words in Syriac with identical spelling, one meaning *a pledge*, the other *a tent, a tabernacle*. The Greek translators chose *a pledge*, but the meaning here points to *a tabernacle*) for the Holy Trinity.

Walk with your friends circumspectly. When you do this you will profit both yourself and them, for often the soul casts off the bridle of watchfulness under the pretext of love. Keep yourself from conversations, for they are not always profitable. Honor silence in assemblies, for this will keep you from much harm. Watch over your belly, but still more over your sight. Unquestionably, conflict at home is easier than conflict abroad. Do not believe, brother, that inner thoughts can be checked unless the body is brought into a good and orderly state. Fear habits more than enemies. He who nourishes a habit within himself is like a man who feeds a fire, for the degree of the strength of each is determined by the fuel with which it is supplied. Once a habit demands something and its request is not fulfilled, the next time you will find it weaker. But if you fulfill its desire just once, the next time you will find its assault against you to be much stronger.

May the memory of this remain with you with respect to all things, for the help received from watchfulness is better than the help received from works. He who is fond of laughter and of making a show before men should be no friend of yours, for he will lead you into loose habits. Do not allow your countenance to be glad with joy in the company of a man who has relaxed his discipline; but keep yourself from despising him. If he desires to stand up, give him your hand, and till death take concern for him. But if you are still infirm, shun the work of healing. 'Give him', he says, 'the end of your staff', and so on (See Budge, *The sayings of the Holy Fathers*, 1:331. 'If thou seest a man who hath fallen into the water, and thou canst help him, stretch out thy staff to him and draw

him out, lest, if thou stretchest out thy hand to him, and thou art not able to bring him up, he drag thee down and both of you perish'). Speak circumspectly before the conceited and envious man. For while you are speaking he is interpreting your words as he pleases, and gathers fuel from what is good in you to make others stumble. And in his mind he changes your words to suit the substance of his illness. As soon as he begins to speak evil of his brother in your presence, show a gloomy countenance. When you do this, you will be found prudent before God and before him.

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If you give something to one in need, let the cheerfulness of your face precede your gift, and comfort his sorrow with kind words. When you do this, by your gift the gladness of his mind surpasses even the needs of his body (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has *the gladness of his mind surpasses your gift, even more than the needs of his body*). On the day when you open your mouth and speak ill of someone, even though your thought urged you to say something that seemed correct and for edification, reckon yourself as dead to God and void of all your works. For what need has a man to demolish his own house and set aright that of his companion?

On the day when you are pained in some way, either physically or mentally, for the sake of any man, be he good or evil, reckon yourself as a martyr on that day, and as one who suffers for Christ's sake and is deemed worthy of confession. For remember that Christ died for sinners, not for the just. See how great a thing it is to grieve for wicked men and to benefit sinners even more than the righteous! The Apostle brings this to mind, as something worthy of wonder (*Vide* Romans 5:7, 8). If you are able to acquire within yourself righteousness of soul, do not take pains to pursue other righteousness. Let all your works be preceded by bodily chastity and purity of conscience, for without them every act is empty before God. Know that every work you do without reflection and examination is empty even if it be comely, for God reckons righteousness in proportion to discernment and not in proportion to undiscerning effort.

An unwise righteous man is a lamp in the sun. The prayer of one who remembers wrongs is a seed upon a stone. An unmerciful ascetic is a barren tree. A rebuke springing from envy is a poisoned arrow. The praise of a crafty man is a hidden snare. A foolish counselor is a blind watchman. Sitting with senseless men is the shattering of the heart. Conversation with wise men is a sweet fountain. A wise counselor is a wall of hope. A foolish and imprudent friend is a treasury of ruin. It is better to see a house full of mourners than a wise man who clings to a fool. It is better to dwell with beasts than with the envious. It is better to inhabit a tomb than to dwell with depraved men. Sit with vultures rather than with the covetous and insatiate. Be friends with a murderer rather than with a contentious man. Converse with a swine rather than with a glutton, for the swine's trough is better than the mouth of a gourmet and glutton. Sit amid lions (Greek; *lepers*) rather than amid the proud. Be persecuted, but persecute not; be crucified, but crucify not; be wronged, but wrong not; be slandered, but slander not. Have clemency, not zeal, with respect to evil. [[Lay hold of goodness, not justice.]]

Justice (or *rectitude*) does not belong to the Christian way of life and there is no mention of it in

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Christ's teaching. Rejoice with the joyous and weep with those who weep; for this is the sign of *limpid purity*. Suffer with those who are ill and mourn with sinners; with those

who repent, rejoice. Be every man's friend, but in your mind remain alone. Be a partaker in the sufferings of all men, but keep your body distant from all. Rebuke no one, revile no one, not even men who live very wickedly. Spread your cloak over the man who is falling and cover him. And if you cannot take upon yourself his sins and receive his chastisement in his stead, then at least patiently suffer his shame and do not disgrace him. [[Do not strive with men for the sake of the belly. And do not hate for the sake of honor. And do not find pleasure in judging.]] Know, brother, that the reason why we must remain within the door of our cell is to be ignorant of the wicked deeds of men, and thus, seeing all as holy and good, we shall attain to purity of mind. But if we become castigators, chastisers, judges, investigators, vindicators, and faultfinders, in what respect does our life differ from the life in the towns? And if we do not give up these things, what could be more miserable than such a life in the desert, falsely quiet? If you cannot be still within your heart, then at least make still your tongue. If you cannot give right ordering to your thoughts, at least give right ordering to your senses. If you cannot be solitary in your mind, at least be solitary in body. If you cannot labor with your body, at least be afflicted in mind. If you cannot keep your vigil standing, keep vigil sitting on your pallet, or lying down. If you cannot fast for two days at a time, at least fast till evening. And if you cannot fast until evening, then at least keep yourself from satiety. If you are not holy in your heart, at least be holy in body. If you do not mourn in your heart, at least cover your face with mourning. If you cannot be merciful, at least speak as though you are a sinner. If you are not a peacemaker, at least do not be a troublemaker. If you cannot be assiduous, at least in your thought be like a sluggard (i.e. consider yourself lazy). If you are not victorious, do not exalt yourself over the vanquished (Greek; *the guilty*. In Syriac the same word means both *vanquished* and *guilty*). If you cannot close the mouth of a man who disparages his companion, at least refrain from joining him in this.

Know that if fire goes forth from you and consumes other men, God will demand from your hands the souls which your fire has burned. And if you yourself do not put forth the fire, but are in agreement with him who does, and are pleased by it, in the judgment you will be reckoned as his accomplice. If you love gentleness, be peaceful. If you are deemed worthy of peace, you will rejoice at all times. Seek understanding, not gold. Clothe yourself with humility, not fine linen. Gain peace, not a kingdom.

No man has understanding if he is not humble, and he who lacks humility is devoid of understanding. No man is humble if he is not peaceful, and he who is not peaceful is not humble. And no man is peaceful without rejoicing. In all the paths upon which men

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journey in this world they will find no peace, until they draw nigh to hope in God. The heart finds no peace from toil and from stumbling-blocks, until hope enters it, makes it peaceful, and pours joy into it. That worshipful and all-holy mouth spoke of this when it said, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). Draw nigh, He says, and hope in Me, and find rest from labor and fear.

Divine hope uplifts the heart, but fear of Gehenna crushes it. The light of the mind gives birth to faith; faith gives birth to the consolation of hope; hope fortifies the heart. Faith is the unveiling of the understanding (or *insight*. The Syriac printed text reads a plural, which gives *of the intuitions*). When the mind is darkened, faith is hidden, fear holds sway over us, and our hope is cut off. It is not the faith which comes from instruction which frees a man from pride and doubt, but the faith which is beheld and

dawns in the understanding; this is called knowledge and the revelation of truth. As long as the intellect perceives God as God by His being revealed to the understanding, fear will not approach the heart. When we are permitted to be in darkness and we lose this perception, then fear will assail us until we are humbled and we draw nigh to humility and repentance.

The Son of God endured the Cross, therefore let us sinners boldly rely on repentance. If the form of repentance averted God's wrath from Ahaab, surely our sincere repentance will not now be unprofitable to us. If a form of humility turned aside Divine wrath from him who was insincere, how much more will it from us who sincerely grieve over our falls? Sorrow of mind suffices to take the place of all bodily labor.

Saint Gregory says, 'He is a temple of grace who is united with God, and is constant in his concern over His judgment' (The Syriac printed text has *over that which pertains to Him* (or *him*). The change in a single letter (*nun* to *lamadh*) gives this reading). What is concern over God's judgment? It is: a continual quest after His rest (or *constant reflection upon that which pleases Him*); mourning at all times and a contrite meditation on account of those things which always remain imperfect because of the wretchedness of our nature; constant sadness on their account which the mind retains through powerful thoughts and which in prayer it offers up before God as an offering with humble compunction; and, inasmuch as is possible and is within a man's power, to hold solicitude for the body in disdain (This sentence is considerably abbreviated in the Greek). Such is the man who carries in his soul the continuous memory of God. As Saint Basil says, 'Undistracted prayer is that which produces in the soul a distinct reflection on God. And God's indwelling is this: to have God established in us by [unceasing] memory [of Him]' (Letter 2. *To Gregory*). In this manner we become temples of God. This is concern with a contrite heart in preparation for the Lord's rest.

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On Involuntary Evil Thoughts That Originate From the Previous Laxity of Negligence.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

Some men sustain their body and, for the sake of God's work, wish to give it a little rest (Syriac; *men and brethren, you who only for sustenance wish to give a little rest to your bodies for the sake of God's work*) until they strengthen it, and then they turn again to their labor. Therefore, in those few days of our rest, let us not completely relax our vigilance and deliver our entire soul up to slackness, like men who have no desire to return to their work. Those who are pierced by the enemy's arrows in the time of peace have laid away in their soul the cause of this through their will's unrestraint. And they see that in the holy place (that is, in prayer) they wear a soiled garment, namely that which stirs in their soul at the hour of prayer and thought of God. The things, which, in the time of pure prayer, seek to do war with us and put us to shame we ourselves have admitted to our intimacy when our senses were negligent.

Watchfulness helps a man more than works, and laxity harms him more than rest. Though internal battles originate from rest, and they molest a man, he still has the power to overcome them. For when a man quits his rest and returns to the place of his work, these attacks fall away and withdraw from him. But it is not so with that which is born of laxity, although slackness is indeed born of rest. As long as a man remains in the realm of his freedom during rest, he can turn back and, by establishing his rule, regain dominion

over himself, for he still remains in the realm of his freedom. But through laxity he departs from the realm of his freedom. For if the man had not completely put away his watchfulness, he would not be forcibly and involuntarily constrained to submit to what brings him no rest. If he had not totally abandoned the limits of his freedom, he would not fall prey to encounters that of necessity bind him fast and that he has no power to resist.

Do not relinquish the freedom of any of your senses, O man, lest perhaps you be unable to regain it. Rest only harms young men, whereas slackness injures the old and the perfect also. Those who from rest enter into evil thoughts can return to watchfulness and re-establish themselves in their lofty discipline. But those who, putting their hope in works, have been negligent in watchfulness, are made captive and led from their lofty discipline to a dissolute life: one man is wounded in the land of his enemies and dies in the time of peace; another goes forth under the pretext of purchasing life and receives a thorn in his soul.

We should not be exceedingly grieved when we make a slip in some matter but when we persist in it; for even the perfect often slip, but to persist therein is total death. The

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grief we have over our slight falls is reckoned by grace in the stead of undefiled labor. But the man who slips a second time, hoping that one day he will repent, walks craftily before God; death (Syriac; *the noose of capital punishment*) falls upon him unexpectedly, and he does not reach the time when he hoped to accomplish the works of virtue. Every man who gives free rein to his senses gives free rein to his heart.

The work of the heart binds the external members. And it is evident whether a man does the work of the heart with discernment, following the example of the Fathers who have gone before us, if in the presence of external things he is not tied by material profit, despises gluttony, and is entirely free of anger. But if these three are found in a man, namely, the desire for material gain (whether to a greater or lesser degree) quick temper, and submission to gluttony, then, even though he seem to be a peer of the saints of old, know that his laxity in externals is produced by his lack of patience in inward matters; these things, however, are not produced by a discriminating disdain of one's soul. If this were not so, how could he have despised bodily things and still not have acquired meekness? Discriminating disdain is accompanied by non-attachment, scorn of ease (Syriac; *life*. In Syriac these two words are very similar in appearance) and the love of mankind. If a man readily and joyfully accepts a loss for the sake of God, he is inwardly pure. And if he does not look down upon any man because of his defects, in very truth he is free. If a man is not pleased with someone who honors him, nor displeased with someone who dishonors him, he is dead to the world and to this life. The watchfulness of discernment (or *discerning watchfulness*) is superior to every kind of discipline accomplished by men of any degree.

Do not hate the sinner. We are, indeed, all laden with guilt. If for the sake of God you are moved to oppose him, weep over him. Why do you hate him? Hate his sins and pray for him, that you may imitate Christ Who was not wroth with sinners, but interceded for them. Do you not see how He wept over Jerusalem? We are mocked by the devil in many instances, so why should we hate the man who is mocked by him who mocks us also? Why, O man, do you hate the sinner? Could it be because he is not so righteous as you? But where is your righteousness when you have no love? Why do you not shed tears

over him? But you persecute him. In ignorance some, who are considered to be discerning men, are moved to anger against the deeds of sinners.

Be a herald of God's goodness, for God rules over you, unworthy though you are. Although your debt to Him is so very great, He is not seen exacting payment from you; and from the small works you do, He bestows great rewards upon you. Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David calls Him

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just and upright (*Vide* Psalms 24:8; 144:17), His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. 'He is good', He says, 'to the evil and to the impious' (Cf. Luke 6:35). How can you call God just when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers? 'Friend, I do thee no wrong; I choose to give unto this last even as unto thee. Or is thine eye evil because I am good?' (Matthew 20:13-15). How can a man call God just when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth?, (*Vide* Luke 15:11 ff). None other but His very Son said these things concerning Him, lest we doubt it, and thus bore witness concerning Him. Where, then, is God's justice, for while we are sinners Christ died for us!, (Cf. Romans 5:8). But if here He is merciful, we may believe that He will not change.

Far be it that we should ever think such an iniquity that God could become unmerciful! For the property of Divinity does not change as do mortals. God does not acquire something which He does not have, or lose what He has, or supplement what He has, as do created beings. But what God has from the beginning, He will have and has forever, as the blessed Cyril wrote in his commentary on Genesis. Fear God out of love for Him, and not for the reputation of austerity that has been attributed to Him. Love Him as you ought to love Him; not only for what He will give you in the future, but also for what we have received. And indeed, for this world alone which He has created for us, who can repay Him? Where is His repayment to be found in our works? Who persuaded Him in the beginning to bring us into being? Who intercedes for us before Him, when we shall possess no [faculty of] memory, as though we never existed?, (Saint Isaac refers to the state after death, mentioned again a little below). Who will awake this our body for that life? Again, whence descends the notion of knowledge into dust? O the wondrous mercy of God! O the astonishment at the goodness of our God and Creator! O might for which all is possible! O the immeasurable kindness toward our nature, that He even will bring sinners back into existence!, (Greek; *that brings once again the nature of sinners to His regeneration*). Who is sufficient to glorify Him? He raises up the transgressor and blasphemer, He renews dust unendowed with reason, making it rational and comprehending, and the scattered and insensible dust and the scattered senses He makes a rational nature capable of thought, even though at his resurrection the sinner will be unable to be reconciled with His grace (Greek; *the sinner is unable to comprehend the grace of his resurrection*). The Syriac verb *to be reconciled with* could also mean *to comprehend*). Where is Gehenna, that can afflict us? Where is the torment that terrifies us in many ways and quenches the joy of His love? And what is Gehenna as compared with the grace of His resurrection, when He will raise us

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from Sheol (i.e. the grave) and cause our corruptible nature to be clad in incorruption, and

raise up in glory what has fallen into Sheol?

Come, men of discernment, and be filled with wonder! Whose mind is sufficiently wise to wonder worthily at the bounty of our Creator? His recompense of sinners is that instead of a just recompense, He rewards them with resurrection, and instead of those bodies with which they trampled upon His law, He enrobes them with the glory of perfection (Greek; *with the perfect glory of incorruption*. The words of *incorruption* are probably a later addition to the Greek text). That grace whereby we are resurrected after we have sinned is greater than the grace which brought us into being when we were not. Glory be to Thine immeasurable grace, O Lord! Behold, Lord, the waves of Thy grace close my mouth with silence and there is not a thought left in me, not even for giving thanks unto Thee. What mouths can confess Thy praise, O good King, Thou Who lovest our life? Glory be to Thee for the two worlds which Thou hast created for our growth and delight, leading us by all things which Thou didst fashion to the knowledge of Thy glory, from now and unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 52.

On the Three Degrees of Knowledge and the Difference of Their Activities and Their Concepts; and on the Faith of the Soul and the Mystic Riches Concealed in It; and on How the Knowledge of This World Differs From the Simplicity of Faith.

The soul that by the pathways of discipline journeys upon the road of faith often makes great progress therein. But if the soul returns once more to the modes (or ways, *means*) of knowledge, she will straightway become lame in her faith and be bereft of faith's noetic force. Now faith, by diverse forms of [divine] assistance, manifests itself in the pure soul that unquestioningly has recourse to it with simplicity in all that pertains to herself. For the soul which in faith has surrendered herself to God, once and for all, and has received through much experience the taste of His help will not take thought for herself again. Nay rather, she is stilled in awestruck wonder and silence and has no power to return to the modes of her knowledge and to be engaged in them. And this is so lest, on the contrary (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has, *by their opposition*, which originally must have been, *on the contrary*), she should be deprived of God's providence, which secretly shelters her unceasingly, cares for her and everywhere cleaves to her incessantly. For the soul would have gone out of her wits to suppose herself sufficient to provide for herself on the strength of her own knowledge. Those upon whom the light of faith has dawned are no longer so audacious as to pray on behalf of themselves; nor do they entreat God, saying, 'Give this to us', or 'Take that from us'; nor do they in any wise take care for themselves. For at every moment, by the

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noetic eyes of faith, they see the fatherly providence which comes of the true Father to shelter them: He Who in His great and immeasurable love surpasses all in paternal affection and Who, more than all, has the power and might to help us in a measure superabundantly greater than anything we might ask, think, or conceive.

For knowledge is opposed to faith; but faith, in all that pertains to it, demolishes the laws of knowledge (we do not, however, speak of spiritual knowledge). For such is the definition (or *circumscription, boundary*) of knowledge, that without investigation

and examination it has no authority to do anything, but it must investigate whether that which it considers and desires is possible. But as to faith, what shall we say? If yes and no approach it at the same time, it will not be persuaded to remain in such a position (i.e. faith does not tolerate deliberations. The Greek text has *not rightly*. But the Syriac, *no and yes*, shows this to be a copying error for *no and yes* (Literally; *rightly*), since *kai* was often written simply *k* plus a tittle).

It is well known that knowledge cannot even exist without (The Greek reads here *knowledge cannot even be known without*) investigation and the employment of its means of operation; and this is the sign of skepticism regarding truth. But faith requires a mode of thinking that is single, limpidly pure and simple, far removed from any deviousness or invention of methods. See how faith and knowledge are opposed to one another! The home of faith is a childlike thought and a simple heart. 'In the simplicity of their hearts' (Cf. Colossians 3:22), he says, 'they glorified God.' And 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of the Heavens' (Matthew 18:3). But knowledge conspires against and opposes both these qualities.

Knowledge keeps within the boundaries of nature in all its paths. But faith makes its journey above nature. Knowledge does not allow itself to experience anything that is ruinous to nature, and it keeps far away from it. But faith readily submits itself to this and says, 'Upon the asp and basilisk shalt thou tread, and thou shalt trample upon the lion and dragon' (Psalms 90:13). Fear accompanies knowledge, but confidence accompanies faith. The more a man journeys in the pathways of knowledge, the more he is shackled by fear and he cannot be found worthy of freedom from it. But the man who follows faith straightway becomes a free man and a ruler of himself, and as a son of God with authority he freely wields all things. The man who has found the keys of faith (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has; *who loves*, a mistake for; *found*) wields all the natures of creation even as God; for by faith comes the authority, after the likeness of God, to create a new creation. 'Thou didst so will', he says, 'and all things were present before Thee' (Cf. Job 23:13). And many times faith can bring forth all from non-existence. But knowledge is unable to do anything without matter. Knowledge is not so bold as to attempt anything that has

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not been given to nature. How so? The liquid nature of water cannot support upon its back the footsteps of a body; the man who comes too close to fire burns himself; and whoever should rashly oppose nature in this fashion brings himself into peril.

Knowledge watchfully guards itself from such things and will in no wise be persuaded to overstep their boundaries. But faith transgresses them with authority, saying: 'If thou go through fire, thou shalt not be burned, and the rivers shall not overflow thee' (Isaiah 43:2). Faith has many times worked such things before the eyes of all creation. If knowledge were given the opportunity to attempt such things, it would in no wise be persuaded. For it is by faith that men have entered into flames and bridled the burning power of the fire, walking unharmed through the midst thereof, and they have trodden upon the back of the sea as upon dry land. All these are above nature and opposed to the modes of knowledge. Do you see how faith has shaken the foundations of knowledge and has proven it futile in all its ways and its laws? Do you see how knowledge keeps within the limits of nature? Do you see how faith passes above nature in traveling on the pathway of its journey? The modes of knowledge governed the world for a little more or less than five thousand years, and man was not able in any wise to

raise his head from the earth and perceive the power of his Creator. For this was not until our faith shone forth and freed us from the gloom of earthly labors and futile slavery that seeks fruitless distraction. And now when we have reached the unfathomable (Greek; *untroubled*) sea and the unfailing treasure, we desire once again to turn aside to miserable fountains. There is no knowledge that is not impoverished, however rich it should be; but heaven and earth cannot contain the treasures of faith. The man whose heart is upheld by the confidence of faith will never be in want; and when he has nothing, by faith he possesses all, as it is written: 'All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, ye shall receive' (Matthew 21:22); and again, 'The Lord is at hand, have care for nothing' (Philippians 4:5, 6).

Knowledge always seeks means to safeguard those who have acquired it. But what says faith? 'Except the Lord build the house and guard the city, in vain doth he labor that buildeth it and he watch that guardeth her' (Cf. Psalms 126:1, 2). The man who takes refuge in faith never employs, or is engaged in, ways and means. For knowledge everywhere sings the praises of fear, as the wise man said, 'He that fears in his heart is blessed' (Cf. Ecclesiasticus 34:15). But what says faith? 'He was afraid and began to sink' (Matthew 14:30); and again, 'For ye have not received the spirit of bondage unto fear, but ye have received the Spirit of sonship' (Romans 8:15) unto the freedom of faith and trust in God; and again, 'Fear them not nor flee from before their face.' Fear is followed by doubt; doubt is followed by investigation; investigation is followed by ways and means; ways and means are followed by knowledge. Fear and doubt are always

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recognized in examination and investigation, for knowledge does not always succeed everywhere, as we showed in the beginning. Often calamities, arduous adversities, and multifarious situations filled with peril befall the soul. Knowledge, however, and the modes of wisdom are in no wise able to provide any help, since the entire power and the very limit of human knowledge is unable to deal with these things. But faith is never vanquished by anything. For what help can human knowledge offer in open conflicts or in war against invisible beings, against unembodied (The Syriac is clearly the correct reading) powers and many other things of this kind? Do you see the feebleness of the power of knowledge and the strength of the power of faith? Knowledge prevents its disciples from approaching anything alien (Syriac; *injurious*. In Syriac these two words are similar in appearance) to nature. But see here the power of faith and what it commands its pupils: 'In My name', He says, 'ye shall cast out demons, take up serpents, and if ye drink poison, it shall not hurt you' (Cf. Mark 16:17).

Knowledge enjoins all those who journey in its path to investigate according to its laws the end of anything before making a beginning, and thus to commence, lest the end of the thing prove unachievable by the limit of human ability and labor be spent in vain, and lest the thing prove difficult and impossible to realize. But what says faith? 'All things are possible to him that believeth' (Mark 9:23) for to God nothing is impossible (Cf. Mark 10:27). O unspeakable wealth, O ocean rich in its billows and its marvelous treasures which abundantly spill forth by the power of faith! How filled with boldness, how replete with sweetness and hope is the journey accompanied by faith! How light are faith's burdens, how sweet its labors!

Question: Whom does the man resemble that has been deemed worthy to taste the sweetness of faith and who afterwards turns again to unspiritual knowledge?,

(a lengthy footnote on page 352 in Homily 72 is referenced here, to wit; (Greek; Literally; *pertainig to the soul, soulish*. It is translated by the word *natural* in the Authorized Version (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14). English has no suitable equivalent for this term. The sense, as it is used here, is given by the following quotations which explain Saint Paul's usage in First Corinthians: 'The man who is *psychikos* is he who lives according to the flesh and whose mind is not yet illumined by the Spirit; he possesses only that innate human insight which the Creator has placed in the souls of all men' (Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary On First Corinthians* [PG 74.865b]). 'The Apostle calls *psychikos* the man who is satisfied with his own thoughts alone, who does not accept the teaching of the Spirit, and is not even able to understand it' (Theodore of Cyrus, *Commentary on First Corinthians* [PG 82.245a]). In this sense *psychikos* can be translated: carnal, unspiritual, profane, material-minded).

Answer: He resembles the man who has found a pearl of great price and exchanges it for a copper obol, who has abandoned self-sufficient freedom and turned to a state of destitution, filled with fear and slavery.

I say not that knowledge is blameworthy (Syriac; *to be repudiated*) but that faith is higher; and if we find fault, it is not knowledge that we blame. Far be it! Rather it is to distinguish (which thing we shall soon do) the erring modes by which it goes against nature; how it becomes kindred to the orders of the demons; how many steps there are in which knowledge journeys; what is the difference in each of them; by what conceptions it is awakened in each mode when it abides therein; in which of these modes (when it walks therein) does it oppose faith and go forth outside of nature; what are the distinctions in knowledge; in which degree (when knowledge returns to its primary aim) does it come into its nature and by its

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good discipline become a stepping-stone for faith; and how far does the distinction of its degree reach; how does it pass from these modes to higher ones; what are the modes of that other degree that is first [[in honor]]; when does knowledge unite with faith and become one with it and from it receive the vesture of fiery intellections; when is it inflamed by the Spirit, acquiring the wings of dispassion; and when is it exalted above servitude to things earthly into the realm of its Creator, with the aid of other modes? But for the moment it is suitable that we should know only that the level of faith's activity is (Greek; *that faith and its levels and their activities are*) more lofty than knowledge.

Knowledge is perfected by faith and acquires the power to ascend on high, to perceive that which is higher than every perception, and to see the radiance [[of Him]] that is incomprehensible to the intellect and to the knowledge of created things. Knowledge is a step whereby a man can climb up to the lofty height of faith; and when a man has reached faith, he no longer has need of knowledge. 'Now', he says, 'we know in part and we noetically perceive in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away' (Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:9). Faith, therefore, now shows us, as it were before our eyes, the reality of [[that future]] perfection. It is by our faith that we learn those things that cannot be comprehended, not by the investigation and power of knowledge.

These are the works of righteousness: fasting, alms, vigil, holiness, and the rest of such works performed with the body. Love for one's neighbor, humility of heart,

forgiving those who have sinned, recollection of good things, investigation of the mysteries concealed in the holy Scriptures, the mind's occupation with good works, the bridling of the soul's passions, and the rest of such virtues, are performed in the soul. All these require knowledge, for knowledge guards them and teaches their order (Syriac; *is their regulator*). All these are known as virtues, but they are still only steps by which the soul ascends to the more lofty height of faith. Faith's way of life (or *discipline*) is more exalted than virtue's labor, and it is not labor (Greek; *than virtue, and its labor is not labor*) but perfect rest, consolation, words in the heart, and it is accomplished by the intellections of the soul. All these wondrous modes of the spiritual discipline—the practice of which in the spiritual life is awareness, delight, fruition of the soul, burning love, joy in God, and the rest—and whatsoever things in this discipline are bestowed upon the soul accounted worthy of the grace of that yonder blessedness, and whatsoever things are subtly indicated in the divine Scriptures, all these things are accomplished through faith by God, Who is bounteous in His gifts.

A Difficulty: But perhaps someone reasons thus: if all these good things, and the aforementioned works of virtue, the abstention from evils, and discernment of the subtle

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thoughts that sprout up in the soul, the battle with thoughts, the struggle against the inciting passions, and the rest of such things without which even faith itself cannot manifest its power in the soul's actions—if, I say, all these knowledge accomplishes, how can knowledge be considered as opposed to faith?

Solution: We say that there are also three intelligible degrees (or *orders, states*) in which knowledge ascends and descends, and according to the variation of the modes wherein it walks, it submits to change and becomes the cause of either harm or help. There are three degrees: body, soul, and spirit. And although knowledge is single in its nature, yet it becomes more [[gross or more]] subtle and changes its provisions (or *stores, victuals*. The Greek has *modes* which may be a copyist's error for *victuals*, which is the Syriac reading) and the activities of its concepts in relation to the noetic and sensible realms. So hearken and learn the order of its activity and causes whereby it either harms or helps. Knowledge is a gift bestowed by God on the nature of rational beings at their very creation. It is naturally simple and undivided, even as the light of the sun, but according to its activity knowledge undergoes changes and divisions.

On the First Degree of Knowledge.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

When knowledge cleaves to the love of the body, it gathers up the following provisions: wealth, vainglory, [[honor]], adornment, rest of the body, [[special means to guard the body's nature from adversities]], assiduity in rational wisdom, such as is suitable for the governance of the world and which gushes forth the novelties of inventions, the arts, sciences, [[doctrines]], and all other things which crown the body in this visible world. Among the properties of this knowledge belong those that are opposed to faith, which we have stated and enumerated above. This is called shallow (or *common, rude, boorish*) knowledge, for it is naked of all concern for God. And because it is dominated by the body, it introduces into the mind an irrational impotence, and its

concern is totally for this world. This measure of knowledge does not reckon that there is any noetic power and hidden steersman over a man, nor any Divine care that shelters and takes concern for him. It takes no account of God's providential governance, but on the contrary, it attributes to a man's diligence and his methods every good thing in him, his rescue from what harms him, and his natural ability to avert the plights and many adversities that secretly and manifestly accompany our nature. This degree of knowledge presumes that all things are by its own providence, like

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those men who assert that there is no Divine governance of visible things. Nevertheless, it cannot be without continual cares and fear for the body. Therefore it is a prey to faintheartedness, sorrow, despair, fear of the demons, trepidation before men, the rumor of thieves and the report of murders, anxiety over illnesses, concern over want and the lack of necessities, fear of death, fear of sufferings, of wild beasts, and of other similar things that make this knowledge like a sea made turbulent by great waves at every hour of the night and day. For knowledge does not know how to cast its care upon God through the confident trust of faith in Him; wherefore in all things that concern it, it is constantly engaged in devising devices and clever contrivances. But when in some instance the modes of its contrivances prove fruitless, it strives with men as though they hindered and opposed it, since it does not see in this the mystical hand of providence.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil, the tree that uproots love, is implanted in this very knowledge. It investigates the small faults of other men and the causes thereof, and their weaknesses; and it arms a man for stubbornly upholding his opinion, for disputation, and aids him in cunningly employing devices and crafty contrivances and other means which dishonor a man. In this knowledge are produced and are found presumption and pride, for it attributes every good thing to itself, and does not refer it to God.

Faith, however, attributes its works to grace. For this reason it cannot be lifted up with pride, as it is written: 'I can do all things through Christ Which strengtheneth me' (Philippians 4:13), and again, 'Not I, but the grace of God which is in me' (1 Corinthians 15:10); and also 'Knowledge puffeth up' (1 Corinthians 8:1), which the blessed Apostle said of this same knowledge, since it is not mingled with faith and hope in God, but he said it not concerning true knowledge, far be it!

By humility true knowledge makes perfect the soul of those who have acquired it, like Moses, David, Esaias, Peter, Paul, and the rest of the saints who have been accounted worthy of this perfect knowledge to the degree possible for human nature. And by diverse *theorias* and divine revelations, by the lofty vision of spiritual things and by ineffable mysteries and the like, their knowledge is swallowed up at all times, and in their own eyes they reckon their soul to be dust and ashes. But that other knowledge is puffed up, even as is meet, since it walks in darkness and values that which belongs to it by comparison with things of earth, and it does not know that there is something better than itself. And so all [who cling to such knowledge] are seized by the uplifting of pride, because they measure their discipline according to the standard of the earth and the flesh, they rely upon their works, and their intellects do not enter into incomprehensible matters. But as many as reflect upon the waves of the glorious splendor of the Godhead (Greek; *and in their intellects they do not ponder upon incomprehensible matters while they sail amid these waves. But the saints reflect upon the glorious virtue of the Godhead*), and whose

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labor is on high, their minds do not turn aside with inventions and vain thoughts. For those who walk in the light cannot go astray, and for this reason all those who have strayed from the light of the knowledge of the Son of God, and have turned away from the truth, journey in these pathways just mentioned. This is the first degree of knowledge; in it a man follows the desire of the flesh. We find this knowledge blameworthy and declare it to be opposed not only to faith, but to every working of virtue.

On the Second Degree of Knowledge.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

But when a man (Syriac; *knowledge*) renounces the first degree and turns toward deep reflections and the love of the soul, then he practices the aforementioned good deeds with the help of his soul's understanding, in co-operation with the senses of his body, and in the light of his soul's nature. These deeds are: fasting, prayer, mercy, reading of the divine Scripture, the modes of virtue, battle with the passions, and the rest. For all these good things, all the various excellences seen in the soul and the wondrous means that are employed for serving in Christ's court (Syriac; *the Church of Christ*) in this second degree of knowledge, are made perfect (or *effected*) by the Holy Spirit through the action of its power. This knowledge makes straight the pathways in the heart which lead to faith, wherewith we gather supplies for our journey to the true age (Syriac; *our true world* [or *age*]). But even so, this knowledge is still corporeal and composite; and although it is the road that leads us and speeds us on our way toward faith, yet there remains a degree of knowledge still higher than it. If it goes forward, it will find itself raised up by faith with the help of Christ, that is, when it has laid the foundation of its action on seclusion from men, reading the Scriptures, prayer, and the other good works by which the second degree of knowledge is made perfect. It is by this knowledge that all that is excellent is performed; indeed, it is called the knowledge of actions, because by concrete actions, through the senses of the body, it accomplishes its work on the external level.

On the Third Degree of Knowledge, Which Is the Degree of Perfection.

(Here a new homily begins in the Greek printed text).

Hear now how knowledge becomes more refined, acquires that which is of the Spirit, and comes to resemble the life of the unseen hosts which perform their liturgy not by the

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palpable activity of works, but through the activity accomplished in the intellect's meditation. When knowledge is raised above earthly things and the cares of earthly activities, and its thoughts begin to gain experience in inward matters which are hidden from the eyes; and when in part it scorns [[the recollections of]] things (whence the perverseness of the passions arises) and when it stretches itself upward and follows faith in its solicitude for the future age, in its desire for what has been promised us, and in searching deeply into hidden mysteries: then faith itself swallows up knowledge, converts it, and begets it anew, so that it becomes wholly and completely spirit.

Then it can soar on wings in the realms of the bodiless and touch the depths of the

unfathomable sea, musing upon the wondrous and divine workings of God's governance of noetic and corporeal creatures. It searches out spiritual mysteries that are perceived by the simple and subtle intellect. Then the inner senses awaken for spiritual doing, according to the order that will be in the immortal and incorruptible life. For even from now it has received, as it were in a mystery, the noetic resurrection as a true witness of the universal renewal of all things.

These are the three degrees of knowledge wherein is brought together a man's whole course in the body, in the soul, and in the spirit. From the time when a man begins to distinguish between good and evil until he takes leave of this world, his soul's knowledge journeys in these stages (Literally; *measures*). The fullness of all wrong and impiety, and the fullness of righteousness, and the probing of the depths of all the mysteries of the Spirit are wrought by one knowledge in the aforementioned three stages; and in it is contained the intellect's every movement, whether the intellect ascends or descends in good or in evil or in things midway between the two. The Fathers call these stages: natural, supranatural, and contranatural. These are the three directions in which the memory of a rational soul travels up or down, as has been said: when the soul works righteousness in the [confines of] nature, or when through her recollection she is caught away to a state higher than nature in the divine vision of God, or when she recedes from her nature to herd swine, as did that young man who squandered the wealth of his discretion and labored for a troop of demons (*Vide* Luke 15:11 ff).

A Recapitulation of the Three Degrees of Knowledge.

The first degree of knowledge renders the soul cold to works that go in pursuit of God (Syriac; *of good things*). The second makes her fervent in the swift course on the level of faith. But the

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third is rest from labor, which is the type of the age to come, for the soul takes delight solely in the mind's meditation upon the mysteries of the good things to come. But since a man's nature is not yet completely elevated above the state of mortality and the burdensomeness of the flesh, and it is not yet perfected in the spiritual state that transcends the former erring state, it is unable to attain the perfection that knows no cessation in its liturgy; and while a man is in this world of deadness, he cannot entirely take leave of the flesh's nature. So long as a man still abides in the nature of the flesh, he is in continual transition from one [state] to the other. At one time, as a poor man and a pauper, his soul performs her service in the second, middle degree, working virtue that is inherent in her nature by means natural to the body.

At another time, like those who have received the Spirit of adoption in the mystery of freedom, the soul enjoys the gift of the Spirit, given according to the beneficence of its Bestower; but afterward she again returns to the lowliness of her works, that is, those wrought by the body. The soul keeps watch over the body, lest the crafty one take her captive through the enticements found in this age, and by troubled and erring thoughts. So long as the soul is closed behind the veil of the door of the flesh, she has no confidence, for there is no perfect freedom in this imperfect age. Every working of knowledge is for the sake of activity and training; the working, however, of faith is not performed in deeds, but is accomplished by spiritual insights through the naked activity of the soul, and it transcends the senses. For faith is more subtle than knowledge, just as

knowledge is more subtle than palpable deeds. All the saints who have been found worthy to attain to this spiritual discipline (which is awestruck wonder at God; see Homily 43) pass their lives by the power of faith in the delight of that discipline which is above nature.

By faith we mean not that wherewith a man believes in the distinctions of the Divine and worshipful Hypostases, in the singular and unique nature of the very Godhead (Syriac; *the distinction(s) of the worshipful Hypostases of the Divine Essence in the properties of His nature*), and in the wondrous dispensation to mankind through the assumption of our nature, although this faith is also very lofty. But we call faith that light which by grace dawns in the soul (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has; *we mean that faith which dawns in the soul by the light of grace*) and which fortifies the heart by the testimony of the mind, making it undoubting through the assurance of hope that is remote from all conceit. This faith manifests itself not by aural tradition (*Vide* Romans 10:17), but with spiritual eyes it beholds the mysteries concealed in the soul, and the secret and divine riches that are hidden away from the eyes of the sons of the flesh, but are unveiled by the Spirit to those who abide at Christ's table through their

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study of His laws. Thus He said, 'If ye keep My commandments, I will send you the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, and He shall teach you all truth' (Cf. John 14:15, 16, 17; 16:13). The Comforter shows a man the holy power that dwells within him at every moment, and the protection, the noetic force that shelters him always and drives away from him all harm, that it should not touch his soul or his body. The luminous and noetic intellect invisibly perceives this [holy power] with the eyes of faith, and the saints gain greater knowledge of it through experience.

This power is the Comforter Himself Who, in the strength of faith, consumes the parts of the soul, as it were by fire. The soul then rushes forward, despising every danger because of her trust in God, and on the wings of faith she soars aloft, taking leave of visible creation. She becomes as one drunken in the awestruck wonder of her continual solicitude for God; and by simple, uncompounded vision, and by unseeing intuitions concerning the Divine nature, the intellect becomes accustomed to attend to rumination upon that nature's hiddenness (Literally; *its hiddenness*. This might also refer to the intellect. The Greek reads here *its hidden things*). For until the coming of that which is the perfection (or *consummation*) of the mysteries, and until we be found worthy of their manifest revelation, faith administers unspeakable mysteries between God and the saints (*Vide* 1 Corinthians 13:10). Of these may we be deemed worthy through the grace of Christ, here as an earnest, but there in the substance of truth in the Kingdom of the Heavens together with those who love Him. Amen.

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Homily 53.

Short Sections on Other Differences in the Concepts of Knowledge.

Knowledge that is occupied with visible things and receives instruction concerning them through the senses, is called natural. But knowledge that is occupied with the noetic power that is within things and with incorporeal natures is called spiritual, since perception in this case is received by the spirit and not by the senses. In both of

these kinds of knowledge matter (This word has been lost in the Greek) comes to the soul from without to give her comprehension. But that knowledge which is occupied with Divinity is called supranatural, or rather, unknowing and knowledge-transcending. The soul does not gain divine vision into this knowledge through material external to herself, as in the former instances, but immaterially it manifests itself within her by the grace of God, suddenly and unexpectedly, and it is revealed from within. 'The Kingdom of the Heavens is within you', and you should not hope to find it in a place, nor does it come in observation, according to the word of Christ (Cf. Luke 17:21). But without external cause and without meditation upon it, it is revealed within the hidden image of the intellect, for the intellect cannot find in it any matter (The Syriac printed text adds *for meditation*).

The first knowledge comes from constant study and diligence in learning; the second comes from a good manner of life and the intellect's faith; and the third is now allotted to faith alone. For by faith knowledge is abolished, works come to an end, and the employment of the senses becomes superfluous. The more knowledge descends from this summit, the more it is given honor (i.e. by men). And the further it descends, so much the more is it

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honored. When it reaches earth and earthly affairs, it becomes the lord of all, and without it every thing is crippled and inoperative. But when the soul raises up her vision and stretches forth her concepts to celestial things, and longs for what the eyes of the body do not see and over which the flesh has no dominion, then all things stand by faith, which may our Lord Jesus Christ grant us, He that is blessed unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 54.

On the Subject of Prayer and the Other Things Which Are Necessarily Required for Constant Recollection and Are Profitable in Many Ways, If a Man Read Them With Discretion and Observe Them.

One of the most excellent allotments of the gift of faith is for a man to be certain of the petition of his prayer through his trust in God. Certainty of faith in God is not the soundness of a man's confession (although this is the mother of faith) but a soul that beholds the truth of God by the power of her disciplines. When you find faith united to disciplines in the holy Scriptures, do not suppose the sense of it to refer to right confession. The faith that gives the confidence of trust is never attained by the unbaptized (Syriac; *the unperfected*) or those whose mind is perfected from the truth. The certainty of faith reveals itself in the soul in proportion to the lofty mode of life of those who pay heed to the practice of the Lord's commandments.

Continual reflection on the Scriptures is light for the soul, because they imprint on the intellect recollections helpful for guarding against the passions and for continuance with God through love and the purity of prayer; further, it makes straight before us the path of peace trodden by the footsteps of the saints. Do not, however, set your hopes upon the notations (Syriac had a complex system of points to indicate to the reader the tone of voice and emphasis he should employ. Jacob of Edessa writes: 'Syrian writers...devised a system and arranged point-symbols for the accents, so that these various tones, each of which indicated a particular meaning, could be pronounced by the

reader through sight as they are recognized by the speaker through hearing. ... Each of these point-symbols stands in special relationship to a spoken tone of voice which indicates an intended meaning, and the tone of voice is recognized by the symbol.' *Ktaba d-Semhe*, 4:5) of the verses when in your prayers or hourly reading they are not

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attended by great alertness and constant contrition (The majority of Greek MSS and the Syriac have this reading. The Greek printed text, however, and the Vatican Greek MS 605 have the following variant; *Yet do not doubt in the prayers [chanted in] verses when they are not attended by great alertness and constant contrition during your prayers or hourly reading*). Accept without fail words spoken from experience, even if the speaker is unlearned; for the treasuries of the great kings of the earth do not despise the addition of a beggar's obol, and by brooks great rivers are filled and their flow is made mighty.

If it is true that the recollection of virtuous men (The Greek MSS have *the virtues*, but the Syriac shows this to be an error for *the virtuous*. In general, the present Greek text for this paragraph has confused the meaning of the Syriac. The context of what follows necessitates the Syriac reading) renews virtue within us when we ponder over them, then it is evident that the recollection of the licentious, when we dwell upon them, renews shameful desire in our mind. For the memory of each imprints and inscribes in our reflections the distinctive nature of the deeds of those recollected, and shows us as with a finger, either the shame of their deeds (Greek; *our thoughts*) or the loftiness of their manner of life accordingly as they are virtuous or licentious. This strengthens in us thoughts and movements belonging either to the right or to the left. We meditate upon them in the secret place of our mind, and in our mind's meditation the peculiarity of their way of life is depicted, so that we are always obliged to behold them. Therefore not only does meditation upon evil harm the man who is engaged in it (i.e. the meditation) but also the sight and the recollection of those who do evil things. And again, not only does the working of virtue greatly help him who accomplishes it, but he is also helped by the imagination of the mind which is fashioned from the recollection of the persons who perform virtue.

Hereby it can be understood that those who are near to attaining the stage of purity are deemed worthy always to behold certain of the saints during the vision of the night; and at every moment during the day, the vision of them (which has been engraved upon their souls) produces in these men the food of joy through their intellect's noetic rumination. For this reason they ardently approach the work of virtue, and a great flame of desire for virtue descends upon them. They say that the holy angels take on the likenesses of saints, venerable and good men, and they manifest these likenesses to the soul in the dreams of sleep, when her thoughts wander, to bring her joy and exceeding gladness; and during the day the angels continually stir these likenesses in the contemplation of their thoughts. Thus by their rejoicing over the saints their work is alleviated, and hereby they progress upon their way. So it is also in prolonged (The Syriac also means *vehement*) warfare. He who is accustomed to meditate on that which is evil will be deluded by the demons through a likeness of evil. For the demons assume a likeness and manifest to the soul phantasies which frighten her, employing for the most part the recollections of things seen during the day. Sometimes

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they quickly enfeeble the soul by a frightful sight of this kind which terrifies her; but

sometimes they demonstrate to her the difficulty of the life of stillness and solitude, and the like.

Therefore, brethren (The Greek adds the following phrase; *as regards attending to our recollections and judging therefrom the state of our soul*. These words were added to the original because of the confusion mentioned above), let us begin henceforth always to discern among the recollections of our meditation, which of them we should converse with, and which of them we should quickly cast out when they approach our thought: whether they are recollections that originate from the demons' forethought, who supply food for our passions; or those that originate from lust and anger; or those that are from the holy angels who give us the beckoning of joy, knowledge, and recollections through the thoughts that arouse us by their (i.e. the thoughts or the angels) proximity to us; or those impressions that were formerly perceived by the senses and that stir up in the soul thoughts that correspond to one of the two mentioned. We shall gain experience of these two (i.e. of recollections originating from the angels and those from the demons) their aspect, their converse, and the manner of their activity, by the clear knowledge of discernment, and thus we shall be able to make a specific prayer to follow upon each of them.

Love that has its cause in [created] things is like a small lamp fed by olive oil, whereby its light is sustained; or it is like a torrent that surges with rain-water, whose flow ceases when there is no water to maintain it. But love whose cause is God is a deep welling spring; its flow is never checked, for God alone is the Source of love whose waters are unfailing.

Do you wish to take delight in the psalmody of your liturgy and to understand the oracles of the Spirit which you recite? Then disregard completely the quantity of verses, and set at naught your skill in giving rhythm to the verses, so that you may speak them in the manner of a prayer. Abandon your customary repetition by heart, and understand what I tell you. As to that which is written after the manner of a history, let your mind gaze steadfastly upon the study of these things as though you were reading certain acts of Divine providence, even until your soul is roused to sublime understandings through awestruck wonder at the Divine oeconomy; and from this your soul will be moved either to glorification or to profitable mourning. If you find anything that is a prayer, take it for yourself; and when your mind is made steadfast in these meditations, then confusion will give place and depart from you. Peace of thought is not to be found in slavish activity (i.e. in the mere recitation of established prayers); nor in the freedom of the children [of God] is there found the confusion of turmoil. For confusion is wont to take away the taste of insight and understanding, and to despoil their intuitions, just as a leech sucks out the life of the bodies of other creatures together

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with the blood of their limbs. Verily, confusion should be called (if permissible) the chariot of the devil, because Satan is ever wont to mount upon it (Greek; *the mind*. The Syriac has *it* (i.e. confusion) which is clearly the correct reading) as a charioteer, and bearing with him the throng of the passions, he invades the wretched soul and plunges her into the pit of confusion.

Understand this also with discernment: in the verses of your psalmody do not be like a man who borrows words from another, lest you imagine that you are diligently increasing your work of meditation (Syriac; *the apostolic work*), while in fact you are left utterly devoid of the compunction and joy to be found in psalmody. Rather, recite the

words of psalmody as your very own, that you may utter the words of your supplication with insight and with discriminating compunction, like a man who truly understands his work (Syriac; *like a man who is persuaded that he is truly occupied in his own work*). Despondency is begotten of distraction of the mind. Distraction is begotten of lassitude in works and in reading and from vain conversation, or it is born of a full stomach.

The man who does not contradict the thoughts sowed in us by the enemy, but who severs any conversation with them by means of his supplication to God, may have this fact as a sign that his intellect has found the wisdom which is of grace, and that his true knowledge has freed him of many labors. This man, by discovering the short path whereon he treads, has cut off the many distracted windings of the long way. For we do not have the strength to gainsay at all times every thought that opposes us, so that they may be silenced; and it often happens that they inflict a severe wound upon us which is long in healing. Do you think to lecture those who are six thousand years old?, (i.e. the age of the demons as reckoned from the creation of the world). And this will itself be a weapon in their hands with which they will smite you, greatly surpassing your wisdom and your prudence. Yet even if you conquer them, the filth of such thoughts will pollute your mind and their stench will linger long in your nostrils. By the first method, however, you will be free of all this and of fear; for there is no helper like God.

Tears during prayer are a sign that the soul has been deemed worthy of God's mercy in her repentance, and that her repentance has been accepted, and through her tears the soul has begun to enter into the plain of *limpid purity*. For unless a man's thoughts have withdrawn from concern for and recollection of transitory things, and have rejected worldly hope, and disdain for the world has been stirred in them, and unless a man has begun to make ready provisions for his departure, and thoughts arise in his soul which stretch out toward the things yonder, his eyes cannot shed tears. Tears are born of pure and undistracted rumination, and of many perpetual, undeviating reflections, and of the recollection

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of something subtle and hidden which enters the mind and saddens the heart by its memory. From these things tears are multiplied and abundantly increase.

When you turn to work with your hands, while you practice stillness in your cell, do not use this commandment of the Fathers as a cloak for your avarice. Because of your despondency, do a little work that will not disturb your intellect. But if you desire to labor more in order to give alms, know that prayer is superior in its degree to almsgiving. If, however, you wish to do this because of a bodily want, then—provided that you are not insatiate—know that what God provides you with will be sufficient for satisfying your need. For God has never left His laborers in want of any fleeting thing. 'Seek ye first', said the Lord, 'the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you before ye ask Him' (Matthew 6:33; 6:8).

One of the saints said: 'It does not befit the rule of your manner of life to feed the starving and to make your cell a hospice, for this is the laymen's portion and it is meet for them to practice this as something good, but not for anchorites, who are liberated from care for visible things, and who keep guard on their intellects through prayer.'

On the Solitary Life, and That We Must Not Be Timorous and Afraid, but Make Our Heart Steadfast Through Trust in God, and Have Courage With Unhesitating Faith, Since We Possess God As Our Guardian and Protector.

(This title is found in the Greek printed text as the beginning of a new homily).

If at any time you are found worthy of the solitary life (or *anchoritism*) (whose burdens are easily borne in the dominion of its liberty), do not let the thought of fear oppress you, as it commonly does, through diverse manners of shifting arguments and refutations. But, on the contrary, be like a man who believes that there is a Guardian with him and who is perfectly assured through his wisdom that he, together with all creation, is under a single Master Who with a single nod moves, and shakes, and stills, and orders all. There is not one slave who can harm any other of his fellow slaves without a warrant from Him Who provides for them all, and controls all; and all things are under His providence. Rise up straightway and take courage! For although liberty is granted to some, it is not granted for every act. For neither demons, nor ravaging beasts, nor men bent on evil can carry out their will to ruin and destroy their fellows unless the bidding of Him Who governs permits it and

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assigns it a definite compass. For that Divine nod from on high does not command or permit liberty to come into full sway; if it did, no flesh would survive. The Lord does not suffer the power of demons and men to encroach upon His creation and do with it as they please. For this reason, always say to your soul, 'I have a Guardian watching over me, and there is not a creature that can even appear in my presence, unless a command should come from on High.' And although you should see with your eyes and hear with your ears their threatenings, do not believe that they will venture to act. For if they had a warrant from the bidding of Heaven, there would be no need of speech and words, but upon their willing it, the act itself would immediately ensue.

But again, say to yourself, 'If it is the will of my Master that evil beings should hold dominion over what He has fashioned, I am not vexed at this, as one who would wish to hinder the will of his Lord.' And thus even in temptations you will be filled with joy, as one who knows and is fully aware that his Master's signal steers him through all. Stablish your heart, therefore, by the confidence [[of faith]] in the Lord, and be not afraid 'for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day' (Psalms 90:5), for the righteous man's faith in God, they say, tames wild beasts as though they were sheep (*Vide* Hebrews 11:33).

'I am not a righteous man', says one, 'that I should rely on the Lord.' Yet, in reality, it was for the working of righteousness that you came out into the desert, which is filled with tribulations, and on this account you became a minister to God's will. Your toil, then, is in vain if, when you endure these sufferings, you do not understand that God wishes your toil only when you offer Him your tribulation as a sacrifice of love. All those who love God display this distinctive mark, that they submit themselves to afflictions for love of Him. For those who with fear of God are pleased to live in Christ Jesus choose affliction and endure persecution. He then gives them authority over His own secret treasures.

One of the saints said: 'There was an anchorite, a respected elder, and once I went out to him when I was in distress because of temptations. But he was ill, lying down; and when I had embraced him, I sat with him and told him, "Pray for me, Father, for I am exceedingly harassed by the many temptations of the demons." But he opened his eyes, and regarding me attentively, he said, "Child, you are very young, and God will not loose temptations upon you." And I said to him, "Yes, I am very young but I have the

temptations of mighty men." And he said again, "Then it is God's will to make you wise." And I said, "How can I become wise? For every day I taste death." And in reply he said, "God loves you; be still. God is about to give you His grace." And he said again: "Know, child, that for thirty years I have made war with the demons, and until the time when I completed the course of twenty years, I had not received any help whatever. But thereafter,

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when another five had also gone by, I began to find rest (This word in Syriac and Greek also means *gratification, refreshment*). And as time continued slowly on its way, it increased. The seventh year slipped by, and after that, when I was in the eighth, it was intensified to a much greater degree. And now that the thirtieth year is running past, and has already reached its end, rest has prevailed to such an extent that I do not even know to what measure it has advanced." And he added, "When I wish to get up for my office, I am permitted to say a single *Glory be* (i.e. a third of a *kathisma*. The Psalter is divided into twenty *kathismata*); but as for the rest, if I stand three days, I am in awestruck wonder with God, and feel no weariness at all." Behold, the labor of many years, and what limitless rest it bore!

There was one of the fathers who used to eat twice a week, and he told us, 'On a day when I talk with anyone, it is impossible for me to keep my rule of fasting as usual, and I am forced to break it.' And we perceived that guarding the tongue not only wakes up the intellect to God, but even in visible labors done by the body it secretly provides great strength with which to carry them out; and it also gives light to the mind in our hidden work, as the Fathers have said, 'Guarding the mouth wakes up the conscience to God, if it is with knowledge that a man keeps silence.' This saint made a frequent habit of night vigil. For he said, 'On the night in which I stand till dawn, I rest after psalmody; but after I wake from sleep, during the day I am such that I am like a man not in this world, and no earthly thoughts of any kind rise up in my heart, nor have I need of set rules, but am awestruck with wonder all that day.

'One such day I was going to eat, four having gone by since I had tasted anything at all; when I got up for the evening office, thus so that I might eat, I was standing in the courtyard of my cell when there was still much sun, and having commenced, I was aware of only one *Glory be* of my office, and thereafter I remained not knowing whither I had been taken; and thus I continued until the sun rose again the next day before me and warmed my body. And then, when the sun beat down on me more strongly and scorched my face, my intellect returned (Syriac; *was gathered*) to me, and lo! I saw it was another day, and I thanked God, seeing that His grace is so abundantly poured out on man, and that He should deem those who pursue Him worthy of such majesty.' To Him alone, therefore, are due glory and magnificence unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 55.

On How the Hidden Wakefulness in the Soul Is Preserved, and How Sleep and Coldness Steal Into the Mind and Quench the Soul's Holy Fervor and Deadens the Godward Desire That Yearns for Things Spiritual and Heavenly.

It is not possible that the opposing power [of the devil] should prevent those who

desire good from doing it, unless he finds an opportunity for his evil machinations in the lovers of good themselves. The matter, however, goes beyond this. In the beginning of its movement every impulse (Greek; *thought*. The Syriac word can also have this meaning, i.e. a mental motion) of a desire of good is accompanied by a certain zeal, similar to the coals of fire in its fervent heat. Such zeal usually encompasses this impulse [[of love of good]] and chases away from it every opposition, obstacle, and barrier that might appear. For this zeal possesses great strength and unspeakable power to shield the soul at every moment from slackness and from the fear of the onslaughts of every tribulation. The first impulse is, then, the force of the holy desire implanted naturally in the nature of the soul. But zeal is the impulse set astir by the incensive faculty that resides in the soul. This faculty is placed in us by God for our profit so as to safeguard the boundaries of her nature, and to send forth the impulse of her vehemence (The Syriac printed text reads *the force of her vehemence*. For *vehemence* the Greek has *freedom* due to a misreading of the Syriac word) for the fulfilling of her natural desire, which is virtue. Without this impulse, virtue (Greek; *good*) cannot be accomplished, and it is called zeal. For it is zeal that stimulates, makes zealous, kindles, and strengthens a man at times and

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seasons to shun the flesh in the afflictions and fearful trials that confront him, to surrender his soul frequently to death and, for the sake of accomplishing that thing which his soul greatly desires, to withstand the powers of rebellion (Perhaps this refers to the demons).

Once in his writings a man clothed in Christ called this zeal a watch-dog and guardian of the law of God, which is virtue. For virtue is called the fulfilling (This word has been lost in the Greek) of the law of God. There are two causes (or *means*) of strengthening, arousing, and inflaming the power of zeal for guarding the house [of the soul], just as there are two causes by which it is weakened, put to sleep, and made indolent. The first cause of its awakening and inflaming is when a man conceives a certain fear, frightening him concerning the virtue that he has gained or will gain, that perhaps it might be stolen away or brought to naught by some occurrence that could accompany the virtue. This is aroused by divine providence (I mean, the fear possessed by all those who truly pursue virtue) for the awakening and continuation of zeal in the soul, lest it slumber.

When this fear is aroused in a man's nature, zeal, which we have called a dog, burns night and day like a red-hot furnace, and awakens nature. And in the likeness of the Cherubim it is vigilant, espying all that encompasses it at every moment. And if, as one might say, a bird should fly by and circle round it, it barks with piercing and unspeakable violence. But when the same fear is on behalf of something pertaining to the body, it becomes satanic. For in such a case a man has faltered in his faith in divine providence and has forgotten how God takes care and provides for those who contest for virtue's sake, sheltering them at every hour, even as the Holy Spirit says by the mouth of the prophet, 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous', and so on (Psalms 33:15); and again, 'The Lord is the strength of them that fear Him' (Psalms 24:14); and the same prophet says, as it were in the person of God, to those who fear Him, 'No evils shall come nigh thee, and no scourge shall draw nigh unto thy dwelling' (Psalms 90:10). When, however, fear is on behalf of the soul (because of those things which befall virtue and attend upon it) lest she should be plundered or harmed by something, this thought is divine, it is a good anxiety, and its affliction and agony are from God's providence.

Now the second cause of strengthening and enkindling the dog is when desire for virtue increases in the soul. For the more this desire increases in the soul, the more natural zeal for virtue becomes inflamed (The Syriac printed text reads here; *the greater the soul's desire for the divine thought, by the love of which it is caught, the greater this natural zeal for [virtue] becomes inflamed*). Now the first cause of its cooling is when the desire for virtue wanes and grows less in the soul. The second is when a self-confident and audacious thought enters into the soul and persists there, and the man begins to hope, think,

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and harbor the opinion that he need fear no harm from any power. In this way he lays down the weapons of zeal and becomes like a house unguarded. The dog sleeps and for a long time abandons his watch.

Most noetic houses are plundered because of this thought; and this comes to pass when the limpid illumination of holy knowledge that abides in the soul is dimmed. And how is it dimmed, if not when a subtle thought of pride slithers into the soul and makes its nest therein, or when a man gives himself over to care more for transient things, or from continual encounter with the world whereby he is deceived, or by the belly, the mistress of every evil. For every time the ascetic enters into converse with the world, his soul straightway loses force, and especially by encountering a woman ((or for a woman—a man; that is, Saint Isaac is presumably referring in this context to someone of the opposite gender)). The same is true when he meets many men, for they necessarily crush his soul by vainglory. But if it were necessary to put this succinctly, every time the governing (Greek; *wandering*. The Syriac word can also have this meaning) intellect encounters the world, it resembles a helmsman who, while calmly passing over the sea, suddenly strikes a reef and shipwrecks. But to our God be glory, dominion, honor, and majesty unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 56.

On Patience for the Sake of the Love of God, and in What Manner Help Is Obtained Through Patience.

To the degree that a man despises this world in his ardent concern for the fear of God, divine providence draws nigh to him, he secretly perceives its assistance, and is given limpid thoughts to understand it. And even if a man is involuntarily (The Greek has *voluntarily* which is a copyist's error for *involuntarily*) deprived of worldly goods, in proportion to his loss the mercy of God will accompany him and God's love for men will support him. Glory be to Him Who deals mercifully with us (Greek; *saves us*. In Syriac *saves us* resembles *deals mercifully with us*) both in things of the right hand and of the left, and Who by means of these things grants us an occasion to find life! For by involuntary afflictions God impels toward virtue the souls of those who have grown so feeble through their own volition that they are unable to gain life. Now Lazarus the poor man was not deprived of the goods of this world of his own volition, and moreover his body was grievously wounded by sores, but enduring these two bitter sufferings—each one of which was worse than the other—he was finally honored by finding rest in the bosom of Abraham (*Vide* Luke 16:20 ff). God is near to the distressed heart of the man

who cries out to Him in his affliction. For even though in what pertains to the body a man is sometimes reluctant to endure affliction so as to receive help (for the Lord acts like a physician who brings about healing by surgery in cases of grave illness), still the Lord shows great mercy to the man's soul, corresponding to the severity of his sufferings in his tribulation.

If, therefore, the desire of the love of Christ has not become so powerful within you as to render you dispassionate toward every affliction due to your joy in Him, then know

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that the world is more alive in you than is Christ. When illness, and want, and bodily exhaustion, and fear of bodily harm perturb your mind so as to sway it from the joy of your hope and from your unsullied care to please the Lord, then know that the flesh and not Christ lives within you. To speak simply, that which you love and which has mastery within you, this it is which lives in you. If you suffer no lack in anything you need, your body is healthy and no adversaries threaten you, and yet you say that you can advance toward Christ in *limpid purity*, then know that your mind is sick and you are bereft of the taste of God's glory. I pass judgment upon you not because you are such a man, but rather so that you might know how far you are from perfection, even though you may attain in part by your way of life to the measure of the holy Fathers who have gone before us.

Do not say that no man can be found whose mind remains perfectly exalted above his weakness, and that when his body undergoes shipwreck in the sea of temptations and afflictions, his love for Christ can overcome the suffering of his thoughts. I shall refrain from bringing the holy martyrs to mind, lest I be unable to stand up before the profundity of their sufferings; I shall remain silent about how their great patience, which arose from the power of their love for Christ, conquered their extreme bodily affliction and suffering. We shall, then, let these things be because they are such that their memory is grievous for human nature, and men are troubled by the magnitude of the deed and the astounding nature of the spectacle.

But let us at least examine those bereft of God, the so-called philosophers (The passages found hereafter in double brackets are lacking in the Sinai Syriac MS and the Greek. They have been translated from the Syriac printed text) [[so that from the example of their patience we may learn about the weakness of our wills. This, however, we shall put off for a time and bring forth in its own place, when we have come to know that such weakness is also a sign of sickness. We do not judge the matter of ourselves, for we should believe how low we lie and that it is possible for a man to be entirely above this state. The drunkard will never believe that there are many men who do not even drink wine. The licentious man will never believe that there are men who entirely refrain from carnal intercourse. A man who is coerced by a certain lust will never believe that there is someone who is not coerced at all by this lust, even though he may be disquieted by others. And a man chronically ill will never believe that there can be a body that is not harassed by illnesses. Such, then, are those who are unable completely to overcome the doubts of their mind. They will find consolation in saying that there is no man who is entirely liberated from being defeated by adversities. And they do not believe at all that there are men in whom the love of Christ has overpowered the weakness of nature and who totally despise the body and the love thereof. They do not believe that there are those whose mind is not shaken away from its joy in Christ, and who resist their nature's

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propensity to be defeated by the assaults of bodily adversities, and that divine gifts triumph over the impotence of human nature.

I do not mean to say, however, that for such men as these latter the rugged places on the path of God are past, or that there is anyone who lives on this path without undergoing temptation. On the contrary, I say that the man who lives in virtue will find that day by day his afflictions increase, and the more he makes progress, the more he will be found amid adversities. And this, indeed, is the sign of the trueness of a man's course: that he lives a bitter life in this world and that he departs from this body with suffering. For this world is not the world of the righteous, and the righteous cannot dwell in it without sorrows. The will, however, can be strengthened by a divine gift so as to despise afflictions, and it can preserve the mind unshaken through the joy of the love of Christ.

The fact that there have been men who have attained to this, and that even now it is possible for men to become such, is due to the mighty assistance of Christ's gift. O man, do not judge the deeds of all men by your own state! Do not weigh their discipline by the standard of your own weakness! If you wish, begin with hope, and you will receive aid. Do not be incredulous, lest you should be abandoned by Him Who implants these things in you. For being abandoned, you will understand how great your deficiency is by comparison with those who have completely triumphed over the world and its turmoil.

If you do not believe the Church, draw nigh the philosophers and you will see how much power the will possesses, such that it can be lifted above the body and abide unshaken in the decision it has taken. You will see how these men, who did not even know God, displayed to the world great constancy and fortitude in the heroism of their will, and made manifest how great a power our inward nature possesses, such that if it wishes, it can overcome anything. Therefore, when one reads their histories amazement falls upon him at how much power God has laid up in human nature, for if it wills, it can overcome all. But because we do not exercise our will, we loudly preach the weakness of our nature. And while we conceal our nature's fortitude behind the weakness of our will, we say, 'Who would ever be able to overcome these things?']

Now one of the philosophers set a rule in his mind to keep silence for a period of time (Secundus the Philosopher). The king of the Romans was amazed on hearing this, and wished to put him to the test. He therefore ordered that the philosopher be brought before him; but when he saw that he remained silent to every question which he asked him, and gave no answer, the king was enraged, and commanded that he be put to death, since he did not reverence the throne and crown of his glory. But this man was not afraid and held fast to his resolution, and quietly prepared himself for death. The king, however, instructed the executioners,

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saying, 'If he fears the sword and breaks his resolution, slay him; but if he remains constant to his purpose, return him to me alive.' When, therefore, he drew nigh to the appointed place of execution, those to whom he was committed harassed him, constraining him to abandon his resolve and live. But he thought to himself, 'It is better for me to die in the course of one hour and so to hold fast to my purpose on account of which I have struggled so long, rather than be vanquished by the fear of death and outrage my wisdom and incur the reproach of cowardice upon myself due to the necessity of the moment.' Thus he calmly laid himself out to receive the blow of the sword.

Thereupon he was delivered and lived, according to the command. The king, being told this, marveled together with all his subjects and released the philosopher with honors.

Some of these men utterly trampled upon natural lust; others bore abuse easily; others manfully endured grave illnesses without grieving; others proved their patience in great tribulations and trials [[and others performed voluntary labors; and still others endured complete nakedness (wearing nothing except the covering required by chastity), a lonely dwelling-place, and a diet of green shoots. Thus when the king Alexander once went to see one of them (Diogenes the Cynic, 412-323 B.C.), he heard nothing from him except words concerning disdain for the world.

Now they did all these things so that they would not be forced to desist from the reflection and converse of their wisdom. If, then, the work of instruction and the discipline of wisdom are able splendidly to accomplish such deeds without the aid of the fear of God, the light of faith, and hope for the future world, who will not be despised by his conscience? For notwithstanding all the light of Christ that has been shed upon the world, and the many gifts that have been abundantly poured forth, and the divine hope that is confirmed by deeds from day to day, yet even so, adversities and bodily joys still triumph over a man, and he does not remain hard like a diamond by reason of his love for God, joyfully setting all things at naught. But if someone still doubts how men can overcome these things, he should know that a man can do nothing by his own power, and that it is possible with God's help that when his will is readied, it will find all things subdued to it; this every wise man knows.

By such considerations monks have been filled with zeal, giving up and straightway abandoning the world and its possessions. They withstood and patiently endured every adversity, and by constancy of will and our Lord's assistance (for He dwelt among them) they overcame every difficulty. Many of them became such due to the example of the philosophers. For they said: 'These profane sages, who were off the path of God, accepted to endure such things for the sake of a fleeting wisdom and training in the instruction of

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this perishing world. They became estranged from the world and remained aloof from it in their affairs, that they might attain to their will's desire. And although they had no righteousness in their reflections, although in their labors there was no hope for something after death, they did all this, having as their aim an empty hope. How much more so, then, should we persevere for the love of God and despise every hardship on account of the great hope for that which has been promised to us!' By this consideration they were strengthened and mastered the laxity of their thoughts. They entered the struggle and did not turn back until they had received the crown. Thus these men became an example for succeeding generations as well, and they set a pattern for the world, how those who take up this path should enter the struggle]], (Instead of the passage in double brackets the Greek reads; *and if they underwent all these things for an empty glory and hope, must not we the more greatly endure, we monks, called in communion with God?*). May we be found worthy of this by the prayers of our most holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, and of all those who have pleased Christ by the sweat of their contest. To Him be all glory, honor, and worship together with His co-beginningless Father and the co-eternal and life-originating Spirit of one nature, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen, (The invocation and doxology are found only in the Greek printed text).

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Homily 57.

On Those Who Live Near to God and Who Pass Their Days in the Life of Knowledge.

Blessed is he whose life in the world is a prudent life!, (The passages in [[double brackets]] in this homily are lacking in the Sinai Syriac MS and the Greek. They have been translated from the Syriac printed text).

A certain elder wrote various words on the walls of his cell. When he was asked what these meant, he replied: 'These are righteous thoughts that come to me by the agency of the angel who stands by me, and also true deliberations that are stirred in me by nature. I write them down when they come to me, so that I might reflect upon them in my periods of darkness, and they might deliver me from delusion.' [[So ought a man to do all his days.]]

When another elder was called blessed by his thoughts which said, 'Instead of this fleeting world you have been deemed worthy of the hope that is imperishable', he answered and said, 'I am still on the road, and so in vain do you praise me; I have not yet come to the end of my path' (Syriac; *this blessedness is not yet mine for certain; I have not yet reached my home*). [[Verily this reflection is just. It is proper that the day of death should be set as the banner of our victory. Before death no one can be proclaimed a victor. For his enemies are living, his path lies before him, and he does not know what might stand in his way. Nay, his path is not safe and he has not reached the time of security. Therefore neither should that man despair who is enmeshed in evil deeds, since it is possible for him to gain life, for he still lives. There is hope for him even as there is for the man who leads a goodly life. Why, O man, do you buffet the sinner? The labors of your commerce have not yet entered harbor, and God has not yet cut off hope for him over whom you exalt yourself. Shortly he might surpass you in virtue and become nearer to

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God than you are. For death has not yet come and sealed either his mode of life or yours. For so long as a man lives there are many changes in his life, but God looks to the consummation and not to what lies in between. There have been many righteous men who have fallen from their righteousness, and many sinners who have climbed up and taken their place. Therefore let not the righteous man exalt himself, for lo, he still lives; nor let the sinner despair, because God is near to him if he seeks Him, and is prepared to receive him if he makes a change in his way of life and turns toward Him.]]

If you practice an excellent virtue without perceiving the taste of its aid, do not marvel; for until a man becomes humble, he will not receive the reward of his labor. The recompense is not given for labor but for humility. He who maltreats the latter loses the former. The man who has a foretaste of and in truth receives the recompense of good things (Syriac; *the man who has taken up the virtue (excellence) of work*) is superior to him who possesses the work of virtue. Virtue is the mother of mourning, and from mourning humility is born, and a gift is bestowed upon humility. Therefore the recompense is not for virtue, nor for toil on account of virtue, but for humility that is born of both. But if humility is lacking, the former two are in vain.

The working of virtue is the keeping of the Lord's commandments. An abundance

of these labors (Syriac; *the virtue (excellence) of work*) is the good formation of the mind, and this is made steadfast by humility and watchfulness. When the strength of the former (i.e. virtuous works) fails, this takes their place. Christ demands not the doing of the commandments, but the soul's amendment, because of which He gave His commandments to rational beings. The body works equally in matters of the right hand and those of the left, but the mind is either justified or transgresses according to its volition. There are some men who through God's wisdom attain to life by means of things from the left, and there are some who make sin their occupation under the guise of divine pursuits.

The shortcomings of those who watch over themselves are the custodians of their righteousness [[and are permitted by God so that their transgressions and failings should be a cause of humility. This humility protects the labor of great men, not only by preserving them from pride, but also by humbling them with the recollection of their failings; in this manner they also receive a greater recompense]].

A gift free of trials is a disaster to those who receive it. If you do something good before God, and He grants you a gift [[on account of your uprightness toward Him, so as to spur you on the more and gladden you in your labor]], persuade Him to give you knowledge of how it befits you to be humble, or to appoint a guardian over the gift, or to take it from you, lest it prove the cause of your ruin. For not every man is able to keep wealth without doing himself harm.

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The soul which has concern for virtue and lives in exacting diligence and in the fear of God must necessarily suffer sorrow daily, because the virtues are interwoven with sorrows. He who flees afflictions most certainly separates himself from the virtues also. If you desire virtue, surrender yourself up to every kind of suffering, for afflictions give birth to humility. God does not wish that the soul be without care (or *concern, solicitude*), and the man who wishes to be free of care is estranged from the will of God in his thinking. We speak not of care for material things, but care for things that cause affliction and that accompany good works. Until we have attained true knowledge, which is the revelation of mysteries, we advance toward humility by means of trials (or *temptations*). He who rests on his virtue without suffering tribulation has the door of pride open before him.

Who is the man, then, that desires his thought to be unafflicted by sorrows? The mind cannot abide in humility without buffetings; and without humility neither can it persevere with *limpid purity* in prayer to God. First a man withdraws his mind from his proper care and thereafter the spirit of pride approaches him. When he tarries in pride, the angel of providence, who is near him and stirs in him care for righteousness, withdraws from him. And when a man wrongs this angel and the angel departs from him, then the alien (i.e. the devil) draws nigh him, and from thenceforth he has no care whatever for righteousness.

'Before ruin cometh pride', says the wise man (Cf. Proverbs 18:12); and before a gift comes humility. According to the measure of pride found in a man's soul, the ruin of God's chastisement is wrought upon her. [[God does not eschew a man for one sort of sin, nor does He abandon him completely such that he should be despised of Him, until He finds his mind engrossed in intercourse with pride or blasphemy; and the first of these [passions] is the cause of the second. Those who in their thinking depart from the path of humility and are thus deprived of God's help, either fall into the disgrace of

licentiousness, or into blasphemy against divine things, or their intellects suffer injury. Those who exalt themselves for their virtuous way of life fall for the most part into disgraceful licentiousness. But those who exalt themselves for their knowledge and intellectual employment fall into blasphemy against the things of God or into derangement of the intellect.]]

We do not consider it pride when a proud thought passes through the mind, nor when a man is overcome by pride for a time, but when it permanently abides in him. In the first instance there can be contrition; but he who has loved pride knows no contrition. [[For if he felt contrition, he would not persist in pride (This sentence might also be translated *but even if he did feel contrition, he would not linger in it*). The grievous thing is not so much to commit sin or to speak evil against God, as to continue in such evil. The former indicates a feebleness of nature, but the latter, audacity of the will.

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But it is also by the praise of the sons of men that a man becomes deranged in his understanding and he is smitten with insanity, as when he desires to perform deeds among men that are beyond his measure, so that the praise of his greatness may increase and men will perceive him to be near to God. Many have excelled in their disciplines, have grown rich in gifts from God, and have been honored with the grace of working signs. But afterward these same men, who were formerly so honored, underwent a change and were smitten of God, because they were unable to sustain the many gifts they had received and they were carried away by pride. Therefore they were rejected by God as dross and became strangers to the lofty rank they had enjoyed. Many have there been who were quiet and stable of mind, whose words were weighed, whose life was chaste, whose knowledge was envied, but who have become an object of terror to those who knew them and a most lamentable sight for those who see them.

Therefore with great lamentation raise your voice to God and beg for humility. Fill your mouth with weeping and sprinkle dust on your head. Do not rise from the earth, nor lift your head from the ground, until God has had pity on you and caused you by death to pass away from this life, or He has shown you mercy and given you humility. Do not still your mourning until you perceive in your soul that you have received it, lest perhaps you suddenly be found as one of those men. But although you should receive humility, do not raise up your eyes, or look into heaven, or fill your gaze with the sight of men, or give your heart rest from fear and supplication. In such a way you will, perhaps, be preserved from the evils prepared for us by the demons along the pathway of this our way of life, a pathway filled with shadows, narrow, beset with many stumbling-blocks, defying our knowledge by reason of its incomprehensibility to human nature.

Believe me, my brother, and give credence to my words: you are not sufficient to comprehend all the power of the demons and your knowledge is not sufficient to withstand their artifices. Now, therefore, permit much light to be shed forth within you, even that light (i.e. humility) wherein the love of Christ is found, and you will be laid up within the rampart of divine mercy, because of the honor of the humility you have attained.

But if you enter into the gloom of temptations because this light (i.e. humility) recedes, and you are permitted to be tried by that dense darkness of soul which those who are abandoned by God and are surrendered into the hands of the demons experience, then you will know that you are before them like an infant who does not know where to turn. All your knowledge will be in turmoil like that of a little child. And your mind which was

firmly established in God, the accuracy of your knowledge, and your sound thinking will be immersed in an ocean of doubts. By one thing alone can you vanquish them (i.e. the demons): by humility. As soon as you take hold of this all their power vanishes.

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Do not consider it a sign that your soul is healthy when you smoothly wend your way with joy in God, but when the bonds of earthly matters (Literally; *the bondage that is through things*) do not distract your mind from the love of God and neighbor, and when your ties with certain persons do not distract you from your care for our Lord, to Whom be glory, and may He keep us near Him and in converse with him! Amen.]]

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Homily 58.

On the Many Changes That Cleave to the Mind and That Are Tested by Prayer.

To choose what is good belongs to the good volition of the man who desires it; but to realize the choice of the good volition belongs to God. For this a man has need of God's help. Therefore we accompany our good desire with constant prayer, and we pray not only because we need help, but also so that we can distinguish whether it is pleasing to God's will or not. For not every fair-seeming desire falls into the heart from God, but only that which is profitable. It happens that a man desires good, but God does not help him therein; for a semblance of a good desire may also enter a man from the devil. It seems to the man that this is for his help, but often it is beyond his measure. The devil himself contrives this for the man's detriment and compels him to seek a thing, although he has not yet attained to this mode of life; or because it is alien to his monastic state (Literally; *to the degree of his schema*); or because when he moves the man to accomplish his desire, it is not the right time to do so (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek clearly said the same originally, but now it reads, *or because it is not the time when this can be accomplished or moved*); or because the man has neither the knowledge nor the bodily strength sufficient for it; or because the present moment does not lend us a hand. The devil strives in every way under the guise of some good thing to trouble the man, or to harm his body, or to set a hidden snare in his intellect.

Howbeit, let us make constant prayer fervently, as I said, with respect to the good desire that arises within us, and let each of us say: 'May Thy will be done, until I bring to completion the good work which I have desired to do, if it be pleasing to Thy will. For it

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is easy for me to will it, but to do it is not within my power, unless I receive grace from Thee; though in truth both are Thine, "to will and to do" (Philippians 2:13). For it is not without thy grace that I was persuaded to accept this desire incited within me, or was I moved by it.' The habitual practice of the man who desires good with a discerning intellect is this: in prayer to labor for it continually, and through prayer to receive power that aids him in doing it and wisdom to distinguish what is genuine from what is counterfeit. The good is discerned by much prayer, by toil and watchfulness, incessant yearning, constant tears and humility, and by assistance from Heaven, especially when a man has proud thoughts which oppose it; for these obstruct God's help from us, though we may abolish them by prayer.

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Homily 59.

On Love for the World.

True is the word of the Lord which declares that no man possessing love for the world can attain to the love of God (*Vide* Matthew 10:37). And likewise no one who has communion with the world can have communion with God, and no one who has concern for the world can have concern for God (*Vide* Matthew 6:24). Now we abandon the things of God for the sake of vainglory (Syriac; *putting aside those things that are because of vainglory*) or it often happens that for the lack of some bodily necessity many of us turn aside to other things. Such men have avowed themselves to labor for what pertains to the Kingdom of the Heavens, yet they do not remember the Lord's promise which He has spoken, 'If you make your every concern to be for the Kingdom of the Heavens, I will not deprive you of what is needed by visible nature, but all these things shall come to you with the rest. For I will not let you take thought for them' (Cf. Matthew 6:33). Will He take thought for the birds which lack rational souls and have been created for our sake, and yet be neglectful of us? Not so. The man who is concerned with things spiritual, even with one of them, has his bodily needs provided for without his taking any thought for them, either with regard to the scarcity of what he needs or the time [needed to supply it]. A man unduly concerned with the needs of the body involuntarily falls away from God. But if we are diligent in attending to what is done for the Lord's Name, He Himself will take thought for both, according to the measure of our diligence [[and the gravity of our need of each]].

However, we should not seek to make trial of God in our souls, wishing to receive bodily benefits in return for our labors, but should turn all our labors toward the hope

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of things to come. For the man who, with his soul's fervent love, has once and for all surrendered himself to virtue, and is possessed of a longing to bring its work to perfection, will never again be concerned with the body's needs, whether or not he is in want. With regard to this it must be said that many times God permits the virtuous to be tempted (or *tried*) in such matters as these, and moreover He allows many evils to rise against them from every side. He smites them in their bodies, like Job, and brings them to poverty, causes them to be repudiated by mankind, and strikes them in whatever they possess; their souls alone are not approached by harm. For it is not possible, when we are faring on the way of righteousness, for us not to encounter gloom, and for the body not to travail in sickness and pains, and to remain unaltered, if indeed our love is to live in virtue. But the man who of his own will lends himself to the slaying (Greek; *fear* in most MSS. The printed text has *envy*. But the Syriac has *murder*. It should be noted that in Byzantine script the *B* often looks very much like *v*) or the destruction of his own life or to anything else that is harmful, is under condemnation. Now if, while a man is walking in the path of righteousness, and is making his way toward God, and has many similar companions, he encounters in this path some affliction of this sort, he must not turn aside from his way. Rather, he should accept whatever it is joyously, without scrutiny, and give thanks to God, because God Himself has sent him this gift. That is to say, because he has been deemed worthy to fall into temptation for His sake, and to become a partaker of the

sufferings of the prophets and the apostles, and of the rest of the saints who endured tribulations for the sake of God's path, whether from men, from demons, or from the body. For without the bidding of God it is impossible that tribulations should be permitted to arise; but they occur so as to be for a man the cause of righteousness. It is not possible that God should benefit the man who longs to be with Him otherwise than by bringing temptations upon him for the sake of the truth. Further, without a gift from Christ a man cannot himself become worthy of this greatness, that is, on account of these divine things to enter into temptations and to rejoice. Saint Paul also testifies to this. For so great is this, that he plainly calls it a gift that a man should be made ready to suffer for hope in God through faith. Thus he says, 'Unto you it is given from God, not only to believe on Christ, but also to suffer for His sake' (Philippians 1:29). Therefore, when you are unoppressed do not rejoice; and when tribulations come upon you, do not be sullen, accounting them as foreign to God's way. For His path has been trodden from the ages and from all generations by the cross and by death. But how is it with you, that the afflictions on the path seem to you

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to be off the path?, (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek MSS have numerous variants). Do you not wish to follow the steps of the saints? Or have you plans for devising some way of your own, and of journeying therein without suffering?

The path of God is a daily cross. No one has ascended into Heaven by means of ease, for we know where the way of ease leads and how it ends. God never wishes the man to be without concern (that is, concern over the truth) who gives himself up to Him with his whole heart. But when God perpetually sends him griefs, a man knows thereby that he is under God's providence.

Those who persevere in the midst of temptations are never allowed by providence to come into the hands of demons, especially if they kiss the feet of the brethren, and cover their faults and hide them as if they were their own. Whoever wishes to be without any concern in this world and, while desiring this, yearns besides to spend his days in virtue, is repulsed by (Literally; *fed up with, has taken his fill of*) the way of God. For it is not only of their own will that the righteous struggle in their good works, but through temptations they also involuntarily come upon great conflicts that their patience might be tested. The soul that holds fast to the fear of God is not frightened by anything that harms her bodily, since she puts her hope in Him, henceforth even unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 60.

That Without Necessity We Should Not Desire or Ask to Have Manifest Signs Wrought by Our Hands or Unto Us.

Although the Lord is always (Greek; *whenever the Lord is*. The Syriac word *had* means both *although* and *when*) near the saints helping them, He does not manifestly show His power by some work and visible sign without need, lest the help we receive should be made ineffectual and turned to our injury. Thus does the Lord act when He provides for His saints, though indeed His hidden care is not absent from them even for a moment. In all things, however, He leaves them to show forth a struggle and to labor in prayer in accord with their strength. But if they encounter something which is so difficult

as to overcome the degree of their knowledge, and they grow weak and fall short of it because their nature is not sufficient for the task, then He accomplishes it Himself, according to the greatness of His dominion, and according to what is profitable for them; and as He knows [best], they receive help. In so far as possible He strengthens them secretly, until they become strong in the face of their tribulation. For the Lord dispels the entanglement of their tribulation by the knowledge which He grants them, and by divine vision He wakens them to glorification that profits them in both ways. If, however, the occasion requires manifest action, He will of necessity do this also. The Lord's ways are most wise and they are employed at a time of want and necessity, but not by chance.

He who without necessity dares to meddle in this (i.e. the workings of divine providence), or who entreats God with the desire that miracles and mighty signs be wrought by his hands, is tempted in his mind by the devil who mocks him. He is a boaster and sick in his conscience. For we ought to entreat God for help in the time of affliction. But it is very dangerous to make trial of God

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without necessity, and the man who desires to do so is truly not one of the righteous. But to do what is the Lord's, even though one does not wish to, this is found with the multitude of the saints (This sentence is extremely obscure in Syriac and has been literally rendered into Greek. The Syriac (and so the Greek) could also be translated *but that which the Lord does without willing to is found by the multitude of the saints*, but this seems unlikely). The man who wishes and desires a sign according to his own will when there exists no necessity for it, falls away headlong from vigilance and stumbles with respect to the knowledge of the truth. For if his entreaty is heard, the evil one will gain a hold over him as one who has been audacious before God, and will lead him into greater peril. Not only do truly righteous men desire no signs, but they turn away from those which are granted to them; not only do they wish these not to be wrought before the eyes of men, but they do not even wish them to be wrought secretly within themselves.

For behold, because of his *limpid purity* one of the holy Fathers was given the gift to foreknow those who were coming to him; but the elder prayed to God that the gift might be taken from him, and he entreated other holy men to pray for the same. If some of them received gifts, it was only by the constraint of necessity that they accepted them, or because of their simplicity. But as for the rest, the Divine Spirit moved in them, and in no wise by chance.

Consider what the holy and blessed Ammoun said to God when he had set out to receive the blessing of Saint Anthony the Great and lost his way. [[He did not say, 'O God, take me and set me down where Anthony is', though he could have done something like this because of his nearness to God, and because of his necessity; for it is said that those who wander in that desert incur danger. Notwithstanding all these things, he did not say this to God, but said only this word: 'O Lord, let not Thy creature perish.' Do you see the humility, do you understand the true wisdom of the Fathers? And God, because He knew that the man was true and not led in his deliberations by pride, showed unto him His care for the saints, and did to the man as his greatness deserved. And so, although Ammoun did not beseech, God did what was meet. For Ammoun lay down to sleep; and rising he saw as it were the hand of a man hanging above his head in the sky and showing him the way, till it went and stood still above the cave of the blessed Anthony. Do you perceive God's care for His servants? It would have been possible even not to allow him to lose his way, but God desired that Ammoun should know how much He cared for him.

So He let him stray and showed him afterward the way clearly, not through a man, but by an angel and in the air.]] (The passages in double brackets have been translated from the Syriac printed text. They are lacking in the Sinai Syriac MS and the Greek). Remember also Abba Makarios [[when he went to Skete bearing baskets. For he grew fatigued and weary, and he sat down because he could not walk any longer. But he did not ask from God that He do anything unto him by His power to

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give him comfort. Rather, he trusted himself to God, saying, 'O God, Thou knowest that I have no more strength!' Then at once, in a moment, he was taken up by divine power and placed there whither he wished to go, both he and his baskets]].

Those who are truly righteous always think within themselves that they are unworthy of God. They are proven to be truly righteous by the fact that they consider themselves wretched and unworthy of God's care. They profess this both openly and in secret, taught to do so by the Holy Spirit, lest they should lack the heedfulness that befits them, and so that they might labor so long as they are in this life. God has prepared a time of rest in the age to come. Those who have the Lord dwelling within them do not wish to be at rest or to be freed of tribulations, although at times they are secretly granted consolation in spiritual things.

And this does not belong to the nature of virtue, to wit, that when a man attains to it, he should be free of care and labor; but the dwelling-place of the Spirit consists in ever striving to subdue oneself, even though there exists a way to accomplish each matter with ease. For it is the will of the Spirit for those in whom He dwells, that they should not become accustomed to sloth. Neither does He urge them to seek for ease (or *rest, repose, leisure, comfort*), but He rather incites them to labor and to give themselves up to greater afflictions. He teaches them vigilance and makes them strong by temptations and brings them near to wisdom, for such is the will of the Spirit, that those beloved of Him should live in hardships.

The spirit of the devil, not the Spirit of God, dwells in those who pass their life in ease. [[The Spirit of God is not pleased with bodily comforts, nor does He find a life of ease acceptable, but one of hardships. The devil, on the contrary, is pleased with a life that is filled with comforts, according to the testimony of our Lord. The Holy Spirit withdraws from ease, as the Holy Fathers have said, 'The Spirit of God does not dwell in a body that is relaxed by ease.' Rather, the Spirit looks to find where men constrain themselves by afflicting their bodies and readying their souls, and He makes His abode with them, teaching them how to live during the short time of this life. Those who love God live out their lives amid every sort of affliction. For all the righteous have expelled this world from themselves by means of hardships. And to the extent that they draw nigh to God, their hardships increase.]]

One of those who love God said, 'I have given oath that each day I die' (Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:31). By this the sons of God are set apart from the rest of mankind: they live in afflictions, but the world rejoices in luxury and ease. For it is not God's good pleasure that those whom He loves should live in ease while they are in the flesh. He wishes them rather, so long as they are in this life, to abide in affliction, in oppression, in weariness, in poverty, in nakedness,

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isolation, want, illness, degradation, buffetings, contrition of heart, bodily hardship,

renunciation of relatives, and sorrowful thought. He wishes them to possess an aspect differing from all creation, a habitation unlike that of the rest of men, and to live in a solitary and quiet dwelling, unknown to the sight of men and bereft of every gladdening thing of this life. They mourn, but the world laughs; they are somber, but the world is joyous; they fast, but the world lives in pleasure. They toil by day, and by night they compel themselves to ascetic struggles in straitness and weariness. Some of them abide in voluntary afflictions, others in toilsome warfare against the passions; some are persecuted by men; others are endangered by passions, by demons, and by like assaults. Some of them were punished, others were put to death, others wandered about in sheepskins, and the rest (Cf. Hebrews 11:37 ff. The Syriac printed text adds considerably to this list of hardships). [[But what is more astonishing than all, is that although they were found in such hardships, they did not expect to be rescued or to be given refreshment, in accord with the saying of the blessed Apostle (*Vide* Hebrews 11:13). Glory be to Him Who gives them crowns, Who by the suffering of the Cross perfected this path after enduring all such things Himself, so that His saints may also follow in His footsteps!]]

In these men the word of the Lord is fulfilled that says, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation' (John 16:33), but in Me ye shall rejoice. [[By the power of this rejoicing these saints were given fortitude patiently to endure. May God, by Whose power the saints persevered in these struggles and did not grow feeble in their hope, confirm His faith in us all! Amen. In truth, without afflictions there is no life.]]

God knows that [[two joys cannot abide in one man simultaneously; and because]] it is impossible for those who live in bodily ease to hold firmly to His love, He restrains His servants from ease and its enjoyment. May Christ our Saviour, Whose love vanquishes every bodily death, manifest in us the power of His love! Amen.

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Homily 61.

On the Reasons Why God Permits Temptations to Come Upon Those Who Love Him.

By the love which the saints show for God on account of the things they suffer for His name's sake (when they endure straitness and do not forsake that which God loves), (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has *when He keeps those whom He loves in straitness but does not forsake them*), their hearts acquire the boldness to gaze toward Him without a veil and to beseech Him with confidence. Great is the power of bold prayer. For this reason (i.e. so that they acquire boldness) God allows His saints to be tried by every sorrow, then to experience anew and to prove His aid, and to understand how great a providence He has for them, for in their perils He is found to be their Redeemer. And again, He does this so that they may gain wisdom from temptations, lest they be unlearned men and be deprived of the two parts of training, and so that they may acquire the knowledge of all things, lest perhaps they be mocked by the demons. For if He exercised them only in that which is good, they would lack training in the other part and would be blind in battles.

If we say that God guides His saints without training and without their knowledge of it (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has *that God trains His saints without their knowledge of it*), we must conclude that He wishes them to become like oxen and asses and creatures which possess no freedom. If a man is not first tried by the experience of evils, he has no taste for the good. Hence when in evils he meets with that which is good,

he will be unable in knowledge and freedom to make use of it as being his very own. How sweet is knowledge that is gained from actual experience and from diligent training, and what

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power it gives to the man who through much experience has found it within himself, the same is known by those who have been assured of and have seen the help it affords them. They learn the weakness of their nature and the help of Divine power when God first withholds His power from them [[while they are amid temptations]]. Thus He makes them conscious of their nature's impotence, the arduousness of temptations, and the cunning of the enemy. Thus He gives them to understand against whom they must wrestle, what kind of nature they are clothed with, how they are protected by Divine power, how far they have advanced on the way, to what height God's power has raised them up, and how powerless they are before the face of every passion when the Divine power is withdrawn from them. Through all these things they acquire humility, cleave closely to God, look for His help with expectation, and persevere in prayer. Whence could they have received all these boons, if they had not had experience of the many evils which God allowed them to undergo? As the Apostle says, 'And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan' (2 Corinthians 12:7). But by the experience of many interventions of divine assistance in temptations, a man also acquires firm faith. Henceforth he has no fear, and he gains stout-heartedness in temptations from the training he has acquired.

Trial (or *temptation*) is profitable for every man. For if trial was profitable for Paul, 'Let every mouth be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God' (Romans 3:19). Ascetic strugglers are tried, that they may add to their riches; the slothful are tried, that they may thereby guard themselves from what is harmful to them; the sleepy are tried, that they be armed with wakefulness; those who are far away are tried, that they may draw nearer to God; those who are God's own are tried, that with boldness they may enter into His house. The son who is not trained will receive no profit from the riches of his father's house. For this reason, then, God first tries and afflicts, and thereafter reveals His gift. Glory be to our Master Jesus Christ Who brings us the sweetness of health by stringent medicines!

There is no man who will not feel oppressed at the time of training. And there is no man who will not find the time bitter wherein he is given the virulent potion of trials to drink. Without temptations a man cannot acquire a strong constitution, yet to endure with patience is not within our power. For how should the clay vessel endure the vehemence of the waters, if the divine fire had not hardened it? If we submit ourselves to God, while beseeching Him humbly with perseverance in unceasing desire, we shall certainly receive all, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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Homily 62.

On How a Man Can Know the Measure in Which He Stands by the Thoughts That Are Stirred In Him.

As long as a man is negligent, he fears the hour of death; when he draws nigh to

God, he fears to stand before the judgment; but when he proceeds forward with his whole heart, both fears are swallowed up by love. Why is this so? Because while a man remains in the knowledge and manner of life of the flesh, death terrifies him. When his knowledge becomes natural (Greek; Literally; *pertaining to the soul*. Here Saint Isaac is contrasting this knowledge to the foregoing carnal knowledge) and he leads a good manner of life, his mind is at all hours occupied with recollection of the judgment to come. For then he stands aright with respect to his nature, he is moved in the level proper to the soul, he is guided by his knowledge and by his discipline, and he is well fit to draw nigh to God. But when a man has reached the knowledge of the truth by the active perception of the mysteries of God and becomes steadfast (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has *and by steadfastness*) in his hope in things to come, he is swallowed up by love. The carnal man fears [death] like a beast fears slaughter. The rational man fears the judgment of God. But the man who has become a son is adorned by love and is not taught by the rod of fear; he says, 'But I and my father's house will serve the Lord' (Joshua 24:15).

He who has attained to the love of God no longer wishes to remain in this life, for love abolishes fear. My beloved, I have become foolish, and I cannot bear to guard the mystery in silence, but I am become a fool (Cf. 2 Corinthians 12:11) for the sake of the profit of my brethren. For true love is not able to tarry in any mystery without her beloved. Often when I was writing these things my fingers failed me in setting down everything on paper, and they were

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unable to endure the sweetness that descended into my heart and silenced my senses. Blessed is the man who reflects always upon God, who has withheld himself from every worldly thing, and ever remains with Him alone in the converse of His knowledge! If he can forbear, it will not be long before he beholds much fruit.

Joy that is in God is stronger than this present life. Whoever has found this will not only make no scrutiny of the passions, but will not even give a thought to his own life, nor will he have awareness of anything else, if in truth he has been accounted worthy of this joy. Love is sweeter than life, and understanding according to God, from which love is begotten, is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. [[What is this sweetness of love that is sweeter than life?]] It does not seem grievous to love to undergo a bitter death for the sake of her beloved. Love is the offspring of knowledge, and knowledge is the offspring of the health of soul; health of soul is a strength which comes from prolonged patience.

Question: What is knowledge?

Answer: The perception (The Syriac employs two different, but related, words here. See page 11, footnote, to whit; This word also means: *consciousness, sensation, awareness*, or in this sense, *experience*. This is the *earnest* of which Saint Isaac speaks) of life immortal.

Question: And what is life immortal?

Answer: Consciousness (repeat of page 11 footnote) in God.

Knowledge concerning God is king of all desires and every sweetness of the earth is superfluous to the heart that has received it. For there is nothing which can be likened to the sweetness of the knowledge of God.

A Prayer. O Lord, fill my heart with eternal life!
Eternal life is consolation in God; and he who has found consolation in God considers every worldly consolation to be superfluous.

Question: Whence does a man perceive that he has received wisdom from the Spirit?

Answer: From the knowledge that teaches him in his hidden depths and in his senses the ways of humility and reveals to him in his intellect how humility is received.

Question: Whence does a man perceive that he has attained to humility?

Answer: From the fact that he regards it as odious to please the world either in his association with it or by word, and the glory of this world is an abomination in his eyes.

Question: And what are the passions?

Answer: They are besetting assaults which are produced by the things of this world and incite the body to satisfy its necessary functions; these cease not to assault us so long as the world stands. But these assaults do not enter the heart of a man who has been deemed worthy of divine grace (Syriac; *a divine intellect*. Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:16), who has tasted and become conscious of something higher; for in their place another and better desire has gained the mastery, so that neither these assaults themselves nor anything born of them approach the heart of such a man,

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but they remain outside, inactive. This is not because the assaults of the passions have ceased to exist, but because the heart which receives them is now dead to them and lives in something else. And again, it is not because a man has relaxed the watchfulness of discernment and works, but because his mind is no longer troubled by anything, for his conscience is satiated in the enjoyment of something else.

A heart that has received an awareness of spiritual things and the divine vision of the age to come in all exactness is in its conscience with respect to the memory of the passions like a man who, being satiated with sumptuous food, pays no attention to a dish of lesser quality that is set before him; he has no desire for it, but rather despises and recoils from it. This he does not merely because of the despicable and hateful nature of the latter, but also because of his satiety with the former delectable food which he ate. He is not like that young man who wasted his inheritance and thereafter desired to fill his belly with husks, since he had already spent his paternal wealth (*Vide* Luke 15:11 ff). [[Now when a man loses his wealth and is reduced to poverty and is deprived of the sumptuous and excellent food in which he was wont to revel in his palatial home, he eventually forgets his former ways and the taste of those magnificent dishes, his belly is no longer filled with the savor of those fattening foods, and necessity constrains him to turn to a very paltry fare. And it is just so with the man who has been vouchsafed health

of soul. For if he is deprived of that divine sweetness because he disregards his duty and slumbers in the sleep of carelessness, then he will turn again to an abominable fare, befouled with all impurity and uncleanness, and his conscience will not hesitate for a moment, since his soul's belly is empty. In very truth, even bitter things are sweet to the hungry soul.]]

The man to whom a treasure is entrusted does not sleep. If we observe the law of vigilance and practice discernment with knowledge, from which the fruit of life is reaped, then the struggle with the assaults of the passions will in no wise draw near our mind. Entrance to the heart is denied them not as a result of struggle, but because of the repletion of our conscious mind, and the knowledge with which our soul is filled, and because of the desire for the wonderful divine visions to be discovered in this knowledge. These things hinder the assaults of the passions from approaching the soul, not because the soul has desisted from watchfulness and the practice of discernment (which, as I have said, guard the knowledge of the truth and the soul's light) but because the mind is not engaged in any struggle, as we have explained. The food of poor men is vile to the rich, just as the food of sick men seems vile to the healthy. But prosperity and health are preserved through vigilance and diligence. As long as a man lives, he has need of vigilance, diligence, and alertness to guard his treasure. But if he leaves his proper limits, he is overtaken by illness

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and is plundered. [[And although for a long time strength will persist in him because of his former state of health, yet when it receives no increase, he will be reduced to feebleness and poverty. Does not nature itself instruct us concerning these things? And what heavenly thing is there, no likeness of which can be found in our nature that enables us to speak of it? For behold, even our Lord confirmed all spiritual things by examples from the things of nature and in this manner instilled their power into our souls. And this was not only with regard to those small earnestings of things yonder which we now enjoy, but also with regard to that true [resurrected] body and the perfection and truth that will be ours in the age to come. Do not marvel at what I say.]]

A man must work not only until he sees the fruit, but until the very time of harvest. By harvest I mean the grave (Greek; *but until his very departure he must struggle*). For often ripe fruit is suddenly destroyed by a hailstorm. He who becomes enmeshed in external affairs and becomes lax in conversations cannot be assured that he continues in good health.

[[A Prayer. O Jesus Christ, King of the ages, deem me worthy of the desire that is in Thee!

Great is the man who perseveres in converse with God, who unites his life to it; nay, he is greater than any other man upon the earth, and this work is greater than any other performed by rational creatures.]]

When you pray, say this prayer: O Lord, deem me worthy to be truly dead to the converse of this world! Herein you have enclosed the entire supplication. But strive diligently also to fulfill this work in yourself, for if work follows upon prayer, then in very truth you have taken a firm stand in the freedom of Christ. Mortification to the world consists not simply in refraining from taking part in intercourse with any worldly thing, but also in a man's not desiring any of the goods of the world in the intercourse of

his intellect.

If we accustom ourselves to a good meditation, we shall be ashamed of the passions whenever we encounter them (those who know this have experienced it within themselves) and even the very causes of the passions will make us ashamed when we draw nigh to them. When you desire to pursue some beautiful work for the love of God, put death as the limit of your desire. In this way you will be deemed worthy to ascend in actual deed to the level of martyrdom in every suffering and injury which you may encounter within this limit, provided that you patiently endure unto the end and do not grow indolent. Meditation upon an impotent thought weakens the power of patience, but a steadfast mind gives a strength that nature does not possess to the man who follows its meditation.

A Prayer. O Lord, account me worthy to hate my life for the sake of the life which is in Thee!

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Life in the world is like a manuscript of writings that is still in rough draft. When a man wishes or desires to do so, he can add something or subtract from it, and make changes in the writings. But the life in the world to come is like documents written on clean scrolls and sealed with the royal seal, where no addition or deletion is possible. Therefore, so long as we are found in the midst of change, let us pay heed to ourselves, and while we have power over the manuscript of our life, which we have written by our own hand (Syriac; *and our manuscript is [still] in our hands*. Reading a *dalath* for the initial *waw* would give the Greek reading), let us strive earnestly to add to it by leading a good manner of life, and let us erase from it the failings of our former life. [[We have power to erase our debts from it as long as we are here. And God will take into account every change we make in it, so that we may be deemed worthy of eternal life before we go before the King and He sets His seal upon it.]] For so long as we are in this world, God does not affix His seal either to what is good or to what is evil, even up to the moment of our departure when the service of our fatherland is completed and we set out upon our journey. And as Saint Ephraim says, we should make our soul like a ready ship that does not know when a wind will come upon it, or like an army that does not know when the trumpet of battle will sound (The Syriac printed text adds *or like a tenant who does not know when the landlord will give order to depart*). And if, he says, merchants are so well prepared for the sake of a little gain, though they will perhaps soon return from their voyage, how much more should we make ourselves ready, and in advance prepare ourselves before the coming of that decisive day, that bridge and door into the new age? May Christ, the Mediator of our life, grant us to arrive at that decisive judgment in full preparation (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has *grant us preparation to [be able to] endure that awaited judgment*. Here the Syriac word *to arrive at* can also mean *to sustain, to endure*, hence the Greek rendering), He that has glory, worship, and thanksgiving unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 63.

On Why Men Who Are Unspiritual in Their Knowledge Investigate Spiritual Things in Accord With the Grossness of Their Flesh, and on How the Mind Can Be Raised Above*

the Grossness of the Flesh, and What Is the Cause of Why a Man Is Not Liberated From It; and on When and by What Means the Mind Can Remain Without Phantasies at the Time of Supplication.

*[See page 352, last footnote, to whit: Greek; Literally; *pertaining to the soul, soulish*. It is translated by the word *natural* in the Authorized Version (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14). English has no suitable equivalent for this term. The sense, as it is used here, is given by the following quotations which explain Saint Paul's usage in First Corinthians: 'The man who is *psychikos* is he who lives according to the flesh and whose mind is not yet illumined by the Spirit; he possesses only that innate human insight which the Creator has placed in the souls of all men' (Saint Cyril of Alexandria *Commentary On First Corinthians* [PG 74.865b]). 'The Apostle calls *psychikos* the man who is satisfied with his own thoughts alone, who does not accept the teaching of the Spirit, and is not even able to understand it' (Theodore of Cyrus *Commentary On First Corinthians* [PG 82.245a]). In this sense *psychikos* can be translated: carnal, unspiritual, profane, material-minded).

Blessed be the majesty of the Lord Who opens the door before us, so that we might have no other wish save the desire of Him! For thus do we abandon all things and our mind goes forth in quest of Him alone, having no care which might hinder it from the divine vision of the Lord. The more, my beloved brethren, the mind takes leave of care for the visible and is concerned with the hope of future things (according to the measure of its elevation above care for the body and all deliberation with respect to such care) the more it is refined and becomes translucent in prayer. And the more the body is freed from the bonds of worldly affairs, the more the mind is also freed from the same. The more the mind is freed from the bonds of worldly concerns, the more it becomes limpid. And the more it becomes limpid, the more it is refined; and the more it is refined, it is exalted above the concepts of this age which bear the stamp of grossness. Then the mind will know how to behold God as He is and not as we are. If a man does not first become worthy of revelation, he will never be able to understand it. And if he does not enter into purity, his intuitions will not be limpid so as to behold secret things. Until a man is liberated from all visible things by this acquisition of his, he will not be free of concepts concerning them, nor will he be void of murky thoughts. And where there is darkness and the

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web of thoughts, there also are the passions. For if a man is not liberated from all these and from their causes, as we have said, his mind will not look upon secret things (The Syriac printed text reads *he will not look upon the secret things of the mind*. The difference is caused by the presence of a single *dalath*). Therefore the Lord gave as a commandment that before all else a man should hold fast to nonpossessiveness and should withdraw from the turmoil of the world and release himself from the cares common to all men. He said, 'Whosoever forsaketh not his entire human state and all that belongeth to him, and renounceth not himself, cannot be My disciple' (Cf. Luke 14:33).

Now He said this in order that a man's mind should not be harmed by sight, hearing, concern for worldly things, either through their increase or loss, or by men. And by binding our mind with hope in Him alone, the Lord has turned toward Himself the entire concern of our thoughts; He has bound in Himself the entire care of our thinking

through our being set free from all things, so that by reason of this we may ardently desire converse with Him in our perpetual concern for Him alone. But prayer also is in need of exercise, so that by its prolonged practice the mind may gain wisdom. For after we have acquired nonpossessiveness which frees our concepts from bondage, prayer requires long continuance, because the mind is trained by perseverance and much time. Thus it knows to banish its deliberations, and learns from much experience that which it cannot gain from elsewhere. Every discipline is strengthened by the discipline which precedes it, and that which comes before it is necessary for the discovery of what follows it. Seclusion (The literal sense of this word is *withdrawal into solitude*) precedes prayer, and seclusion itself comes about for the sake of prayer. Prayer is necessary for acquiring the love of God, because from prayer we discover the causes for loving God.

We must also know, beloved brethren, that every secret converse, every good care of the intellect directed toward God and every meditation upon spiritual things is delimited by prayer, is called by the name of prayer and under its name is comprehended; whether you speak of various readings, or the cries of a mouth glorifying God, or sorrowing reflection on the Lord, or making bows with the body, or psalmody in verses (Syriac; [*the chanting of*] *the alleluias of psalmody*), or all the other things from which the teaching of genuine prayer ensues. From genuine prayer the love of God is born, for love comes of prayer, and prayer from the practice of seclusion. We have need of seclusion, that we may have the possibility to converse with God by ourselves. But seclusion is preceded by the abandonment (The Greek word can mean both *renunciation* and *abandonment*. The Syriac means only the latter) of the world. For if a man does not first abandon the world and abstain from all therein, he will not be able to dwell in solitude. And again, abandonment of the world is preceded by patient endurance. Patience is preceded by hatred of the world, and hatred of the world is preceded by fear and yearning. For if

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the fear of Gehenna does not terrify the mind, and if yearning does not make it long for the [future] blessings, a man will not experience the hatred of this world. If he does not hate the world, he will not be able patiently to endure the deprivation of its [[intercourse and]] comfort. If the mind has not first acquired patience, a man will be unable to choose a wild and desolate place, bereft of any inhabitants. And if he does not choose for himself a life of seclusion, he will be unable to persevere in prayer. And if he does not constantly converse with God and continue in those deliberations and ruminations which are conjoined to prayer, and in the various forms of prayer's teaching (which we mentioned above) then he will never gain experience of love.

The love of God, therefore, comes by converse with Him; the converse of prayer (Greek; *the practice and meditation of prayer*) comes through stillness; stillness comes through non-possessiveness; non-possessiveness through patience; patience through the hatred of lust; the hatred of lust is born of the fear of Gehenna and the earnest expectation of [future] blessings. Lust is hated by the man who knows its fruits, and what it prepares for him, and of what good things it deprives him. Thus every discipline is connected with that which precedes it, and takes increase from it, and proceeds to another which is higher. But if one of these [[middle ones]] should fail, those following will be unable to stand, and it will appear that all are undone and lost. What is more than this lies beyond explanation. But to our God be glory and majesty unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 64.

On Prayer, Prostrations, Tears, Reading, Silence, and Hymnody.

*[[Excellent Admonitions That Teach Watchfulness and Rules for an Ascetical Way of Life, That by Them a Man May Acquire for Himself a Comely Discipline.**

*(The passages in [[double brackets]] are translated from the Syriac printed text. They are not found in the Sinai Syriac MS or the Greek.)

Repentance is the mother of life. It opens its door to us when we take flight from all things. By means of the intellect's extraordinary intuitions repentance renews in us the grace that we have lost after baptism by leading lax lives. By water and Spirit we have put on Christ (Cf. John 3:5; Galatians 3:27), though we did not perceive His glory. Through repentance we enter into His delight by means of the knowledge of those extraordinary intuitions that repentance causes to dawn within us.

He who is deprived of repentance is deprived of the delight to come. He who is close to all things is far from repentance. And he who is far from all with discernment repents in very truth. When a man goes far away from men and concentrates himself, then immediately the thoughts (Literally; *motions*) of repentance will be imprinted in his intellect. He receives from repentance the seed of life, and being like an infant, a keen sorrow is stirred in him. In his heart throbs the recollection of the life of the age to come, expectation of the resurrection, and rumination upon the judgment.

Do not think that without divine repentance contrition can descend into the mind.

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Through a gift of grace (or *an overshadowing*) the mind receives contrition secretly by divine mercy in [the form of] poignant compunction due to desire for [true] life. As Abba Evagrius says (Evagrius was born in Pontus of Asia Minor in the mid 4th century. After enjoying the friendship of Saint Basil and Saint Gregory, he retired to the deserts of Egypt where he dwelt with various Egyptian fathers. Some of his writings were, however, strongly influenced by his studies of Origen and for this reason they were condemned by the Fifth Oecumenical Council (A.D. 553). Before this time a Syriac translation was made of his writings which suppressed clearly heterodox statements and, consequently, enjoyed much popularity among Syriac-speaking monastics. Although in 7th century Persia some doubts were expressed about certain teachings, most of his writings continued to be held in great esteem), 'Fervent compunction of soul is a purifying herb; through the holy angels the Lord gives it for diligent cleansing of passions to those who repent.' And again he says, 'Fervent compunction of soul is the fire of a furnace that by Christ's grace comes upon the soul at the time of prayer and thereupon the faculty of recollection attains to divine vision. The absence of compunction is, however, cured by living water.'

The beginning of repentance is unfeigned humility. Elegance of clothing is the disruption of repentance. The path to wisdom is orderly control of the limbs. The exuberance of the body is the unsettling of wisdom. True wisdom is gazing at God. Gazing at God is silence of the thoughts. Stillness of the thinking is quietness with discernment. The confused impressions of the senses are a well-spring of thoughts.

Perception of God is an abyss of humility. True *theoria* is mortification of the heart. A heart that is truly dead to the world is wholly astir in God. True mortification is the movement of life. It is better to breathe in life by staying away from all than to edify the living by departure from breathing (Perhaps this means *to die for some noble cause*). Better is he who edifies his soul than he who edifies the whole world. It is better to imbibe life than to distribute life. He whose outward members are dead gives life to his inward motions. He who allows his outward members to live deadens the members of wisdom. Humility with discernment is true knowledge. True knowledge is a fountain of humility. He who is humble in heart is humble in body. He who is shameless in his body is shameless in his heart. He who is agitated in body is agitated in his heart. He who is agitated in his heart is frivolous in mind. The man who is frivolous in mind journeys by evil pathways. He whose paths are evil is dead during his life. If you love humility, do not be a lover of finery. The man who loves finery cannot endure disrepute. It is hard for him to undertake lowly works and he is ashamed to submit himself to his inferior.

The servant of God does not adorn his body. Know that anyone who loves to adorn his body, though he possesses excellent works, is sickly in his conscience. No one who is enamored of visible affluence is able to acquire true love for another man. All who run after honors are slaves of this world. If you despise all who do such things, then refrain from these deeds as well. Humility and chastity are assisted by one and the same kind of

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reproach. But do not seek the truth of these matters from a man who loves honor and adornment.

If you love chastity, do not love wandering about. The occurrences that befall you by reason of your wandering do not allow you vigilantly to retain chastity in your soul. No man who loves wandering possesses chastity. And do not believe that anyone who is entangled with men of this world is humble. Every man who loves God loves a quiet life. It is impossible for a man who wanders about to preserve the truth untainted in his soul.

Many show an appearance of repentance, but no one truly possesses it save the man who is sorely afflicted in his heart. Many run to find contrition of heart, but no one finds it in very truth save he who possesses unremitting silence. Every man who is a servant of God loves contrition. Know that every loquacious man is inwardly empty, though he discourse on amazing things. Inward sorrow is a bridle for the senses. If you love the truth, love silence. This will make you illumined in God like the sun and will deliver you from the illusions of ignorance. Silence unites you to God Himself.

Whenever you find it delightful to kneel [in prayer], do not be carried off [by the thought] to put an end to it. Would that this were never cut short for as long as you are in this life! And whenever your mind is concentrated, do not cut off your prayer.]] Do not count as idleness the protraction of unwandering concentrated prayer because you abandon the psalms [for the sake of it]. More than the practice of psalmody love prostrations during prayer. When prayer gives you her hand she will take the place of your office. And when at the very time of your office you are granted the gift of tears, do not count the delight which you find in them as an interruption of your liturgy. For the fullness of prayer is the gift of tears.

[[Do not be surprised if sometimes when you are kneeling in prayer and your mind is concentrated upon it, your mind grows silent and desists from prayer. You will find this to occur both in your office and in reading.]] At the time when your mind is

scattered, persevere in reading rather than in prayer. [[The course of your reading should be parallel to the aim of your way of life.]] Not all books, however, are profitable for the concentration of the mind (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has *are profitable, as has been said*). [[Most books that contain instruction [in doctrine] are not useful for purification. The reading of many diverse books brings distraction of mind upon you. Know, then, that not every book that teaches about religion is useful for the purification of the consciousness and the concentration of the thoughts. But do not dispute about the precise truth of these things with a man who does not know the truth.]]

Love stillness far more than labors. Give more honor to reading, if possible, than to standing, for it is a source of pure prayer. But do not neglect standing entirely, and be

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on the alert against mental wandering. Psalmody is the root of the ascetic discipline. Know also that psalmody recited with a wandering mind is more profitable than labor of the body (This is the reading of the Syriac MSS and the Syriac printed text. The Greek MSS and the Greek printed text say the opposite here, namely *that labors of the body will profit more than psalmody recited with a wandering mind*). Sorrow of mind is superior to bodily toil. In a period of lethargy be vigilant and stir up your zeal a little, for zeal greatly awakens the heart and inflames the thoughts of the soul. Just as natural anger is a help against lust, so it is also in a time of lethargy (There are many different readings in the Greek MSS for this phrase. This is the Syriac reading), because it melts the chillness of the soul. Lethargy usually comes upon us from one of these reasons: either from an overladen stomach, or from exhaustion caused by works.

Good order in one's labor is a light to the understanding. There is nothing like knowledge. Let every prayer that you offer in the night be more precious in your eyes than all your activities of the day. Do not weigh down your belly, lest your mind become confused and be troubled with mental wandering when you stand up at night, and lest your members be enervated and you find yourself filled with womanish languor ((re: 'womanish languor'; please see Apologetic at the beginning of this Work for a more in-depth apologetic for gender-related truisms)). Nay more, lest, while your soul is darkened and your thoughts are turbid, you should not be able to collect your thoughts at all in your psalmody on account of that darkness. And further, lest the taste of all things should become insipid to you, and the verses chanted in your psalmody should hold no sweetness for you, that very psalmody the variation of which your intellect was wont to savor with delight through the acuteness and lucidity of your mind. When the good order of the night's discipline is disturbed, then during the labor of the day the intellect also becomes confused; it travels in darkness and it does not take delight in reading, as it is accustomed to do. For whether it is moved to prayer or to study, confusion assails its thoughts like a hurricane (Syriac; *confusion comes over its thoughts like dense mist*). The delight given to ascetics by day pours forth upon their pure intellect from the light obtained by their night's activity. From a man who has not gained experience of prolonged stillness do not expect to learn anything further about the good things of asceticism, even if he is a great sage and a teacher, having many achievements behind him.

Be on your guard, moreover, not to exhaust your body completely, lest lethargy gain strength against you and chill your soul to the savor of her work. It behooves every man to weigh his discipline as though on scales. At a time when you have taken your fill, be on your guard for a while against being free with yourself. Let your sitting be in

chastity at the time of your bodily need. But most of all, be chaste and pure when you are going to sleep, and be closely observant not only of your thoughts, but also of your members. Beware of conceit at the time of changes toward the good. In your prayer earnestly show the Lord your weakness and your unskillfulness before the subtlety of conceit, lest you

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be given up to be tempted in shameful things. For fornication follows upon pride; and upon conceit, delusion.

Labor in the work of your hands according to your need, or rather, so as to bind yourself to your stillness. Be not weak in your trust in your Provider, for God's wonderful dispensations take place among the members of His household; and even without employing the hands of men He provides for those who dwell in the uninhabited desert waste and trust in Him. If the Lord should visit you with respect to bodily matters when you are struggling uniquely in the care of your soul, and the thought is roused in you that the credit for all this provision is due entirely to yourself, it is from the wiles of the devil, the manslayer. As soon as you accept this thought, the provision of God will be withheld from you and at the same moment a fast number of temptations will break out against you, either from the negligence of the [brother] who provides for you, or from the renewal of the pains and sicknesses of your body. Now God does not turn away from us on account of the mere movement of a thought, but only when our mind persists in it. For God does not chastise and judge a man for an involuntary movement, not even if we agree with it for a moment. And if, at the very moment when we spur the passion on, compunction should overtake us, then the Lord will not call us to account for such negligence. Yet He does call us to account for that which our thinking has truly accepted, and looks upon shamelessly, and has accepted as fitting and profitable, not considering it a terrible thing to muse upon it. Let us always pray this prayer to the Lord: O Christ, the Fullness of truth, let Thy truth dawn in our hearts that we may know to walk in Thy way according to Thy will!

When an evil thought is newly sown in you, either about things afar off or about those formerly known, and it manifests itself constantly in your mind, then know most certainly that it lays a snare for you; awaken yourself, and be alert in time. If, however, it is among those things that come from the right hand, from the good side, then know that God wishes to grant you a certain means (Syriac; *portion, share*) of life, and for this reason it is ceaselessly stirred within you in this unusual manner. But if it is an obscure thought and you are in doubt concerning it, and you cannot distinguish clearly if it is one of your own, or whether it is a thief, a helper, or a foe in ambush hidden under a fair guise: then prepare yourself against it with prolonged and most poignant prayer, both night and day, with much vigil. Do not thrust it away, yet do not agree with it; but make your prayer in earnest and with ardor concerning it. Do not be silent in calling upon the Lord, and He Himself will show you from whence it comes.

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On Silence.

Love silence above all things, because it brings you near to fruit that the tongue cannot express. Let us force ourselves first to be silent, and then from out of this silence something is born that leads us into silence itself. May God grant you to perceive some

part of that which is born of silence! If you begin with this discipline, I know not how much light will dawn on you from it. Do not infer, O brother, from what is said of that wondrous man Arsenios, that when the fathers would visit him, and the brethren would come to see him, and he would sit with them and remain silent, and in silence would let them go, do not infer, I say, that he did this completely voluntarily, except at the beginning when he used to force himself to it. After a time a certain sweetness is born in the heart out of the practice of this labor, and it leads the body by force to persevere in stillness. A multitude of tears is born to us in this discipline through a wonderful divine vision of something that the heart distinctly perceives (The Greek MSS have different readings here. Some read *perceives in those [tears?]*, others *perceives in itself*. The Syriac literally reads *of something at which things the heart perceives* (the verb *perceive* takes the preposition *at*, but this is superfluous in English). It is the repetitious *at which things (b-hon)* which has caused the variant readings in the Greek MSS), sometimes with pain, sometimes with amazement. For the heart humbles herself and becomes like a tiny babe, and as soon as she begins to pray, tears flow forth in advance of her prayer. Great is the man who by the patience of his members achieves wondrous habits in his soul! When you put all the works of this discipline on one side and silence on the other, you will find the latter to be greater in weight. The admonitions of the Fathers (Greek; *of men*) are many. When a man draws near silence, the keeping of these is superfluous for him, and works themselves become superfluous; he is found to have gone beyond them, for he has approached perfection.

Silence is also an aid to stillness. How is this? Because it is impossible, when we dwell in a place inhabited by many, that we should not be met by other men. And neither was that peer of the angels, Arsenios, who loved stillness more than all other men, able to escape this. For we are obliged to encounter the fathers and brethren who dwell with us, and sometimes we meet them unexpectedly, since a man cannot avoid going to church or elsewhere. When, therefore, that man who is worthily called blessed beheld all these things, and saw that it would not be possible to avoid them as long as he was near the habitation of men; and when he found that it was often impossible, because of the place of his abode, to be far withdrawn from the proximity of men and from the monks who settled in those parts—then from grace he learned this way of life: unbroken silence. And if out of necessity he ever opened his door to some of them, they were gladdened only by the

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mere sight of him; but conversation with words, and its employment, were rendered superfluous between them.

By this sight alone many of the fathers also reached the condition of being able to keep guard on themselves, and they gained an increase of spiritual riches from the instruction they received from the sight of this blessed man. Some of them bound their tongue by means of a stone or tied themselves with a cord; or they exhausted themselves with extreme fasting whenever they went out to the society of men, because hunger avails much in the constraint of the senses. [[And many did these things so as to acquire that watchfulness over oneself which is so comely to look upon and which makes one a possessor of life.]]

I have found many fathers, O brother, great and wonderful men, who cared more for the good ordering of the senses and the behavior of the body than for labors. For out of this is born good order of the thoughts. There are many causes that confront a man

independently of his will and make him go beyond the bounds of his freedom. And unless he is found on his guard over the senses through a continuous habit previously formed within him, they will prevent him for a long time from coming to himself and from finding his former peaceful state.

The heart's progress is reflection upon its hope. Progress in our discipline is release from all things. The remembrance of death is a good fetter for the outward members. A lure for our soul drawing her toward life is the joy that blossoms forth in the heart from hope. A drink (The word in the Greek printed text is *growth, augmentation*. Most Greek MSS have, however *quantity*. But the Syriac has *a drink*. Finding the copyist's error unclear, someone apparently changed it.) of knowledge is continual trials that the intellect receives each day from within because of our two changes (i.e.; to the left and right, toward evil and good). [[The budding of the heart is conviction in the resurrection through faith that hope receives inwardly.

Deem me worthy, my Lord, to behold Thy mercy in my soul before I depart this world, and at that hour to sense within me comfort along with those who in good hope have gone forth from this world. Open my heart, O my God, by Thy grace and purify me from communion with sin. Make smooth in my heart the path of repentance, my God and my Lord, my hope and my boast, my strong refuge, by Whom mine eyes are illumined, and give me understanding through Thy truth. Deem me worthy, O my Lord, to taste the delight of the gift of repentance, whereby the soul is separated from the working of sin and the will of flesh and blood. Deem me worthy, my Lord, to taste contrition wherein the gift of pure prayer is deposited. May I attain, my Savior, to the wondrous crossing whereby the soul forsakes the visible world and there arise in her new thoughts for entrance into the spiritual world, and the experience of new perceptions!

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The man who begins and finishes well lays his way of life upon this foundation, and he unceasingly entreats God that he be accounted worthy of this very perception. For herein is planted the knowledge of that future state through imperishable hope, the state which is reserved for men by God's grace until the consummation of this world. But the man, on the other hand, who starts out in the reverse way goes from above downward. That is, he begins with joy and ends with lamentation, and he is devoid of knowledge and hope like a formless body, one that has not reached perfection through the reception of a soul because it has not completed its period of gestation in the womb and gained the maturity of formed life.

Aversion to converse with the world is a sign of a soul that has perceived her hope. Secret wakefulness is sleepiness to things visible. The heart's weapon is faith in Christ. The man who in the desire of his hope even defies death reckons death as naught, and he disregards the barrenness of the place where he dwells, his battles with the demons, his estrangement from men, and his abstinence from the consolations of this world. What, indeed, is the consolation derived from visible things and association with them in comparison to the delight of hope that is perceived in the heart? For he is like a man who has lost consciousness of his body by reason of the inebriation of his joy. And by reason of the burning fervor of his faith that inflames his heart all visible things are hidden from him, and he does not know that he is found in creation, because of his body's ardor and his soul's intellections. And by the faith of his mind it seems to him that he is like a man who already stands in that Kingdom.]]

Though at times despondency befalls on account of our solitude (allowed, perhaps

by way of Divine oeconomy), yet through our heart's faith we possess the ineffable consolation of faith [[whereby we reckon afflictions and even death as naught]]. Well did one of the Godbearing Fathers say, 'Ardent love of God is sufficient consolation for a believer even though he should lose his life.' For, as they say, what harm can tribulations do to a man who holds luxury and ease in contempt for the sake of the good things to come?

I advise you this also, my brother: let the scale of mercy always be preponderant within you, until you perceive in yourself that mercy which God has (The Greek reads [*which*] you have. The Syriac has *god* as the subject of the phrase. In Greek; *God* being understood) for the world. Let this our state become a mirror where we may see in ourselves that likeness and true image which naturally belong to the Divine Essence. By these things and their like we are enlightened so as to be moved toward God with a limpid intellect (Greek; *volition*). A harsh and merciless heart will never be purified. A merciful man is the physician of his own soul, for as with a violent wind he drives the darkness of the passions out of his inner self. This is a good

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investment to make with God, according to the Gospel's word of life [['Blessed is the merciful man, for he shall obtain mercy' (Cf. Matthew 5:7), not only yonder, but here also in a mystical way. Indeed, what mercy is greater than this, even that when a man is moved with compassion for a fellow man and becomes a partaker in his suffering, our Lord delivers his soul from the gloom of darkness—which is the noetic Gehenna—and brings her into the light of life, thus filling her with delight. Well has Evagrius said, 'A clear pathway comes from showing mercy'.

Therefore, as I said, let a merciful heart preside over your entire discipline, and you will be at peace with God. Take heed lest at any time evil should befall someone by your agency, even if he be an evil man. And when it is in your power to deliver the iniquitous man from evil, do not neglect to do so. I do not mean that if the affair is far removed from you, you should go and cast yourself into works of this sort, for deeds of this kind do not belong to your way of life. If, however, the affair is placed directly into your hands and is within your power (for in such a case as an accidental occurrence the affair has come to you as a trial, as it were, and God by His permission has brought it upon you to prove you) then take heed to yourself lest you become a partaker of the blood of the iniquitous man by not taking pains to deliver him. Nay, try with your whole soul to rescue him, even to the point of dying for his sake. At that hour you will be a martyr in very truth and be like Him Who for the sake of sinners accepted death on the Cross. Entreat God that this [opportunity] may not escape you. But even though a man be worthy of receiving evil, let him receive the judgment of his deed at the hands of others. It is not your affair to scrutinize the worthiness of his deeds. Let only good come upon him at your hands.

Bring to mind Him Who upholds all things, and how the deeds of every man are before His eyes and they stand out before Him more clearly than the sun; and remember that by the mere breath of His mouth He is able to destroy all men if He so wished. You, however, have not been appointed to decree vengeance upon men's deeds and works, but rather to ask for mercy for the world, to keep vigil for the salvation of all, and to partake in every man's suffering, both the just and sinners. Know further that if a man is worthy [of retribution], then not much time will pass before justice binds him fast by the hands of others who are apt for this work. Thus you will save your soul and become a living

martyr. Still, not even this should you pray for or reflect upon, but you should make supplication that God's mercy come upon him so that he be changed and become conformed to God's will, and that he depart life in righteousness and not in retribution for iniquity.

Instead of an avenger, be a deliverer. Instead of a faultfinder, be a soother. Instead

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of a betrayer (i.e. one who gives another over to punishment), be a martyr. Instead of a chider, be a defender. Beseech God in behalf of sinners that they receive mercy, and pray to Him for the righteous that they be preserved [in their righteousness]. Conquer evil men by your gentle kindness, and make zealous men wonder at your goodness. Put the lover of justice to shame by your compassion. With the afflicted be afflicted in mind. Love all men, but keep distant from all men. Recollect death and prepare yourself for your entrance thither, and embellish your course. Remember that the sins of all men go before them to the judgment seat.

Do not fall into despair because of stumblings. I do not mean that you should not feel contrition for them, but that you should not think them incurable. For it is more expedient to be bruised than dead. There is, indeed, a Healer for the man who has stumbled, even He Who on the Cross asked that mercy be shown to His crucifiers He Who pardoned His murderers while He hung on the Cross (*Vide* Luke 23:34). 'All manner of sin', He said, 'and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men' (Matthew 12:31), that is, through repentance. For a brief moment of mourning He pardoned Simon (Peter) who had denied Him, and after His resurrection He commanded him to become the head of His flock. Three times He asked him, 'Dost thou love me?' on account of his threefold denial of Him, so as to confirm his pardon (*Vide* John 21:15 ff). Christ came in behalf of sinners to heal the broken of heart and to bandage their wounds. 'The Spirit of the Lord', He says, 'is upon Me, to preach good tidings unto the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim forgiveness to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind' (Cf. Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18), and to strengthen the bruised by forgiveness. And the Apostle says in his epistle, 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners' (1 Timothy 1:15). And his Lord also testifies, 'I am come not to call the righteous, for they that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick' (Mark 2:17). Further, He says that a certain creditor had two debtors and because neither had the wherewithal to repay him, he forgave them both, when, that is, they entreated him (*Vide* Luke 7:41, 42).

Our frail nature would not be strong enough if God's justice were to rise up to take vengeance (or *make exaction*). Therefore He employs mercy, since at all times we are held by debt. But do not sin, O man, expecting that you will repent; and do not succumb [to sin] being confident of forgiveness! Remember that death will not delay. Do not craftily seek means to draw nigh the pleasure of sin with a knavish mind! God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7). His knowledge precedes your thoughts. Affliction will overtake you suddenly, and when you cry out, He will not answer you.]]

When you approach your bed, say to it, 'This very night, perchance, you will be my

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tomb, O bed; for I know not whether tonight instead of a transient sleep, the eternal sleep of death will be mine.' And so, as long as you have feet, run after work, before you are bound with that bond which cannot be loosed again once it is put on. [[As long as you

have hands, stretch them out to Heaven in prayer, before your arms fall from their joints, and though you desire to draw them up, you will not be able.]] As long as you have fingers, cross yourself in prayer, before death comes [[loosing the comely strength of their sinews]]. As long as you have eyes, fill them with tears [[before that hour when dust will cover your black clothes and your eyes will be fixed in one direction in an unseeing gaze and you will not know it. Nay, fill your eyes with tears as long as your heart is controlled by the power of discernment and before your soul is shaken by her departure from it and the heart is left like a house deserted by its owner. O wise man, do not be enticed by expectancy of a long life!]] For just as the rose wilts at a breath of the wind, so at a little puff on even one of the elements of which you are composed [[your knees will suddenly grow feeble without your expecting it. And while you are thinking it is nothing and you are caring for the ailment, suddenly that stern one (i.e. the angel of death. See, for instance, 2 Kings 24:16) will draw nigh, he who ridicules the wise. O the wretchedness of our nature! How we are held fast by the love of this substance wherein God does not wish to leave us!]], (Instead of this passage the Greek and the Sinai MS have *you will die*).

Fix your departure in your heart, O man, by always saying to yourself: 'Behold, the messenger is at the door, he who comes for me. Why am I idle? My going forth is forever; there will be no return.' [[Pass the night in this reflection; muse upon this thought throughout the day. And when the time of departure comes, greet it with gladness, saying: 'Come in peace! I knew that you were coming and I have not neglected anything that could prove useful to me on the way.'

Take provisions for your long way, O wise man! Remove the heaviness of sleep from your heart, O invited guest! Set your baggage in order for departure, O sojourner! The morningtide is nigh at hand, O wayfarer; why do you sleep? Arise and prepare yourself, O mariner who is to voyage on the sea! Arise and make ready the tackle of your ship, for you do not know at what hour the wind will carry you out! Be ready and prepared for the coming of the [angel of death] who will cause our form to perish. 'Their form', he says, 'shall waste away in Sheol' (Psalms 48 (49):14 in the Peshitta). They will be withdrawn from the comely glory of their nature and their bodies will become a desolate place. Recollect at all times that lamentable sight of corruption, that formless dispersion of your senses, that ruin of the edifice of your body, and how your wholesome constitution will become mud in Sheol. Blessed is the man who greets the recollection of this destruction with joy! Blessed is he who with good

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hope awaits that deed so replete with mystery wherein is concealed the wonder of the Creator's power!, (i.e. the resurrection of the dead).

Spiritual meditation is constant and earnest expectancy of what will be after the resurrection. The inception of this reflection in the mind is the [crossing of the] borderline of repentance. That which retains repentance in the soul is continual rumination upon things future. The man who is moved by repentance has migrated through his hope to the world to come. But the mind of the man who has forgotten it dwells in this world.]]

A man who loves conversation with Christ, loves to be alone. But he who loves to linger with many is a friend of this world. [[Repentance is perpetual sorrow of heart while meditating on that great and inexpressible state, saying, 'How can I reach that ineffable entrance?']] If you love repentance, love stillness also. For outside of stillness repentance

cannot be brought to completion. And if anyone should dispute this, do not argue with him [[for he does not know what he says. But if he knew what repentance is, he would also know its place, and that it cannot be brought to perfection amid turbulence.]] And if you love stillness, the mother of repentance, then take pleasure in the small physical discomforts, harsh reproaches, and injustices endured for its sake. For without this preparedness you will not be able to live in stillness with untroubled liberty. If you set these things at naught, then in accord with the good pleasure of God you will become a partaker of stillness and abide steadfastly in it as God wills. The ardent love of stillness is a constant expectation of death. Whoever enters into stillness without this continual rumination will not be able to bear those things that we are obliged to undergo and to endure from all sides. [[To die for God's sake and to live in God is the fulfillment of life. 'To ponder upon death for God's sake brings our intellect to union with God' as Evagrius says.]]

But know this also, O man of discernment: we do not make our habitation alone with our soul and practice stillness and seclusion for the sake of the many works of the monastic ordinances and in order to accomplish these. For it is well known that fellowship with many facilitates this because of bodily vigor (i.e. the body is better sustained in a community and has more strength to complete the various regulations). But if these works were necessary, there would not have been Fathers who abandoned the company and fellowship of men, some of whom inhabited tombs, and others who chose seclusion in a solitary place. Such men greatly enfeebled their bodies in this manner, and neglected them, and could not fulfill their rules because of their weakness and the physical hardship; and even when grave illnesses befell them, they bore them with pleasure throughout their whole lives. Among these men were some who, on account of their weakened body, could not even stand on their feet, or offer the customary prayer, or give praise; they said no psalm and they did

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nothing else that is performed with the body. Instead of all the monastic ordinances the infirmity of their body and their stillness sufficed them. This was their way of living all the days of their life. And in all this supposed idleness not one of them wished to forsake his cell. Or because they did not perform any of the monastic canons, they did not wish to wander about or to be gladdened by the chanting in the churches and by the divine offices performed by other men.

The man who is conscious of his sins is greater than he who profits the whole world by the sight of his countenance. The man who sighs over his soul for but one hour is greater than he who raises the dead by his prayer while dwelling amid many men. The man who is deemed worthy to see himself is greater than he who is deemed worthy to see the angels, for the latter has communion through his bodily eyes, but the former through the eyes of his soul. The man who follows Christ in solitary mourning is greater than he who praises Christ amid the congregations of men. Let no one object here, citing what was said by the Apostle, 'I would wish that myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren' (Romans 9:3). He who has received the power of Paul is enjoined to do this. But Paul was guided by the nod (or *beckoning, sign*. The Greek has *spirit* which the Syriac shows to be a copyist's error) that was made to him so that he should profit the whole world, as he himself bore witness, for he did not do this of his own will. 'For necessity is laid upon me', he says, 'yea, woe to me if I preach not the Gospel' (1 Corinthians 9:16). And the election of Paul had in view not the course of his own repentance, but the

preaching of the Gospel to mankind, and he received superabundant power.

Let us then, my brethren, love stillness until the world is made to die in our heart. Let us always remember death, and by this meditation let us approach God with our heart, despise the vanity of the world, and hold its pleasure as something contemptible. With a sickly body let us gladly endure the continual idleness of stillness, so that we may be deemed worthy of delight together with those who, in the dens and caves of the earth, await the lauded revelation of the Lord from Heaven. For to Him, and to His Father, and to His Holy Spirit be glory, honor, dominion, and majesty unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 65.

An Epistle of Our Father Among the Saints Isaac the Syrian, Sent to His Friend, Wherein He Expounds Things Respecting the Mysteries of Stillness, and How Many Monks, Being Ignorant of These Things, Are Negligent in This Wonderful Activity, and That the Majority of Them Hold on to Their Cells by Reason of the Tradition Current Among Monks; and Together With This, a Brief Collection of Sayings Useful for the Practice of Stillness.

Being obliged by duty to write you, O brother, concerning necessary things, I am acknowledging your love by my letter in accord with the promise which I gave you. Because I have found you determined to run the course of abiding in stillness with exacting discipline, I have taken the concise sense of the words I heard from discerning men about the work of stillness and combined it with my own first-hand experience of these very things. This I shall imprint in your memory with this short writing; and you, on your part, will help yourself by this epistle if you read it with your accustomed zeal. For you will not approach the reading of the sayings gathered in our epistle as some ordinary reading, but with the understanding of wisdom, and you will receive it as a light for your other reading because of the great power hidden in it. [[For the intellect is greatly strengthened by reading such things, and from this it receives a weapon against the distraction of the thoughts and against the despondency that is wont to arise from severe labors and prolonged dwelling in stillness. By means of the ardor with which it is endued from what it encounters in reading it turns its back on the world while caring for its own activities.]], (The passages in double brackets are translated from the Syriac printed text. They are lacking in the Sinai Syriac MS and the Greek).

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And this is the aim of this epistle: that you learn what is the life of stillness, what is its work, what mysteries are concealed in this discipline [[mysteries that are hidden from many, but after the discovery of which strenuous men run, seeking to attain them in stillness]], and why some men belittle the righteousness that is practiced in the society of men and prefer to it the tribulations and struggles of a silent and solitary abode. [[From the understanding of these things and because of what they find in this epistle, men will call blessed the solitaries who pass their lives in this world by remaining concentrated and by themselves. But to those who have no acquaintance with these matters this instruction, with all its admonitions, about the stages that are in stillness will be superfluous. I write here to wise men, and I offer advice with love.]]

If you wish to find imperishable life in your short days, O brother, let your entry

into stillness be made with discretion [[that you may find the profit which wise men expect to gain by the discipline of solitude]]. Investigate its work and do not run after a name, but enter, delve, strive, learn, attain [[and practice all the wondrous, noble ways of the work of stillness, so as to comprehend]] together with all the saints what is the depth and height and breadth and length (Cf. Ephesians 3:18) of this [[infinite]] discipline. [[For the riches that its merchants strive to acquire are without limit. Do not rest until you have gone throughout all the pathways of its works.]] In every human action from its commencement to its completion there is a means employed and a hope which looks for some profit from the action, and this it is which spurs on the mind to lay a foundation for doing it. This aim fortifies the mind to endure the hardship of the work, and the mind receives consolation from gazing toward its goal. And like a warden, this goal holds the intellect fast until the deed is done.

For the discerning man the venerable work of stillness is a harbor of mysteries, a goal toward which the mind gazes from the beginning of the construction till the completion of the edifice and in all a man's prolonged and difficult labors. And as the eyes of the helmsman look to the stars, so the solitary throughout the whole course of his journey looks, with the inner eye of divine vision, to the goal which he fixed in his mind from the first day when he gave himself to voyaging over the billowy sea of stillness, until he discovers that pearl for the sake of which he set off into the unfathomable deep of the ocean of stillness. The watchful gaze of his expectation makes light for him the heavy burden of his labor and the perilous hardships which befall him on his way. Whoever does not fix this aim in himself when he begins to practice stillness, labors without judgment in that work which is his duty, even as a man who fights the air. Such a man will never be liberated from the spirit of despondency throughout his whole life. And one of two things befall him: either he cannot endure the insufferable burden and is defeated and completely

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abandons stillness, or if he perseveres in it, his cell becomes for him a dungeon and he is fried therein because he does not know to rest his hope on the consolation that is born of the work of stillness. For this reason he cannot even make entreaty with pain of heart or weep in prayer or aspire to those things that our Fathers, being filled with mercy and loving their children, have left in their writings as tokens for the needs of our life.

Now one of them said, 'The profit which I gain from stillness is this: when I depart from the dwelling wherein I abide, my mind is void of the preparations of war and turns to a superior activity.'

Likewise another said: 'I run to stillness so that the verses of my reading and prayer should become sweet to me. And when my tongue becomes silent because of the sweetness that comes from understanding them, then, as it were into a kind of sleep, I fall into a state where my senses and my thoughts become inactive. When by prolonged stillness my heart becomes tranquil and undisturbed by the turmoil of recollections, waves of joy ceaselessly surge over me, waves arising from inward intuitions that beyond expectation suddenly blossom forth to delight my heart. And when these waves approach the barque of my soul, they plunge her into veritable wonders in the stillness which is in God, taking her far from the whisperings (Greek; *words*) of the world and the life of the flesh.'

And again another said: 'You will know the degree of what lies hidden within you from the difference of your reflections, I mean those which you have continually, not

those set astir by some circumstance and which pass away after an interval of time. There is no man clad in a body whose dwelling is not visited by a wayfarer from the two changes of good and evil. If a man is zealous, on account of nature he is visited by changes in insignificant matters, for fathers are the fathers of their children; while if he is indolent, he is visited by changes in lofty matters on account of the leaven of that grace which was poured into our nature [[because of which it has become related to the family of the Kingdom on high]], (This passage is obscure. In our understanding the saint says that the indolent man is subject to serious falls because he neglected and trampled upon the grace he received).

Another said: 'Choose for yourself a work filled with delight: constant night-vigil, whereby all the Fathers divested themselves of the old man and were accounted worthy of the renewal of the intellect. During those hours the soul experiences that immortal life,

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and by means of this experience she puts off the vesture of darkness and receives the [[gifts of the]] Spirit.'

And another used to say: 'When a man sees different faces and hears many kinds of voices foreign to his spiritual rumination and he converses and holds intercourse with them, his mind will not be free so that he can see himself in secret, remember his sins, demolish his thoughts, pay attention to what befalls him, and attend to hidden prayer.'

And again: 'It is impossible without stillness and estrangement from men to bring the senses into submission to the sovereignty of the soul. For the noetic soul is hypostatically united and conjoined with the senses and it is involuntarily carried away by her thoughts, unless a man is vigilant in secret prayer.'

And again: 'O how greatly does vigil by its wakefulness, together with prayer and reading, cause delight, gladden, rejoice, and cleanse the soul! This is known pre-eminently by those who practice these things throughout the whole of their lives and struggle in strict and exacting asceticism.'

Therefore, O man who loves stillness, place before yourself these indications, taken from the teaching of the words of the Fathers, as a sort of target, and direct the course of your labor so as to draw near to them. But before all, prudently seek out what is most suited to agree with the aim of your labor, for without these practices you will be unable to know the knowledge of the truth. Wherefore I tell you, strive beyond measure to show your perseverance in them.

Silence is a mystery of the age to come, but words are instruments of this world. A faster endeavors to liken his soul to the nature of spiritual beings. Through silence and continual fasting a man sets himself apart so as to persevere in his divine labor within his hidden self. In these very mysteries (i.e. silence and fasting) the invisible hosts perform the liturgy that is filled with divine mysteries and the holiness of the Supreme Being Who rules the ages (This is the reading of the Sinai Syriac MS. The Greek reads: *In these mysteries his liturgy—filled with divine mysteries—is performed by the invisible hosts and [in?] the holiness of the Supreme Being Who rules created things*). Some of the saints set themselves apart in order to enter into the mysteries of God and were marked by this seal; some were entrusted with the governance of a strong people; others were entrusted to receive authority over the elements and by a great wonder the natures of created things were obedient to the command of their words; and some of them were entrusted to reveal hidden things, concealed in the secret silence of the Lord, for the renewing of those who are in the middle state (The Syriac also means *the community of*

men). Indeed, it would not have been fitting that such mysteries should be administered by men whose belly is full and whose intellect is confused because of intemperance. The saints, however, did not dare to converse with

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God or raise themselves toward His hidden mysteries, unless their limbs were weak, their color pale by reason of gnawing hunger, and their intellect quiet [[in its perceptivity]] through renunciation of every earthly thought.

When the power of stillness overshadows you on account of prolonged abiding in your cell, laborious works, watchfulness over hidden things, and restraint of the senses from every encounter, then at first you will find a joy which without cause overcomes your soul at times and seasons; and thereupon according to the degree of your purity your eyes will be opened to see God's creative power and the beauty of created things. And when the intellect will be guided by the wonder of this divine vision, then night and day will be as one to it because of its awe at the glorious creations of God. Hereafter the awareness of the passions is stolen from the very soul herself by the sweetness of this divine vision, and by means of divine vision she enters into the two levels of noetic revelations which are placed in order after this one, which both come of purity and transcend it. May God deem us worthy of them. Amen.

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Homily 66.

A Study and Elucidation With Examples Concerning Diverse Concepts and on What Use Each Has.

The intellect (This word, in Syriac; *mad'a*, has been added from the Syriac. The Greek has somehow omitted it and reads *spiritual perception is that which is conditioned*) is spiritual perception that is conditioned to receive the faculty of divine vision (Syriac *vision*) even as the pupils of the bodily eyes into which sensible light is poured (The Greek has *eyes which have in themselves sensible light*. This is probably a confusion of *to have* with *to pour*). Noetic vision is natural knowledge that is united [[by power]] to the natural state and it is called natural light. A holy power is grace, the sun (Greek; *a holy power is a grace (gift) of the sun*. The Syriac and the context that follows show this to be an error. The error might have originated from the Syriac MS which the translators used, where simply the letter *alap* at the end of *grace* could have been missing) that enables discernment among things that lie between light and divine vision. Natures are things that are intermediate and become discernible for divine vision by means of light (This sentence is very obscure in both Greek and Syriac). Passions are like hard substances; they take up a middle place between light and divine vision and prevent the latter from discerning the difference of things. Purity is the translucence of the noetic air, and in the bosom of this air our nature (Literally; *the nature that is in us*. The Syriac printed text has *the spiritual nature in us*) takes wing. If the intellect is not sound and healthy in its natural properties, knowledge is not active in it, just as when bodily sense has been somehow impaired, it is deprived of sight. But if the intellect is sound and still there is no knowledge, then the intellect, lacking it, is unable to make a distinction between spiritual things, just as an eye, although it is sound and healthy in all things pertaining to it, is often dull

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with respect to its visual power. And if these things (i.e. the intellect, divine vision, etcetera) are preserved in their own state, but grace is not near them, they all remain inoperative in the work of discernment, just as in the hours of the night, because of the sun's absence, they remain unseeing (I mean the eye and the faculty of vision, but not what is or is not discerned) even though they should be completely sound and perfect in what pertains to them. And this is the meaning of what has been said, 'In Thy light we shall see light' (Psalms 35:9). Now even if grace, the noetic sun, should draw nigh and inspire the soul to yearning, incite her and make her vigilant, but there be no purity in her (through which, as through air that is cleansed from the density of clouds and darkening matter, the rays of that sun (i.e. divine grace) easily stretch out toward us and in their pleasant light we are gladdened by the sweetness of a vision that is wholly spiritual), (The phrase in parentheses is slightly confused in the Greek. Here the Syriac has been rendered), then divine vision is impeded in the work of discernment, and thereupon nature ceases from righteous activity (*praxis*). Thus the soul is prevented from perceiving the sweetness of the second sun (i.e. the sun of God's grace) (which sheds its light upon all things) because of a corporeal blanket that overlies her and shrouds her from the illuminations of the truth, obstructing their path toward us.

Therefore all the things aforementioned must necessarily be sought out. And because it is difficult to find them all in one man without some deficiency and taint, most men are unable to attain to a degree of perfection in spiritual knowledge. The absence, however, of these things is caused by the intellect's insufficiency, undirectedness of will, a disposition not corresponding to a man's aim, lack of purity, being unable to find a teacher and guide, a cessation of grace ('Riches are not comely for a niggardly man' (Ecclesiasticus 14:3), he says, nor to have dominion over great things), and the hindrances of times, places, and means.

A Selection of Short Sections.

[[You know, my brethren, that the eye of sense perception by its visual power alone (which is sent forth from the brain to the eye by a channel, as it were) cannot perceive distinctions among objects unless it partakes of some other light. Now in this respect all natural sense perceptions are ordered in the same manner as the intellections of the spiritual state. And unless the natural power of the mind (which is also the soul's (or *natural*) knowledge) receives divine light, the soul cannot partake of truth by means of *theoria*. *Theoria* arises from a virtuous way of life, which in turn is achieved when the soul's appetitive part is fixed in a natural state of health. For many, while immersed in passions of body and soul,

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have rashly ventured to attain this (i.e. divine vision) by philosophical training, relying on it alone; but they strayed even from the truth that they did possess, and they destroyed their normal power of [mental] vision. For just as the eyes see phantasies in the air because of the weakness of their vision which is impeded by an opaque fluid in them, so each one of these men considers as the truth every image that he imagines before him. And when all the images (i.e. concepts) of all these men are brought together into one, then instead of a unity there appear many images in place of the truth. This happens to

them because they do not make entreaty for the bright rays of grace that shines through the soul's purification.]] Truth is awareness of God which a man savors in himself by means of the perception of the spiritual senses of the intellect (Greek; *senses of the spiritual intellect*). [[The blossom of spiritual knowledge is divine love, which arises from flaming intellections that are discovered by the spirit during prayer.]] Love is a fruit of prayer that, by prayer's divine vision, draws the intellect insatiably toward that which it (i.e. love) longs for when the intellect patiently perseveres in prayer without wearying (or *becoming despondent*) [[whether it prays in a visible way, employing the body, or]] with the mind's silent reflections, diligently and with ardor. Prayer is the mortification of the will's motions pertaining to the life of the flesh. For a man who prays correctly is the equal of the man who is dead to the world. And the meaning of 'to deny oneself' is this: courageously to persevere in prayer. [[It is known by those who know the Scriptures what the earnest entreaty of correct prayer is. And it is known by those who embrace this solitary way of thought so as by their supplications to acquire solitary prayer in proportion to their desire, that they must not allow themselves to bring turbulence upon their souls through contrary passions which they might stir up in themselves after prayer.]] The love of God, therefore, is found in the soul's self-renunciation.

Just as the ear of chastity blossoms forth from the seed of the sweat of fasting, so satiety yields licentiousness, and excess yields impurity. But if the belly is starved and humbled, shameful thoughts will never intrude into the soul. Every food that is consumed adds to our body's humors and becomes a natural force within us. When the organic members are filled with the ooze that comes from the whole body and a man happens to see something corporeal, or if his heart should suffer an involuntary movement joined with a thought, then the material of pleasure will suddenly be stirred by this and sent throughout the entire body. Even if the mind of a chaste and pure man is strong in all its thoughts, yet his discretion will be immediately shaken by the sensation in his members, and he plunges from the peace where he stood as though from a lofty summit. The holiness of his thoughts is tossed about, and his resplendent chastity is soiled by the turbulence of the passions that entered his heart through the burning of his members. There-

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upon he loses one-half of his strength and, one might say, he forgets the former goal of his hope; before he enters the struggle, he is found guilty without struggle, and though his enemies make no effort, he becomes guilty, being subdued by the loose will of his flesh. The abundant nourishment of continual satiety compels the will of a good man to all these things. Although a man abides safely in the haven of chastity, yet satiety will cause him to stoop to surrender himself to that which he never wished to enter his heart. And when he falls asleep by himself, a congregation of thoughts containing vain and shameful phantasies encompasses him and makes his chaste pallet a brothel and a theater of spectacles. He participates in their conversation through the inebriation of his thoughts and defiles his holy members without drawing near to a woman. What sea because of a tempest is so turbulent and seething as the stable intellect that because of the satiety of the belly is stricken by the vehemence of the billows that rise up against it in the sea of a man's flesh?

O chastity, how greatly thy beauty shines forth in sleeping on the ground and in hunger pangs that drive away sleep through the body's hardship and through abstinence from food which produces a deep moat, as it were, between the ribs and the belly! All

food and all leisure that we indulge in create and give birth to shameful images and unseemly idols, and these come forth and are beheld in the hidden place of our mind, enticing us secretly to take part in shameful deeds. But an empty stomach makes our thinking a desert land, arid and silent from any turbulent thought. The stomach that is filled to satiety is a place of spectacles and an arena of vile phantasies, yea even if we be alone in the desert. For, they say, satiety desires many things.

You will not be able to understand that you have been accounted worthy of divine grace and dispassion of soul from the fact that unseemly thoughts or the movements of thoughts produced by the body do not pass through your consciousness (for it is impossible to be without these) nor from your easy victory over such thoughts while your mind remains entirely unsoiled and unshaken, however lofty this state may be. Rather, you will recognize this from the fact that because of a more superior activity of the understanding, your intellect is not permitted to wage war with unseemly thoughts and crush them; but on the contrary, when thoughts make an appearance, the intellect is completely caught away from what pertains to them by a certain violent force which is outside the realm of the will, and which by the effect of habit and grace keeps leaven in the heart, which is the abode of the understanding.

The intellect of the ascetic is one thing, the order of the priesthood is another. A mind which by the mercy of Heaven has died to the world has only passing thoughts about certain things, and that without battle and struggle. [[And though there should be struggle due to the motion of the members, this sensation will not be deadly.]] Perfection that is yoked to flesh and blood has sovereignty over a kingdom comprised of what springs from

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flesh and blood. It does not wholly abolish the peculiar properties of nature while a man's vital impulse (Greek; *thought*) still throbs with a life originating from the physical elements, and the foundation of his existence (The Sinai Syriac MS and the Greek have *of his intellect*. In Syriac the words *intellect* and *existence* are very similar in appearance. The context, however, seems to require the reading *existence*, given by the Syriac printed text) is still subject to variation with every movement and fluctuation of the four bodily humors. But to our God be glory unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 67.

On How the Discerning Monk Ought to Dwell in Stillness.

Hearken to me, beloved, if you would not have your labors spent in vain and your days lie fallow and be barren of that profit which discerning men hope to find in stillness. Let your entrance into the same be made with discernment; not, indeed, simply by tradition, as it is with many, but let there be a goal fixed in your mind, that toward it you may aim the labors of your manner of life. Question the more knowledgeable, who are such by experience and not from erudition. [[Train yourself in all the wondrous and unencumbered distinctions of stillness]] and do not cease until you are practiced in all the pathways of the works of stillness. At every step you take, examine whether you are walking on the path or have gone astray on some trail outside it. And never believe that the strict life of stillness is brought to perfection by visible labors alone.

If you wish to find something [[found by the Fathers]] and attain to it in your experience, let there be secretly in your soul signs and proofs for you at every step you take, and by these you will recognize the truth taught by the Fathers and the enemy's delusion. Let these few things which follow be signs to you until you are skilled in your path. When in your stillness you see in your intellect that your mind is able to operate freely in thoughts from the right, and there is no effort for it regarding any of them under its authority, know that your stillness is right.

And if, while you are performing your liturgy with discernment and are as far from wandering thoughts as possible, suddenly the verse is cut short from your tongue, and fetters of silence are laid upon your soul without the exercise of her liberty, and these follow upon perseverance [in stillness]: then know that you are moving forward in your

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stillness, and that its simplicity (Greek; *and that meekness*. In Syriac the word *simplicity* can also mean *meekness*, but the following sentence would seem to require the translation *simplicity*) has begun to become manifold within you. For simple stillness (i.e. unaccompanied by other virtues), if judged aright, is blameworthy. And simple discipline is counted by those who are philosophic and discerning as a lonely limb, separated from the help of others.

And again, if with each thought moving in your soul, every memory, and the divine visions occurring in your stillness, you observe that your eyes are filled with tears which rain down your cheeks without effort, then know that a breach in the opposing camp (or *into the opposing camp*. The *opposing camp* probably refers to the passions) has begun to appear before you.

And if you find in yourself that from time to time your mind is plunged inside of you, without any preparation for this outside the order of your usual practice, and it remains there for the good part of an hour, or for whatever it is; and if after these things you see that your limbs seem to be in a state of great debility, while peace reigns over your thoughts, and this same thing always occurs to you: then know that the cloud has begun to overshadow your tabernacle.

But if, when you spend some time in stillness, you find that thoughts rend your soul and dominate her, and at every moment take possession of her as though by force, and that her mind is led at every opportunity to things that she formerly did, or that she longs to inquire into futile affairs: then know that in vain do you labor in stillness, and that your soul is passing her existence in pointless wandering (Syriac *and that you are harming yourself by pointless wandering (distraction)*). The causes of this come to her from outside, or from inward heedlessness regarding her duties, but especially from neglect of vigil and reading. Then immediately set your manner of life (Literally; *your thing, your doing*) in order.

But if, whenever you enter these days, you find no peace from the importunity of the passions, do not marvel. For when the rays of the sun have passed from the bosom of the earth, it retains in itself their warmth for a long time. And when the odor of drugs and the vapor of perfume are diffused through the air, they linger a long while before they are dissipated and vanish. But much more so do the passions. The passions are like dogs accustomed to lick blood in butchers' shops. When these are barred from what their habit feeds on, they stand in front of the doors and howl until the force of their previous custom is spent.

When heedlessness begins in its thievish way to enter into your soul, and in that

gloom she turns herself back, and your house is well-nigh filled with darkness, then you

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will find these symptoms draw near to you: you secretly feel in yourself that you are weak in your faith; that you covet visible things; that your confidence wanes; that you are being harmed by your neighbor; that your whole soul is taken up with fault-finding in mouth and heart against every man and every matter—whatever things you encounter in words, in your thoughts and your senses—and even against the Most High Himself; that you are alarmed at any injury done to your body, through which at every moment cowardice masters you, and from time to time your soul is shaken with fear, so that you are terrorized and oppressed even by your shadow. For you have covered over your faith with unbelief (we do not mean that faith which is the basis of all men's Confession, but the noetic strength which steadies the heart by the light of the understanding, and by the testimony of the conscience rouses in the soul great confidence in God, so that she takes no thought for herself, but having no concern for anything earthly, she casts her cares on God).

But when you are moving forward, you will find these evident proofs as symptoms in your soul: in all matters you are strengthened in your hope, and you are enriched by prayer; the material of profit is never absent from your mind in everything you meet; you have an awareness of the frailty of human nature; and on the one hand, by these things you are kept from pride; and on the other hand, your neighbor's faults are set at naught in your eyes; you long for departure from the body by reason of your aspiration for the [state] in which we shall live in the age to come; and all the afflictions that befall you openly and in secret you find to be rightly yours, all having descended on you precisely so as to keep you from conceit. And for all these things you will render confession and thanksgiving.

These are signs for those who are vigilant and on their guard, who abide in stillness, and who have set their hearts on attaining perfection in their manner of life. But those who are lax have no use for these subtle indications of where falls are lurking in ambush, because they are far from the secret virtues. When one of these starts to penetrate into your soul, at that very moment observe to which side you have begun to incline. For you will immediately know to whose part it belongs. May God grant us true knowledge. Amen.

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Homily 68.

That We Can Understand the Degree of Our Manner of Life From the Changing States of Our Mind, and That We Should Not Childishly Rely on the Great Diversity of Our Labors, but As Wise Men We Should Recognize the Degree of Our Soul From the Secret Renewal Which We Perceive Day by Day, and on the Subtle Stage of Discernment.

Always pay heed to yourself, beloved, and mark, as you persevere in your labors: the afflictions which come upon you, the desert in which you pass your life, the subtlety of your intellect, the keenness of your knowledge, and the great span of your stillness together with the many medicines (i.e. temptations) administered by our true Physician for the health of our inner man. Sometimes, indeed, these are from demons, sometimes they come to pass through sickness and pains of the body, and sometimes through the

terror of the thoughts of your soul at dreadful recollections of what will be at the ending of all. But sometimes through the spurring and envelopment (Literally; *bandage, binding round*) of the warmth of grace there arise sweet tears, the joy of the Spirit, and—so as not to multiply words—the rest. Do you see with certainty that by all these things your ulcerous sore has begun to heal and close up? This is to say, have your passions begun to grow feeble? Establish proof of it: constantly enter into yourself and mark which of the passions you see have grown feeble in your presence; which of them have perished utterly and have entirely withdrawn; and which of them have begun to grow silent, on the one hand because of the health of your soul and not because of departure from things that incite you, and on the other hand because your mind has learned to dominate them and not because of the lack of their causes.

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Give heed, then, and see whether living flesh (which is peace of soul) has begun to come back and cover completely the putrefaction of your sore. And observe: which of your passions consistently and impulsively perturb you, and at what time, and whether they belong to the body or the soul, or are composite and mixed; whether as being feeble they stir dimly in your memory, or they rebel vehemently against your soul; whether they do so as exerting authority, or in some stealthy manner; and how your intellect, the king, he that wields authority over the senses, attends to them. When they bend their forces and join in war, does the intellect make war with them and make them powerless by its might? Or does it not even look upon them with a glance or gage them? And which of them are remnants of old ones, and which have been newly formed? Further, are your passions set in motion through images, or through sensation without images, and even through remembrances without passion and thoughts, free from arousal? By these things also it is possible to know the degree wherein your soul stands.

If the first state of affairs has free reign and the passions are not confined, this is because strife still presses heavily upon the soul, even though she shows her might against them. But concerning the second the Scripture says in corroboration, 'David sat in his house and God gave him rest from all those round about him' (2 Kings 7:1). Do not think these words relate to one of the passions only; rather, together with the natural passions, I mean lust and anger, they also refer to the passions desirous of glory, which depict persons, indulge in phantasy, and wake us to a longing and desire; and again, to the passion of avarice as well. For whenever the soul secretly partakes of it, even if she is not persuaded to commit any overt act, it nevertheless pictures in her mind the idols of the objects of cupidity, taking the amassing of wealth as its theme; and it persuades the soul to meditate upon these things, and creates in her a desire to possess them for herself along with the rest.

Not all the passions wage war by means of assault (The Syriac also means *provocations, allurements*). For there are passions that only cause the soul affliction. Listlessness, despondency, and grief do not attack, whether by an assault proper, or through relaxation; rather they simply lay a weight upon the soul. The strength of our soul is proven, however, by victory over those passions which wage war by assault. A man must have a refined knowledge of all these, and recognize their symptoms, so that with every step he takes he may be conscious of the place he has reached, and in what terrain his soul has begun to walk: in the land of Canaan (The land of Canaan was the promised land), or beyond the Jordan.

Give heed to this also: is your knowledge, through the illumination of your soul,

competent for the discernment of these things, or does it discern them dimly; or is it completely bereft of such capacities? Do you find with absolute certainty that your thoughts

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have begun to become limpid? Does wandering in your mind take place at the hour of your prayer? And what passion troubles you when your mind draws near to prayer? Do you perceive in yourself that the power of stillness has overshadowed your soul with meekness, calm, and that uncommon peace which it is wont to engender in your mind? Is your intellect, without willing it, continually being rapt away to perceptions of incorporeal things into which our senses are not permitted to search? Does there blaze up within you a sudden joy that completely stills the tongue? Does a certain sweetness, which by reason of its delightfulness is beyond comparison, constantly well up from your heart and does it draw the whole man altogether after it? And at times does there imperceptibly descend into the whole body a certain delight and gladness (things which a tongue of flesh cannot express) until whatever is earthly is esteemed ashes and dung when recollected? For the joy first mentioned, which wells up from the heart, appears sometimes at the hour of prayer, sometimes while reading; while at times, again, the intellect is made fervent by the constant and prolonged rumination of the mind. But the joy last-mentioned usually comes outside of these, and frequently occurs during our secondary work, and in the same way, often at nights, between sleeping and waking, when one is both asleep and not asleep, and awake while not awake. But whenever that delight which surges through his whole body sojourns within a man, at that hour he thinks that nothing else is the Kingdom of the Heavens save this.

See, again, whether your soul has acquired power to strip away the memories of visible things through the power of hope that has gained mastery of the heart, and that strengthens the inner senses through unfathomable conviction. And see whether your heart (without taking forethought concerning this) is wont (The Greek and the Sinai Syriac MS have *is kept vigilant so as to be*. In Syriac the two verbs are quite similar in appearance. The reading of the Syriac printed text *is wont* seems more likely) to be led away from earthly things as a prisoner by the continual work of its unceasing converse with our Saviour.

Gain knowledge of the distinction of the heart's calling and its converse (Syriac *of* [Literally; *for*] *the distinctions of the heart's callings of converse*) when you hear it. Unbroken stillness, by its unceasing and persevering work, quickly makes the soul taste these things. Yet after their discovery they are lost again through the heedlessness of those who have received them, and for a long time are found no more. But with respect to these things one might venture to say (being made bold by the witness of his conscience) what the blessed Paul said when he declared, 'I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other thing soever, can separate me from the love of Christ' (Cf. Romans 8:38). Yea, neither the tribulations of the body, nor even those of the soul; neither hunger, nor persecution, nor nakedness, nor isolation, nor confinement, nor peril,

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nor the sword, nor even Satan's angels, nor his powers (through the wicked means of his contrivances), nor glory that fadeth away (through the assault whereby it attacks a man), nor slanders, nor reproofs with blows, inflicted to no purpose and without reason.

But O my brother, if these things to a greater or lesser extent have not begun to be manifest in your soul after some fashion, then your troubles and afflictions, even all your stillness, is profitless toil. And even if miracles are wrought by your hands, even if you raise the dead, yet such deeds are not to be reckoned as equal to these. At once rouse your soul, and with tears persuade Him Who saves all to draw back the curtain from the door of your heart, to scatter the murk of the passions' storm from your inner sky, and to vouchsafe you to see a ray of daylight, lest you be like one dead, sitting in darkness forever.

Unremitting vigil with reading and frequent prostrations performed intermittently will not be long in conferring these good things on such as are earnest. For those who find them, find them by these means. And those who would find them again, can find them again by these means. When we perform these works and dwell perseveringly in stillness and our mind is not bound by any thing or any man, but only by our soul alone, and we practice the work of inner virtue, then by these same works we shall soon find in ourselves a partial, yet distinct, perception of some of these good things, and by it we also receive certainty as regards the rest.

A man who sits in stillness and who receives experience of God's kindness has little need of persuasive argument, and his soul is not sick with the disease of (Greek; *with some sort of*. Here the Greek translators read *b-nisha* for *b-hasha*, these two words being almost identical in appearance) unbelief, like those who are doubtful of the truth. For the testimony of his own understanding is sufficient to persuade him above endless words having no experience behind them. To our God be glory and majesty unto the ages. Amen.

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Homily 69.

On True Knowledge, and on Temptations, and on How One Must Know Clearly That Not Only Certain Lowly, Weak, and Untrained Men Are Tempted, but Also Those Are Tempted Who Have Been Accounted Worthy of Dispassion for a Time, Who Have Achieved Perfection in Their Manner of Thought, and Who Have in Part Drawn Near to the Purity That Is Conjoined With Mortification, and Who Have Been Raised Above the Passions In So Far As This Is Permitted by God While Men Are in This World, Under the Yoke of Life Conjoined to the Passionate Flesh; and on How Men Endure Conflict and Are Belabored by the Passions Because of the Flesh, for by Divine Permission and Mercy They Suffer This on Certain Occasions Because of the Danger of Pride, and Many Times They Transgress, but They Heal Their Souls by Repenting and Grace Accepts Them.

Aberration passes indefinitely through every rational nature (See page 4, Section 8 [i.e.; paragraph 4]), and at every hour variations pass over all men; the discerning man will find many occasions to understand this. But especially the trials which daily befall a man are able to make him wise concerning these things, if he is vigilant. Thus he can observe himself with his intellect and learn how much each day his mind accepts variation in meekness and gentleness (Syriac *rest and tranquility*, but the Greek rendering is also possible), how it suddenly turns away from its peaceful disposition into turbid confusion without any immediate cause, and how it enters into great and unspeakable danger.

Saint Makarios has written most clearly with much forethought and earnestness as

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reminder and an instruction for the brethren. He wrote so that those who have reached the level of purity should not fall into despair at the time of contrary variations, when accidental falls (or simply *accidents, occurrences*) happen to them (as it occurs that the air grows cold at times) even without their being negligent or lax; for even though they are observing right discipline, downfalls occur which are opposed to their will's aim. But the blessed Mark also testifies concerning this as one who speaks from exact experience, and he puts this down in his writings for greater confirmation, as it were, lest any man should think that Saint Makarios wrote this in his letter simply by chance, and not from genuine experience; and also so that by reason of two such witnesses as these, the mind may accept undoubtingly its consolation at the time of need. What then does he write? 'Changes occur in every man', he says, 'even as they do in the atmosphere' (footnote: A quotation from the First Syriac Epistle of Saint Makarios of Alexandria, also called the Twelfth Syriac Epistle of Saint Makarios of Egypt. See Appendix C for the complete text of this epistle). Understand his words 'in every man', for our nature is one, and do not therefore suppose that he said this about inferior and lowly men only, while the perfect are liberated from change and abide in one state unwaveringly (The Syriac could either read thus or *one state that is free of aberration*), never having passionate thoughts, as the Euchites (Heretics also known as the Messalians or 'praying people') assert. For this reason, therefore, he wrote, 'in every man'.

How is this, O Makarios? You say that 'there is cold, and soon after, burning heat, and then perhaps even hail, and after a little, fair weather. This is the manner in which we are trained: now there is warfare, now grace comes to our aid; sometimes the soul is found in a tempest and violent waves rise up against her, and then a change occurs, grace overshadows a man and fills his heart with joy and peace from God, and chaste and tranquil thoughts' (repeat of last footnote. See Appendix C). He mentions here chaste thoughts alluding to the fact that beforehand there were bestial and impure thoughts in us. Then he admonishes us, saying: 'If it should happen that after we receive those chaste and gentle thoughts, we should suffer an assault, let us not be sorrowful and despair. And likewise, let us not boast during a period of grace-given rest, but rather, in the time of joy let us expect affliction' (repeat of last footnote. See Appendix C). When he says that we should not be sorrowful if falls occur, he does not mean that we should not stand up against them and that our mind should accept them gladly as being natural to us and our own, but that we should not despair like a man who expects something more exalted than struggle, and a perfect and unchanging repose; and who, moreover, does not wish to undertake struggles and sorrows, or to experience in himself any movement that is opposed to this perfect state, although God does not think it fit to grant the same to our nature in this world. God has done so, lest we should cease from works entirely and

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in such a state of mind we should languish in despair and remain motionless in our course.

Further he writes: 'Know that all the saints were engaged in this work. As long as we are in the world we secretly receive abundant consolation together with this labor'. Every day and every hour the proof of our love for God is demanded of us through warfare and struggle against temptations. And this is the meaning of 'We should not be

sorrowful': that we should not grow despondent in the struggle. 'In this manner', he says, 'our path is made smooth. But the man who desires to run aside or deviate from these things will be prey for wolves' (A quote from the First Syriac Epistle of Saint Makarios of Alexandria). Truly marvelous is this holy man, how by a few words he made this expression worthy of confidence, showed it to be full of wisdom, and completely expelled every doubt from the mind of his reader! Furthermore he says that because a man according to his own set intention does not wish to journey in the way, and desires instead to go in his own path, one not trodden by the Fathers, he turns aside from these things and becomes prey for the wolves. And he also teaches us to await afflictions in the hour of gladness. When by the inworking of grace there suddenly arise within us great thoughts and astonishment at the intellect's divine visions, which are more lofty than nature, and when (as Saint Mark says) the holy angels draw nigh to us, filling us with spiritual vision, then all things that oppose us retreat and there is peace and ineffable tranquility for as long a time as we remain in these things. When, therefore, grace overshadows you and the holy angels draw nigh to you and encompass you, and moreover all those who tempt you withdraw from your proximity, do not be uplifted and think within your soul that you have now attained to the tempest-free harbor and the atmosphere that is unchanging. Do not think that you have been exalted above the world's lagoon and the contrary winds that blow therein, and that there is no more enemy, nor encounter with evil. For there are many who have thought this and have fallen into perils, as the blessed Nilos has written. Again, do not think that you have become greater than many, and that it befits you to abide in such sublime things, but that it does not befit them at all because of their imperfect manner of life, or because (one says) their knowledge is insufficient and so they are deprived of these things, while I abide in what is proper to me since I have attained to perfect holiness and the spiritual level and to unchanging joy (The Syriac printed text reads *unchanging renewal*, i.e. *hudatha* for *hadutha*). But on the contrary, think upon the impure thoughts and the unseemly idols that have been established in your mind during the time of tempest, in the hour when your thoughts were shaken and unruly as they rose up against you in the blindness of the black night. Ponder upon how speedily you turned toward the passions and conversed with them in the murky confusion of your mind, and you were not ashamed, nor were you truly awed by the vision of divine things and the graces and gifts which you received. Know, therefore, that in order to humble

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us divine providence, which with foreknowledge provides and cares for each one of us, brought upon us all these things. For if you become puffed up by her gifts, she will abandon you, and you will fall into deeds which by their mere thought alone throw you into temptation (or *things which you have made trial of merely in thought*).

Know with certainty, therefore, that to stand is not within your power, nor does it pertain to your virtue, but it belongs to grace herself which carries you upon the palm of her hand, that you may not be alarmed. Ponder on these things in yourself when you are joyful, writes our holy Father, and whenever your thought should be uplifted, weep and lament, and cast yourself headlong upon the recollection of the transgressions which you committed by God's permission, that you may be delivered by this and acquire humility from these things. However, do not despair; but in thoughts proper to humility find forgiveness for your sins.

Humility, even without works, gains forgiveness for many offenses; but without

her, works are of no profit to us, and rather prepare for us great evils. Therefore, through humility, as I said, find forgiveness for your iniquitous deeds. What salt is for any food, humility is for every virtue, and she can mightily obliterate many sins. To acquire humility we must be unceasingly grieved in our mind through self-belittlement and discerning sorrow. And if she becomes ours, she will make us sons of God, and even without good works she will present us to God. For without humility all our works are in vain, every virtue and every righteous labor.

God wishes the alteration of our mind, for by the mind we improve and by the mind we become unprofitable. For it is sufficient in itself to stand alone before God unaided and to speak in our behalf. Give thanks and praise God unceasingly that, although you possess a nature which is weak and easily drawn away, yet by grace's assistance you are exalted from time to time, you receive great gifts, and are raised far above nature. But when it is permitted, see how far you plunge, and how you acquire a brutish mind. Remember the wretchedness of your nature, and how swiftly a change can occur within you, even as one of the holy elders said: 'Whenever a proud thought comes to you saying, "Remember your virtues", then answer, "Old man, look upon your fornication!"', (Abba Epiphanius. See Budge, *Sayings of the Holy Fathers*, 1:123). Here he speaks of the fornication that tempts you in your thoughts when God so permits, because grace provides for each of us what is profitable, either warfare or succor.

Do you see how simply this marvelous elder expresses the matter? Whenever, he says, a proud thought comes to you concerning the excellence of your discipline, say: Old man, look upon your fornication. It is obvious that the elder said this to a great man, since men cannot be troubled by the thought of pride unless they are found in the higher levels

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and their manner of life is truly praiseworthy. For this passion rises up against the soul after virtue has been practiced, in order to strip her of virtue's activity. You can also learn, if you wish, from a letter of the same Saint Makarios what level the saints achieved and what things God permits to assail them in order to try them. Here is that epistle: Abba Makarios writes to all his beloved children (Apparently Saint Isaac included the entire epistle of Saint Makarios, but it was left out in later manuscripts, both Syriac and Greek. The words *Abba Makarios writes to his beloved children* are the first words of the First Syriac Epistle of Saint Makarios of Egypt. See Appendix C for the entire text of this epistle).

Abba Makarios clearly teaches them how God provides for them both in conflicts and in the succor of grace. For it pleased the wisdom of God to train the saints for as long as they are in this life by their struggle against sin for virtue's sake, so that their gaze might always be raised toward God and that by their continual beholding of Him their holy love for Him might grow. When they run unceasingly to Him because of the urgency of the passions and the fear of aberration, they are made steadfast in faith, hope, and love of him.

Clearly these things were not written for those who dwell with men and go about everywhere, and are always engaged in actions and thoughts that are shameful and unclean. Nor are they for those who remain outside of stillness and practice righteousness with works, who are captivated by their senses at every hour and are constantly in danger of falling (for necessity, which confronts them against their will, throws them into involuntary circumstances) and who are unable perfectly to guard not only their thoughts, but their senses also. These things are meant, rather, for men who with great vigilance

endeavor to keep watch over their body and their thinking; who withdraw completely from turmoil and intercourse with men; who pass their time in keeping their intellects in prayer by their renunciation of all things and even of their souls; who accept in perfect stillness the changing states dispensed by grace; who pass their lives under the arm of the knowledge of the Lord; and who in stillness are secretly made wise by the Spirit, being separated from all things and the sight of them, and possessing a mind that is dead to the world. The passions do not die due to such things (or *in such persons*. These words are missing in the Syriac), but it is the mind that dies to the passions by a man's separation from things and by the assistance of grace. May grace keep us also within this measure. Amen.

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Homily 70.

On the True Sense of This Chapter and on Prayer.

The concise sense of this chapter is the following: at every moment we should know that we stand in need of repentance throughout the twenty-four hours of the night and day. The meaning of the word *repentance*, as we have learned from the true means of its performance, is this: continual and intense (Syriac; *mournful*) supplication which by means of prayer filled with compunction draws nigh to God in order to seek forgiveness of past offenses, and entreaty for preservation from future ones. For this reason our Lord fortified our infirmity by prayer, saying, 'Awake, watch, and pray that ye enter not into temptation' (Greek; 'Be watching and praying, that ye enter not into temptation', Cf. Matthew 26:41). Pray and be not slothful, being watchful and praying always. 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened' (Greek; 'Keep on asking, and it shall be given to you; keep on seeking, and ye shall find; keep on knocking, and it shall be opened to you', Matthew 7:7). He strongly corroborates His word and induces us to become the more zealous by the parable of the friend who went to his friend in the middle of the night and asked him for bread, and He says, 'Verily I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth' (Luke 11:8). Pray ye also, therefore, and be not negligent. O the ineffable encouragement! The Giver incites us to entreat Him to the end that He might give us His divine gifts. And although the Lord, as He Himself knows, provides us with everything that will profit us, nonetheless what He here says is filled with great power to give us courage and to make us confident. For He knows that until our death He does not take away from us the capacity of going astray (or *capacity of aberration*), and how close this change is to us (that is, from virtue to vice) and that human nature

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itself is susceptible to contrary states. For these very reasons He enjoins us to be zealous and to struggle in continuous prayer. If the state (Literally; *place, land*) of certainty were to be found in this world and, having attained it, a man's nature would be raised above every necessity and his labor above fear, then the Lord would not have enjoined us and, in His care for us, exhorted us (Greek; *doing so in His care for us*) to struggle in prayer. In the future age the saints will not offer prayers to God as petitions for something. For in

that fatherland of freedom our nature will not be susceptible to changes, nor to submission to (Greek; *turning away underneath*. The Greek *turning away* seems to be an error arising from the similarity of the Syriac words *hbash* (*to subject* or *shut in*) and *hbal* (*to twist* or *corrupt*)) the fear of adversities, because it will be perfect in every way.

Therefore the Lord does not urge us only to prayer and vigilance, but His providence often hurls us into the realm (Syriac; *onto the scourge*) of temptations due to the subtlety and incomprehensibility of those things which continually confront us, which the knowledge of our mind cannot comprehend, and in which we are often found against our will even though our understanding be very firm and cleave to the good (This sentence is obscure in both Syriac and Greek and different translations are possible). Thus the blessed Paul said: 'Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet me. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:7).

'Wherefore, O Lord (so speaks Paul) I rejoice, if this be Thy will, and our childishness requires all these things to be instructed, trained, and awakened by Thee, even when a man is inebriated with fervent love for Thee, as am I, and is drawn after good things, not seeing the world at all because of the inebriation of the love that he has for Thee. Thou hast granted me to attain to this, even to revelations and divine visions which the tongue of flesh cannot express, and to see and hear the voice of the liturgy of spiritual beings, and to be deemed worthy of Thy beholding, a thing replete with holiness. But despite all these, I have not the power to guard myself, I who am a man that is perfect in Christ, because there remains something yet, which by reason of its subtlety I am unable to comprehend, I who possess the mind of Christ (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:16). Hence, O Lord, I rejoice in infirmities, in tribulations, in prisons, in bonds, in necessities: whether they be from nature, or from the sons of nature, or from her enemies. Joyfully I now endure in mine infirmities, that is, in my temptations, so that the power of God may overshadow me (*Vide* 2 Corinthians 12:9). If, with all these, I still require the rod of temptations, that Thine indwelling may be thereby increased within me,

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and that I may be protected by Thy nearness to me, then I know that there is no man whom Thou lovest as me. Therefore Thou hast magnified me above many. Thou hast granted to none of my fellow apostles so to know Thy wondrous and glorious powers as Thou hast to me, and a chosen vessel (Cf. Acts 9:15) Thou hast called me, as one who is faithful in keeping the rule of Thy love. Because of all these things, and especially because the work of reaching progresses and goes forward, more so than if I were freed from the bond of temptations, I know that if it were profitable for me, Thou wouldst have given me freedom; but it is not Thy pleasure that I should be without tribulation and care in this world. As many times as I have suffered trials Thy concern was not so much that the work of preaching Thy Gospel should multiply in the world, but that I should be profited by temptations, while my soul was being kept sound by Thee.'

So, O man of discretion, if all this be true, great is the profit of trials! For however much a man in the likeness of Paul is raised aloft and enters into the spiritual state, he still stands in need of fear and watchfulness, and he reaps great profit from temptations. Show me the man who has reached the state of certainty [[in this mortal world]] that is full of despoilers, who has received that portion wherein there is no aberration (which

even the holy angels have not been given, 'that they without us should not be made perfect', Hebrews 11:40) who wishes to be completely immutable even before all spiritual and physical beings, and that no temptation should approach him in his thoughts! But the knowledge of this world's order as expressed in all the Scriptures is this: if each day recurringly we should receive a thousand wounds, we should not become faint-hearted and abandon our course in the arena. For it is possible through one small opportunity to seize the victory and to win our crown.

This world is the course of the contest and the arena of the courses. This time is the time of combat; and there is no law laid down in the field of combat and in the time of contest. That is to say, the King lays no limit on His warriors until the contest is finished and all men are brought to the gate of the King of kings, where each is examined whether he persevered in the contest and refused to admit defeat, or he turned his back. For many times it happens that a man who is altogether useless, who, because of his lack of training, is constantly pierced and thrown down, who is feeble at all times, suddenly seizes the banner from the hands of the mighty warriors, the sons of the giants, and makes his name famous. He thus gains greater renown than those who always contest and are known by their victories, and he receives a crown and gifts esteemed precious by all his

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companions (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has *precious gifts above all his companions*). For this reason no man should despair; only, let us not be negligent in prayer, nor be slothful to beseech the Lord for succor.

And let us implant this also in our minds: that so long as we are in this world and left in this flesh, even though we be exalted to the vault of heaven, we cannot be without labors and hardship and be free from care. This is the end of it; forgive me. More than this is speculation devoid of sense (Syriac; *mere repetition*). To our God be glory, dominion, and majesty unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 71.

On the Differences of the Virtues, On the Perfection of the Entire Course, and on the Greatness of Mercy and Love for Mankind Which in a Spiritual Manner Perfects All the Saints, and by Which the Divine Likeness Is Established In Them Through God's Abundant Love, Which He Has Poured Out Upon All the Sons of Men.

The consummation of the entire course consists in these three things: in repentance, in purity, and in perfection. What is repentance? It is the abandoning of former deeds and grieving over them. What, succinctly, is purity? It is a heart that shows mercy to all created nature. And what is perfection? It is profound humility, which is the abandoning of everything visible and invisible: by visible [I mean that one abandons] all things perceived by the senses and by invisible [I mean that one abandons] all thought concerning them.

Once an elder was asked, 'What is repentance?' And he replied, 'Repentance is a contrite and humble heart.' 'And what is humility?' 'It is a twofold voluntary death to all things.' 'And what is a merciful heart?' 'It is the heart's burning for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears.'

From the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and from his great compassion (The Greek here is *fortitude*. In Syriac, however, there are two words identical in spelling, one meaning *strength* or *fortitude*, the other meaning *pity* or *compassion*. The Greek translators chose the former, but the sense points to the latter), his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow

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in creation. For this reason he offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God.'

Again he was asked, 'What is prayer?' And he replied: 'The mind's freedom and rest from everything of this world and a heart that has completely turned its gaze toward the fervent desire belonging to the hope of future things. But the man who has no part of these things sows a mixed seed in his sowing, and is like a man who yokes an ox and an ass together' (*Vide* Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:9, 10).

Again he was asked, 'How can a man acquire humility?' And he said: 'By unceasing remembrance of transgressions; by anticipation of oncoming death; by inexpensive clothing; by always preferring the last place; by always running to do the tasks that are the most insignificant and disdainful; by not being disobedient; by unceasing silence; by dislike of gatherings; by desiring to be unknown and of no account; by never possessing anything at all through self-will (Syriac; *holding to one sort of work altogether uniquely* [or *particularly*]); by shunning conversation with numerous persons; by abhorrence of material gain; and after these things, by raising the mind above the reproach and accusation of every man and above zealotry (See Homily 51. This could also mean *above envy*); by not being a man whose hand is against everyone and against whom is everyone's hand, but rather one who remains alone, occupied with his own affairs; by having no concern for anyone in the world save himself. But in brief: exile, poverty, and a solitary life give birth to humility and cleanse the heart.'

The sign of those who have attained to perfection is this: if for the sake of his love for men a man were to be given over to the fire ten times a day, he would not be content with this, even as Moses said to God, 'If now Thou wilt forgive their sin, forgive it; and if not, blot me out of Thy book which Thou hast written' (Exodus 32:32); and like the blessed Paul who said, 'For I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren' (Romans 9:3); and again, 'I now rejoice in my sufferings for the nations' (Cf. Colossians 1:24). And likewise the other apostles accepted many kinds of death because of their fervent desire that men should receive life.

But the sum of all is that God the Lord surrendered His own Son to death on the Cross for the fervent love of creation. 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son over to death for its sake' (Cf. John 3:16). This was not, however, because He could not have redeemed us in another way, but so that His surpassing love, manifested hereby, might be a teacher unto us. And by the death of His only-begotten Son He made us near to Himself. Yea, if He had had anything more precious, He would have given it to us, so

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that by it our race might be His own. Because of His great love for us it was not His pleasure to do violence to our freedom (although He is able to do so), but He chose that

we should draw near to Him by the love of our understanding. For the sake of His love for us and in obedience to His Father, Christ joyfully took upon Himself insult and sorrow, as Scripture says, 'For the joy that was set before Him He endured the Cross, despising the shame' (Hebrews 12:2). For this same reason the Lord said on the night in which He was betrayed, 'This is My body which is given for the world for life, and this is My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins' (Cf. Matthew 26:26, 28). And again He said for our sakes, 'I sanctify Myself' (John 17:19). In like manner, when the saints become perfect, they all attain to this perfection, and by the superabundant outpouring of their love and compassion upon all men they resemble God. The saints seek for themselves this sign of complete likeness to God: to be perfect in the love of their neighbor. The monastic fathers did likewise, when they strove to bear always in themselves that perfection and likeness (so full of life) of the Lord Jesus Christ (Syriac; *Christ, the Lord of all*).

They say that the blessed Anthony resolved within himself never to do anything that would benefit himself more than his neighbor, because he possessed the hope that his neighbor's profit would be to him his own most excellent work. Furthermore it is said concerning Abba Agathon that he was wont to say, 'I should wish to find a leper to take his body and give him mine own.' Do you see perfect love? Even in outward things he could not bear not to give rest to his neighbor. He possessed a knife and once a brother came to him and took a liking to it, and the saint would not allow him to leave his cell without it. And there are many other such things written about these men. But why do I speak of this, when many of them surrendered their bodies to wild beasts, to the sword and to fire for their neighbor. No one can ascend to this degree of love unless he secretly perceives his hope. And those who love this world cannot acquire love for men. When a man acquires this love, together with it he is clad with God Himself. He, however, who has put on God must not only refuse to gain anything else besides Him, but must also divest himself of his own body. But if a man is clothed with the world or with love of this life, he will in no wise be clothed with God until he abandons all. For He Himself bears witness to this, saying, 'If a man abandon not all and hate his own life also, he cannot be My disciple' (Cf. Luke 14:26). He must not only abandon all things, but he must also hate them. But if a man cannot be His disciple, how will He dwell in him?

Question: Why is hope so sweet, her discipline and her labors so light, and her works so easy for the soul?

Answer: Because hope awakens a natural longing in the soul and gives men this

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cup to drink, straightway making them drunk. Thenceforth they no longer feel the wearisome toil, but become insensitive to afflictions, and throughout the whole course of their journey they think that they walk on air, and do not tread the path with human footsteps; for they see not the harshness of the way, no mountains or rivers bar their path, and 'the rough places shall become smooth ways for them' (Isaiah 40:4), and so on, because they fix their attention on the bosom of their Father. Things that lie afar off and are invisible this hope ever shows them clearly, as it were the very things themselves (Greek; *as it were with a finger*), so that they might examine them in an enigma with the hidden eye of faith. And they reckon things far off as near because all the parts of their soul are set aflame, as by fire, through their longing for what lies afar off. Thither,

therefore, the whole content of their thoughts is directed, and they speed ever onward to know when they will attain this. When they approach a virtue to practice it, they do not practice it separately, but all the virtues at once, completely and comprehensively. For they do not make their journey upon the royal highway as other men, but these giants select for themselves short-cuts, whereby gloriously they journey swiftly to the Heavenly mansions. For this hope so inflames them, as with fire, that they cannot rest from their incessant and headlong course on account of their joy. There comes to pass in them what was spoken by the blessed Jeremias, 'I said, I shall not remember Him nor speak His name. And there was in my heart as it were a flaming fire and it entered into my bones' (Jeremiah 20:9). Such is recollection of God in the hearts of men who are drunk with hope on His promises.

I call the short-cuts among the virtues the all-embracing virtues, because they are not of great length due to manifold pathways of a discipline leading from here to there; they do not await a time and place and they accept no distraction, but straightway they make their stand and accomplish the virtues.

Question: What is human (The Syriac omits *human*) dispassion?

Answer: Dispassion does not mean that a man feels no passions, but that he does not accept any of them. Owing to the many and various virtues, both evident and hidden, acquired by the saints, the passions have grown feeble in them and cannot easily rise up against their soul. Nor does the mind need to keep constant watch on them, because its concepts are at all times filled with study and intercourse with most excellent subjects, which are stirred in the intellect by the activity of insight. As soon as the passions begin to arise, the mind is suddenly ravished away from them by a certain insight that penetrates into the intellect, and the passions recede from it as being inactive.

The intellect which accomplishes the works of virtue by God's grace and which has drawn nigh to knowledge, as the blessed Mark said, is conscious of little that comes from

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the wicked and senseless part of the soul. For its knowledge ravishes it on high and estranges the intellect from all that is in the world. And because of the purity which the saints possess, their intellect becomes subtle, nimble, and keen. And further, because of their ascetical life, their intellect is purified and becomes perfectly clear because their flesh has dried up. In consequence of their practice of stillness and their long continuance therein, their intellect swiftly alights wherever the divine vision within them draws it, leading it to awestruck wonder at the same (or *to the awestruck wonder that accompanies it* (i.e. divine vision)). Therefore their divine visions bounteously multiply and their mind is never in want of the substance of insight, nor are they ever without those things which the fruit of the Spirit produces in them. Prolonged and habitual discipline utterly blots out from the heart the recollections which instill in the soul the passions and the powerful sway of the devil. For when the soul does not keep lewd company with the passions by deliberating upon them, then, since she is constantly held fast by another concern, the power of the passions can no longer hold her spiritual senses in its claws.

Question: What are the special characteristics of humility?

Answer: Just as presumption dissipates the soul through imaginings that distract her and gives her free rein to fly among the clouds of her thoughts and to circle round all creation, so humility collects the soul through the stillness of the thoughts and concentrates her within herself. As the soul is unknown and invisible to corporeal eyes, so a humble man remains unknown amid men. As the soul abiding within the body is hidden from the sight and association with all men, so the truly humble man not only does not wish to be seen or known by men (for which reason he is secluded and distant from all men) but more, his will is—if possible—to plunge himself away from himself into himself. He wishes to enter and dwell in stillness, to forsake totally his former conceptions together with his senses, and to become as something that does not exist in creation, that has not come into being in this world, that is totally unknown even to his soul and his senses. And so long as such a man is hidden locked away and withdrawn from the world, he remains wholly with his Lord.

A humble man is never pleased to see gatherings, confused crowds, tumult, shouts and cries, opulence, adornment (Greek; *care* (i.e. *septha* for *sevtha*)), and luxury, the cause of insobriety; nor does he take pleasure in conversations, assemblies, noise, and the scattering of the senses; but above all he chooses to be by himself and to collect himself within himself, being alone in stillness, separated from all creation, and taking heed to himself in a silent place. Insignificance, absence of possessions, want and poverty are in every wise beloved by him. He is not engaged in manifold and fluctuating affairs, but at all times he desires to be unoccupied

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and free of the cares and the confusion of the things of this world, that he may keep his thoughts from going outside himself. For he is persuaded that if he becomes involved with many activities, it is not possible for him to remain without confused and disturbed thoughts. For many activities collect many cares and a swarm of diverse and complicated thoughts. These cause a man to leave the peacefulness of his thoughts (whereby he was superior to all earthly cares, except for the small necessities of life which are inevitable), and a state of mind that has a single concern amid peaceful (Greek; *excellent*) reflections. And when necessities do not permit him to restrain his mouth from speaking (Greek; *restrain his thoughts*), he is both harmed and causes harm. Then the door is thrown open to the passions, the tranquility of discernment retires, humility flees, and the door to peace is shut. For all these reasons a humble man unceasingly protects himself from many affairs, and thus at all times he is found to be tranquil, gentle, peaceful, modest, and reverent.

A humble man is never rash, hasty, or perturbed, never has any hot and volatile thoughts, but at all times remains calm. Even if heaven were to fall and cleave to the earth, the humble man would not be dismayed. Not every quiet man is humble, but every humble man is quiet. There is no humble man who is not self-constrained (or *reserved*, *grave*); but you will find many who are self-constrained without being humble. This is also what the meek and humble Lord meant when He said, 'Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls' (Matthew 11:29). For the humble man is always at rest, because there is nothing which can agitate or shake his mind. Just as no one can frighten a mountain, so the mind of a humble man cannot be frightened. If it be permissible and not incongruous, I should say that the humble man is not of this world. For he is not troubled and altered by sorrows, nor amazed and enthused by joys, but all his gladness and his real rejoicing are in the things of his Master.

Humility is accompanied by modesty and self-collectedness: that is, chastity of the senses; a moderated voice; mean speech; self-belittlement; poor raiment; a gait that is not pompous; a gaze directed toward the earth; superabundant mercy; easily flowing tears; a solitary soul; a contrite heart; imperturbability to anger; undistracted senses; few possessions; moderation in every need; endurance; patience; fearlessness; manliness of heart born of a hatred for this temporal life; patient endurance of trials; deliberations that are ponderous, not light; extinction of thoughts; guarding of the mysteries of chastity (The Syriac printed text reads *guarding of mysteries; chastity*); modesty; reverence; and above all, continually to be still and always to claim ignorance.

The humble man never encounters a necessity which could trouble and confuse him. When he is alone, he even feels shame before himself. I should marvel greatly if there

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were any truly humble man who would venture to supplicate God when he draws nigh to prayer, or to ask to be accounted worthy of prayer, or to make entreaty for any other thing, or who would know what to pray. For the humble man keeps a reign of silence over all his deliberations, and simply awaits mercy and whatever decree should come forth concerning him from the countenance of God's worshipful majesty. When he bows his face to the earth, and the divine vision within his heart is raised to the sublime gate leading to the Holy of Holies, wherein is He Whose dwelling-place is darkness (*Vide 3 Kings 8:12, 54*) which dims the eyes of the Seraphim and Whose brilliance awes the legions of their choirs and sheds silence upon all their orders [[and when they are waiting for mysteries to shine forth from the Invisible One in that airless realm through a soundless motion, through bodiless senses, through imageless perception of that formless Essence and of revelations which surpass them, the power of their thoughts being too weak to contain the waves of those mysteries]]: then he dares only to speak and pray thus, 'May it be unto me according to Thy will, O Lord.' And may we also say the same for ourselves. Amen.

[[Thus far I have endeavored to set down for you in simple words things which the mind can grasp without scrutiny on account of their manifest sense, things by the reading of which alone the intellect forgets the course and the ways of this world and its carnal mode of life and is straightway translated in mind to that true and better world. I beseech your love, that when you light upon these mysteries, do not leave them without gaining profit, lest they be found to be mere dead words to you, and it should befall you what befell those who were invited to that spiritual banquet but declined from attending. Behold, the table is prepared, the spiritual delicacies are laid out, and lo, all delightful things are furnished; the Bridegroom awaits us, that we should enter and rejoice with Him. Let us, therefore, not excuse ourselves, lest that word also be said to us that was said concerning them. What word? 'Amen, I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of My supper' (Luke 14:24)]].

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Homily 72.

On Faith and Humility.

O miserable man, do you wish to find life? Hold faith and humility fast within

you; for through them you will find mercy, help, and words spoken by God in the heart, along with a protector who stands beside you both secretly and manifestly (The Syriac printed text reads *along with both secret and manifest protection*, i.e. *nutura* for *natura*). Do you wish to obtain these things, which are a fountain (Greek; *conversations*. In Syriac these two words are similar in appearance) of life? From the very outset take hold of simplicity. Walk before God in simplicity and not with knowledge. Simplicity is attended by faith; but subtle and intricate deliberations, by conceit; and conceit is attended by separation from God.

When you fall down before God in prayer, become in your thought like an ant, like the creeping things of the earth, like a leech, and like a tiny lisping child. Do not say anything before Him with knowledge, but with a child's manner of thought draw near God and walk before Him, that you may be counted worthy of that paternal providence which fathers have for their small children. It has been said, 'The Lord preserveth the infants' (Psalms 114:6). An infant goes up to a snake and clasps it by the neck, and it does him no harm. An infant goes naked all winter long, when everyone else is dressed and covered up, and the cold steals over all his limbs unfelt. He sits naked on a day of cold, ice, and frost and suffers nothing, because the body of his innocency is swaddled with another, invisible garment woven of that hidden providence which protects his tender limbs, lest harm from any source come near them.

Now do you believe that there is a certain hidden providence by which a tender body, especially subject to every hurt because of the delicacy and weakness of its constitution, is protected amid hostile forces, and is not overcome by them? David says, 'The

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Lord preserveth the infants' (Psalms 114:6). And not only those who are tiny of body, but also those, who being wise in the world, abandon their knowledge, and applying themselves entirely to that other, all-sufficing wisdom, and becoming like babes of their own free will, learn that other wisdom, which is not learned through study's labors. Well did Paul say, who was wise in things divine, 'He that seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise' (1 Corinthians 3:18). Ask God, however, to grant that you attain the measure of faith. And if you experience the delight of faith in your soul, it is not difficult for me to say to you that there is nothing further that keeps you from Christ. Easily you can be carried off at every moment from things earthly and forget this futile and feeble world and memories of its affairs. Pray for this diligently, and entreat for it with fervor, and with great earnestness make supplication till you receive it. Then you will weary yourself no longer. You will be counted worthy of these things if with faith you first compel yourself to cast your care upon God, and exchange your own providing for His providence. When He sees your volition, that with complete *limpid purity* of thought you have set your faith in God alone, rather than in yourself, and that you compel yourself to hope in God more than in your own soul, then power which is unknown to you will come to dwell upon you, and you will sensibly perceive this very power which is most certainly with you. Many, on becoming aware of this power, enter into fire and have no fear, and while they walk on water do not falter in their thoughts, considering how perhaps they may be drowned. For faith strengthens the senses of the soul, and a man perceives, as it were, one unseen, who persuades him not to heed the sight of terrible things, save only (Greek; the literal sense is something like *but [this does] not [mean that he should not gaze upon them] with the faculty of sight which*

transcends the senses, i.e. the noetic sight of faith. But if one read here as the Greek printed text he would have; *nor that vision which goes beyond the senses*. The Syriac supports the first reading) with that vision which surpasses the senses.

Take care, lest you think in any wise that a man receives that other, spiritual knowledge through this merely human—

(Greek; Literally; *pertaining to the soul, soulish*. It is translated by the word *natural* in the Authorized Version (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14). English has no suitable equivalent for this term. The sense, as it is used here, is given by the following quotations which explain Saint Paul's usage in First Corinthians: 'The man who is *psychikos* is he who lives according to the flesh and whose mind is not yet illumined by the Spirit; he possesses only that innate human insight which the Creator has placed in the souls of all men' (Saint Cyril of Alexandria *Commentary On First Corinthians* [PG 74.865b]). 'The Apostle calls *psychikos* the man who is satisfied with his own thoughts alone, who does not accept the teaching of the Spirit, and is not even able to understand it' (Theodore of Cyrus *Commentary On First Corinthians* [PG 82.245a]). In this sense *psychikos* can be translated: carnal, unspiritual, profane, material-minded)

—knowledge of ours. But I say that not only is it impossible for that other, spiritual knowledge to be received by this merely human knowledge, but not even an inkling of it can be perceived by those who are zealous to train themselves in such knowledge. And if any of these men should wish to approach the knowledge

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of the spirit, then until they repudiate human knowledge, all the intricacies of its subtlety, and all the convolutions of its method, and establish themselves in a childlike manner of thought, they will not be able to draw near to it, not even by ever so little. Even the customary employment of human knowledge and its notions are a great hindrance to these men, until little by little they erase these things [from their minds]. Spiritual knowledge is simple and does not shine upon human conceptions. Until our mind has been freed from its many conceptions and enters the unified simplicity of purity, it can never experience spiritual knowledge (The Syriac printed text reads *spiritual [things]* i.e. a plural where the Greek translators read a singular).

This order of knowledge is the experiencing of delight that belongs to the life of that other age. Hence it holds multiple deliberations in contempt. But human knowledge cannot know anything else except a multiplicity of deliberations. It cannot know that which is received in the simplicity (Syriac; *limpid purity*. The Greek, however, may be the correct reading, since in Syriac the word *simplicity* resembles *limpid purity*) of the mind, according to Him Who says, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of God' (Matthew 18:3). But lo, the majority of men do not attain such innocency, yet we hope that for their good deeds a portion is reserved for them in the Kingdom of the Heavens. This can be ascertained from the understanding of the beatitudes of the Gospel, which He stated differently in order to make known to us the many variations in the diverse modes of life within these same beatitudes. For God opens up before each man the gate of the Kingdom of the Heavens in all the states of any path whereby the man journeys to Him.

A man cannot receive spiritual knowledge except he be converted, and become as a little child. For only then does he experience that delight which belongs to the Kingdom

of the Heavens. By 'Kingdom of the Heavens' the Scriptures mean spiritual divine vision. This cannot be found through the workings of our deliberations, but by grace it can be tasted. Until a man has been purified, he is not even capable of hearing of it, for no one is able to acquire it by instruction. If, my son, you reach the purity of heart which comes of faith (a purity which is gathered in stillness, away from men) and you forget the knowledge of this world so that you are not even conscious of it, suddenly that other, spiritual knowledge will be found within you without your searching for it. 'Set up a pillar', Scripture says, 'and pour oil upon it' (Cf. Genesis 28:18), and thou shalt find treasure in thy bosom. But if you are caught fast in the noose of human knowledge, it is not improper for me to say that it would be easier for you to be loosed from fetters of iron than from this. You will never be far from the snares and bonds of delusion, nor will you ever be able to have boldness and confidence before the Lord; at every moment you will walk the edge of a sword, and

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by no means will you be able to escape sorrow. Take refuge (Greek; *make supplication*) in weakness and simplicity, that you may live acceptably before God and be without care. For just as a shadow follows a body, so also does mercy follow humility. If, then, you wish to pass your life in these things, by no means encourage your feeble deliberations. Even if all ills and evils and dangers should surround and frighten you, give no heed to them, neither take them into account.

If once you have set your faith in the Lord Who is Himself sufficient for your protection and your care, and if you are following after Him, take no thought again for any such thing, but say to your soul: 'He suffices me for all, to Whom I have altogether committed myself. I am not here (i.e. absent to all earthly concerns); He knows this.' And then you will see in reality the wonders of God, how on every occasion He is at hand to deliver those who fear Him, and how His providence encompasses them and is not observed. Although the guardian [angel] who accompanies you is not observed with bodily eyes, you should have no doubt of his existence. For even to your bodily eyes he often reveals himself to give you courage.

As soon as a man casts all visible aid and mortal hope away from himself, and follows after God with faith and a limpidly pure heart, grace immediately attends him, and reveals her power to him in help of many kinds. First, in external matters, and in what pertains to the body, she shows him her succor by making provision for him, since he is more able to perceive in these things the power of God's providence concerning himself. And through his understanding of externals, he is also convinced of those things that are hidden (for so the childishness of his thinking and his inexperience (Literally; *uncultivation*. The Greek reads here *way of life* or *activity*. The Greek translators read *l* for *la*) demand, seeing that his need is toillessly fulfilled when he did not so much as give it a thought. While he does not concern himself with them, she causes many onslaughts, often filled with dangers, to pass him by as they approach him, and by a great miracle grace imperceptibly dispels them, watching over him like a mother hen which spreads out her wings over her brood, lest any harm come near them. And she shows him before his very eyes how his destruction was upon him, and he remained unhurt. In the same manner she trains him in hidden things as well, and discloses before him the ambush of thoughts and deliberations which are hard to grapple with and difficult to comprehend. The understanding of them is readily uncovered by him: their inter-relatedness, their erroneous nature, which of them follows which, and how they breed, one thought from

another, and destroy the soul. Right before his eyes she clearly exposes to him every ambush of the demons, the subterfuge of their thoughts, and what the consequence of each is. She places sound judgment in him for perceiving what is to come, and there dawns in his simplicity a secret light to perceive

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in all matters the force of the deliberations of subtle thoughts. And she points out to him as with a finger what he would have soon suffered if he had remained ignorant of these things. From thence there is born in him [the knowledge] that he must entreat his Provider with prayer for everything both small and great.

As soon as divine grace has made his thinking secure in all these matters, so that he puts his confidence in God, she begins to introduce him to temptations, little by little. She permits him to be sent temptations to his measure, that he may bear their force. But in these very temptations her aid palpably draws near him, so that he may take courage, until little by little he gains experience, acquires wisdom, and holds his enemies in contempt because of the confidence he has in God. For it is not possible without temptations for a man to grow wise in spiritual warfare, to know his Provider and perceive his God, and to be secretly confirmed in his faith, save by virtue of the experience which he has gained.

But as soon as grace sees that a little self-esteem has begun to steal into a man's thoughts, and that he has begun to think great things of himself, she immediately permits the temptations opposing him to gain in strength and prevail, until he learns his weakness, and takes to flight, and clings to God in humility. By these things a man comes to the stature of a perfect man (Cf. Ephesians 4:13) in the faith and hope of the Son of God, and is lifted up unto love. For God's marvelous love (The Syriac printed text reads *help*) of man is made known to him when he is in the midst of circumstances that cut off his hope; herein God shows His power by saving him. A man can never learn what divine power is while he abides in comfort and spacious living. Moreover, God has never perceptibly shown His action except in a region of stillness, in the desert, and in places bereft of chance encounters with men and of the turbulence of their habitations.

Do not be astonished if, when you begin to practice virtue, severe and intense tribulations break out against you from every quarter, for virtue is not accounted virtue if it is not accompanied by the difficulty of labors encountered in accomplishing it. For virtue itself is named from this very fact, as Saint John said, 'It is usual for hardships to assail virtue; virtue is blameworthy (Syriac; *to be repudiated*) when it is linked to ease.' And the blessed Mark the Monk has said, 'Every virtue on being achieved is called a cross, when it fulfills the Spirit's commandment.' That is why all those who wish in the fear of the Lord to live in Jesus Christ, will suffer persecution (Cf. 2 Timothy 3:12). For He says, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. If any man wishes to quicken his soul with comforts, he shall lose it; and if any man loses it for My sake, he shall find it' (Cf. Matthew 16:24; 10:39). For this reason, then, He has gone in advance and has set the Cross in front of you, that you might sentence yourself to death, and then send forth your soul to go after Him.

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Nothing is stronger than desperation. It knows no defeat at the hand of any, whether they be on the right, or on the left. When in his mind a man cuts away any hope for his life, nothing can equal him in daring. None of his foes is able to face him, and

there is no affliction the rumor of which makes his purpose weaken; for every affliction which may befall him is lighter than death, whereas he has bowed his head to receive precisely this. If, in every place, and under every circumstance, and on every occasion, in all that you wish to concern yourself with, you set labors and grief as the aim of your resolution, you will find yourself at all times courageous and unhesitant in standing up against every seeming difficulty. Furthermore, through the power of your deliberations, all thoughts that dismay and frighten you will take flight from you, since these are customarily engendered in men by thoughts that look to comfort (Greek; this also means *rest, ease, repose*). Thus all things difficult and harsh that you encounter will be light and easy for you. And indeed, your affairs often turn out contrary to what you expected, and perhaps you will never encounter any of those difficulties.

You yourself know that at all times the hope (or *expectation*) of comfort is wont to make men forget what is great, and good, and virtuous. Unless they resolve in their minds to suffer hardships, not even those who are found in this present world in the life of the flesh can attain the end of their desire. And since experience testifies to this, there is no need to prove it with words. For in every generation of those who have gone before us, even until now, it is this and nothing else that has made men feeble, so that they do not gain victories and are hindered from excellent deeds. Therefore, to sum up, we say: no man disdains the Kingdom of the Heavens except in hope of some small comfort in this life. And not only does he suffer this, but also many times mighty onslaughts and fearful temptations are prepared for the man who sets comfort as the aim of his will and whose thoughts follow after it, because that which governs him is desire.

Who does not know that birds approach the trap because of a sight of repose?, (or *comfort*). Can it be that by comparison, our knowledge is so much less than that of the birds as regards things concealed, or contingencies lying hidden in certain affairs, or in places, or whatever else with which the devil (who from the very first by the promise and thought of comfort) hunts us down? But because my mind has pursued its own desire, I have strayed from the goal I set at the beginning of my discourse: to show how we must always establish in our thinking the aim of tribulation in any matter by means of which we are about to start on the path to the Lord, and how right at the beginning we must diligently press on with all our strength in order to reach its end. How often does man raise questions when he wants to make a start in something for the Lord's sake, saying, 'Is there really

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comfort in this?' Or, 'How can I easily make headway in this without toil?' Or, 'Perhaps there is tribulation in this, which causes the body pain?' Do you not observe how high and low we seek the name of comfort? What are you saying, O man? You wish to ascend to Heaven, and to receive that Kingdom, communion with God, the consolation of the spiritual goods of yonder blessedness, the fellowship of the angels, and immortal life, and you ask if this path requires toil? Great is this marvel! Those who yearn after the things of this perishing world pass over the terrible waves of the sea, and they brave journeying on rough roads, and for all that, they never ask whether there is any labor in this, or any affliction in what they desire to do. But we search everywhere after comfort! If, however, we always keep in mind the path of crucifixion, we shall think that every other affliction is lighter to bear than this.

Could there be, perhaps, anyone at all who is unconvinced of the following: that no one has ever gained victory in war, or received a fading crown, or had his heart's

desire fulfilled (even in things unpraiseworthy) or ministered in things divine, or achieved any of the glorious deeds of virtue, unless he has first set at naught labors and afflictions, and has driven away from his proximity the thinking that impels a man toward repose? Such thinking, indeed, begets heedlessness, sloth, pusillanimity, and from these comes laxity in everything.

When the intellect is zealous for virtue, then even our outward senses (that is, our sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) are not vanquished by difficult and repugnant labors beyond the wont and limits of their natural power. And when in due time our natural, incensive faculty (Greek; *wrath, strong feeling*) exerts its proper energy, then the life of the body is held in contempt more readily than dung. For as soon as the heart is zealous in spirit, the body is not grieved by tribulations, nor does it feel alarm and shrink back from horrors; but the intellect hardens it against all temptations, making it like a diamond in its endurance. Let us be zealous, too, with ardor of spirit for the sake of Jesus' will, and drive away all heedlessness from ourselves, which gives birth to sloth in our thinking. For zeal begets courage and fortitude of soul, as well as vigor of body. What power is there in demons to withstand us when our soul stirs up her own fierce natural zeal against them? Eagerness (or *impetuosity*), moreover, is said to be born of zeal. And when this brings its power into action, it makes every force in the soul become unflinching. The very crowns of confession which the athletes and martyrs carried off by their endurance were won through the dual workings of zeal and eagerness, which are born of the power of natural desire. Hereby they became invulnerable to suffering amid the fierce pain of their torments. May God grant us also such eagerness to please Him. Amen.

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Homily 73.

On the Benefit to Be Had From Fleeing the World.

Mighty indeed, trying and difficult, is the struggle that arises from the proximity of things. However much a man becomes eminent (Greek; *invincible*) and strong, yet when the causes that bring on the onslaughts of wars and struggles come near him, fear grips him; he swiftly inclines toward a fall, even more so than through encounter with the devil's open warfare. Therefore, as long as a man does not remove himself from what his heart dreads, his enemy always has a coign of vantage against him. And if he drowns a little, his enemy readily destroys him. [[There (i.e. in the desert) the body is fearful of injury, but by every means it keeps itself distant from sin. But here (i.e. in the world) it is the soul which receives the invisible wound and she cannot beat down her enemy who strives against her. For [worldly] things of themselves are able to arouse the turbulence of warfare against her, and voluntarily she is led away into captivity by them, though no warfare has assaulted her from without. Howbeit, the soul has her struggle in the provocations that are arrayed before the body's senses, as has been said somewhere:]] 'Whenever the harmful encounters of the world prevail upon the soul, these same become sharp stakes for her, and she is worsted as it were naturally whenever she comes in contact with them.'

Because our ancient Fathers, who walked these paths, knew full well that our intellect is not at all times in vigorous health, that it is incapable of standing steadily in one state and of keeping guard on itself, and that there come times [[of darkness]] when it

cannot even perceive what causes it injury, they with wisdom considered the matter, and clad themselves with non-possessiveness as a weapon. This frees a man from many struggles, as

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it is written, for by means of his indigence he can extricate himself from many transgressions. Men have gone out into the desert, where there is nothing which can be an occasion for the passions, in order that even when a moment of weakness should come, they would be unable to find occasions for falls. I mean they would have no occasion for anger, lust, the remembrance of wrongs, and glory, and that both these and their like would be at a minimum by reason of the desert. For they walled themselves up in the desert as in an impregnable tower. Thus each of them was able to finish his struggle in solitude, where the senses find no help for assisting our adversary through encounter with hurtful things. It is better for us to die in our struggle, than to live in our fall.

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Homily 74.

On the Means Whereby a Man Can Acquire a Change of His Secret Intuitions Together With a Change of His External Discipline.

As long as a man chooses to be free of possessions, departure from life always arises in his mind. He makes the life after the resurrection his continual study, and at all times he contrives to make preparation that will be useful (or *suitable for*) yonder. He acquires disdain (Greek; *patience*) for every suggestion of honor and bodily ease that is sown in his thoughts, and the thought of scorning (The Syriac can also mean *the thought of the meanness of*) the world is lively in his mind at every moment. His mind becomes bold and he acquires a heart that is always strong and courageous in every fear and danger of impending death; and he does not even fear death itself, because his attention is always upon it, as something that approaches him, and he awaits it. With undoubting confidence he casts his care upon the Lord. If he meets afflictions, he is confident, knowing for a certainty that they will procure a crown for him. He patiently endures them with all joy, accepting them with exultation and gladness, since he knows that it is God Himself Who has provided these afflictions because of the profit gained from unknown causes through unmanifest acts of providence.

But if for some reason he should acquire something transient by the working and device of him who is adept in every evil, at that very moment love for the body begins to stir in his soul. He thinks of a long life and thoughts concerning ease (or *comfort, repose*) of the flesh arise

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and continually blossom forth in him. He clings firmly to his body [[so that, if possible, it will not be vexed by anything]] and he employs every means that could possibly provide his body with ease. Thus he departs from that freedom which is unsubmitive to every thought produced by fear, and henceforth he ponders upon every notion that gives rise to cowardliness. He deliberates upon the causes of fear, because the former stoutheartedness, which he acquired in his soul when he was higher than the world through his nonpossessiveness, has been taken away from him. And because he has

become an inheritor of the world in proportion to the degree of his possessions, he also becomes prey to fear in accord with the law and ordering ordained by God. We become slaves and bondsmen to that portion for which we prepare our members to labor, and we serve it with all fear, according to the word of the Apostle (Cf. Romans 8:15).

Self-love precedes all the passions, and scorn of ease precedes all the virtues. The man who surrenders his body to comforts, afflicts it in the land of peace. He that indulges in luxury in his youth becomes a slave in old age, and in his last moments he sighs. Just as a man whose head is submerged in the water cannot breathe the subtle air which is poured upon the [atmosphere's] empty gulf, so he who immerses his mind in the cares of the present life cannot take in the breath that is a perception of the new world (The Syriac printed text reads *the perception of the limpidly pure air of the new world*). As the whiff of a deadly poison disturbs the constitution of the body, so does a lewd sight the peace of the mind. As health and illness cannot co-exist in a body without one destroying the other, so it is impossible for pecuniary wealth and love to remain in a house without one being harmed by the other. As glass cannot remain whole when it lies near to a stone, so neither can a holy man who continues and persists for a long time in conversation with a woman remain in his purity and be unsoiled ((or for a holy woman—a man; that is, Saint Isaac is presumably referring in this context to someone of the opposite gender)). As trees are wrenched from their roots by a violent and continual flood of water, so love for the world is uprooted from the heart by a flood of temptations that surge against the body.

As medicines purge the body from the impurity of bad humors, so grievous afflictions purify the heart from evil passions. As a dead man cannot perceive the affairs of the living, so when a solitary is buried in stillness as in a tomb, his soul is exempt from the storm that customarily blows when he perceives the affairs that take place in the society of men. As a man cannot remain unscathed who spares his enemy on the field of battle, so the spiritual warrior cannot deliver his soul from destruction if he spares his body. As a child, terrified by some frightening sight, runs to its parents, clutches the hem of their garments, and cries out to them, so too with the soul; for the more she is straitened and afflicted by fear arising from temptations, the more she hastens to cleave to God, crying out to Him with continual supplication. And so long as the temptations persist, one assaulting

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her after the other, she multiplies her supplications; but once she finds herself again in spacious freedom, she gives herself over to wandering thoughts.

If men who are surrendered into the hands of judges to be punished for their wickedness humble themselves and straightway confess their iniquity when they come before the scourges, their punishment is diminished, and with only slight afflictions they are released. But if there are among them some who are wicked and stiff-necked, who refuse to confess, these are scourged, and in the end they confess involuntarily after many torments. And since their sides are already covered with wounds, they gain no profit from this. So it is in our case. For because we have gathered transgressions without [returning to the good (Here the sense of the Syriac word is added)] direction, we are taken from the hands of divine mercy and surrendered into the hands of the justice of the Judge of all (The Greek reads *the hands of the just Judge of all*), and the command is given that we be stretched out before the rod of trials, so that our punishment yonder be made light. But if at that moment, as the Judge's rod nears us, we humble ourselves and recollect our iniquities and confess them before the Magistrate, then we shall escape with slight trials.

But if, on the contrary, we become stiff-necked in our afflictions and do not confess that we are the cause of these and are worthy to suffer things even greater; if instead we blame other men, sometimes the demons, sometimes even God's justice; if we maintain that we are innocent of such deeds; and if we continue to think and say this without comprehending that God knows and understands more than we, that His judgments are throughout the whole earth, and that a man is not chastened unless He gives His command: then everything that comes upon us will cause us constant sorrow, our tribulations will become very vehement, and we shall be handed over from one to another as in a chain. Thus it will be until we come to know ourselves, we humble ourselves, and we perceive our iniquities (for unless we perceive our iniquities, we cannot be corrected); then finally having suffered many afflictions, we shall make a confession which is of no profit for us and brings us no consolation. It is a spiritual gift from God for a man to perceive his sins. When God sees that we suffer grievously in multifarious trials, this gift penetrates into our thought, lest we should depart from life in the midst of all these calamities and afflictions, having reaped no profit from this world. Our lack of understanding is not due to the difficulty of temptations, but to our ignorance. Often it happens that while some are in the midst of these trials, they depart from the world laden with guilt, since they did not confess, but rather denied and blamed. But the merciful God waited with the hope that somehow they might be humbled, so that He might forgive them and make for them a way of escape (*Vide* 1 Corinthians 10:13). And He would not only have provided them with a way of escape from their temptations, but

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would have forgiven them their transgressions by reason of the brief confession of their hearts.

As a man who offers a great gift to the king wins a cheerful countenance toward himself, so it is with the man whose prayer is accompanied by tears, for God the great King of the ages allows every degree of his sins and of all his transgressions to pass into oblivion and shows him a gracious countenance. As a sheep which leaves its fold, and wandering here and there to graze, stands beside a lair of wolves, so too is the monk who separates himself from the assembly (Syriac; *concord*) of his companions in the name of finding a quiet and solitary dwelling; for approaching and passing through cities, he draws near to sights and the marvels of the theaters and tarries with those whom he encounters.

A man who carries a precious pearl on his back and journeys on a road infested with brigands and notorious for many crimes is in constant fear of being ambushed. Likewise the man who carries the pearl of chastity and journeys in the world on the road of his enemies has no hope of safety from thieves and plunderers, until he reaches the sanctuary of the tomb, which is the land of certainty. Is it possible that the man who carries a precious pearl will have no fear? Even so, he who carries the pearl of chastity does not know in what place, by what enemies, in what moment they observe him to strip him suddenly of his hope, though he be at the threshold of his house, that is, in old age.

As a man who drinks wine and becomes inebriated on a day of mourning forgets all the pangs of his sorrow, so the man who in this world (which is a house of lamentation) is drunk with the love of God, forgets all his sorrows and afflictions and becomes insensible to all sinful passions through his inebriation. His heart is made steadfast by hope in God, his soul is as light as a winged bird, at every moment his mind rises out of the earth and soars far above the heavens through the meditation of his

thoughts, and he takes delight in the immortal things of the Most High (The passage which follows is not found in the Greek or in the Vatican Syriac MS 124. It has been translated from the Syriac printed text), [[his prayer is unceasing, and he is like a man who has the wind for his steed, so that his enemy cannot overtake him. Every time he seeks him, he flies away from him.

He who takes compassion on the afflicted is like a man who has an advocate in a court of justice. As a man who is in peril at sea amid a tempest casts his baggage overboard, so too does he who despises the obstacles on the path of God amid this world, which is a sea ready to drown him. For obstacles will never be wanting.

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. Why do you increase your bonds? Take hold of your life before your light grows dark and you seek help and do

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not find it. This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits.

The cross is the door to mysteries. Through this door the intellect makes entrance into the knowledge of the heavenly mysteries. The knowledge of the cross is concealed in the sufferings of the cross. And the more our participation in its sufferings, the greater the perception we gain through the cross (or *the greater the perception we gain of the cross*). For, as the Apostle says, 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ' (2 Corinthians 1:5). Now by *consolation* he means *theoria*, which, being interpreted, is vision of soul. Vision gives birth to consolation.

Our soul cannot yield spiritual fruit unless our heart is dead to the world. For the Father raises up by the divine vision of all the ages the soul that has died [with] the death of Christ. And again, unless you die to the world, the spiritual Adam will not be quickened in you. For when a man through this spiritual sacrifice dies to all the dealings of this abode (i.e. The world) and entrusts his life to the life that will be after the resurrection, grace will settle upon him and his mode of life will be spiritually strengthened. And when he hates the world, he will perceive the mode of life of the new man, which is more lofty than the vileness of the dwelling of men, and he will be accounted worthy of divine revelations.

It is impossible for us to be dead to the world while still in the world so long as our thinking cherishes ease, and the world through its objects lies before our senses, and through sensation renews our recollections, and arouses the body to desire by means of its proximity to objects, employing sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. The soul's deadness to the world consists in the heart being void of all rumination upon recollections of the world, in the soul abstaining from thoughts concerning the things of the world, and in the will withholding itself from the love of deliberating about them. For it is impossible for our heart to enjoy peace that is exalted above disturbance, and the serenity of love that transcends this world, when that which renews recollections (Literally; *recollection-renewers*) is infused into it by encounters with things through the senses which perceive them. The soul cannot acquire deadness to the world until the body is also far off from the perception and sight of things]].

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Homily 75.

*On Night Vigil and the Various Ways of Its Observance, and That We Must Not Make the Aim of Our Labors the Fulfillment of a Definite Quantity of Prayers, but Rather With Freedom and Discernment We Should Be Like Children of God With Their Father, Laboring With the Eagerness Proper to Love; and on How the Work of Vigil Is More Venerable Than All Other Disciplines; and on What Things Are Sought by Those Who Choose This Work; and on How Men Should Perform Night Vigil; and on the Gifts Which These Men Are Granted From God, and the Conflicts and Battles Waged Against Them by the Ruler of This World.**

*(The text of this homily is much abbreviated in the Greek and in the Vatican Syriac MS 124. If we are to judge only by the extensive title of the homily, which is identical in Greek and Syriac, the Syriac printed text must give the original. The passages in double brackets have been translated from thence).

When you desire to take your stand in the liturgy of your vigil, with God as your helper do as I tell you. Bend your knees, as is the custom, and rise up again, but do not immediately begin your liturgy. After you have made a prayer and completed it, and signed your heart and your limbs with the life-creating sign of the Cross, stand silently for a moment until your senses have been set at rest and your thoughts have become tranquil. Then raise up your inner vision to the Lord and beseech Him with an afflicted soul to fortify your weakness and to grant that the psalmody of your tongue and the reflections of your heart be pleasing to His will, saying quietly in the prayer of your heart the following:

A Prayer. O Lord Jesus my God, Who overseest Thy creation, Thou to Whom my passions, the infirmity of our nature, and the might of our adversary are evident, do Thou Thyself shelter me from the wickedness of our common enemy who maligns my salvation,

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for great is his power, and wretched is our nature, and feeble is our strength. Wherefore, O Good One, Who dost know our weakness and didst bear upon Thyself the burdensomeness of our frailty, do Thou safeguard me from the turmoil of thoughts and the inundation of passions, and account me worthy to perform this sacred liturgy, lest perchance I should taint its sweetness by my passions and be found as one shameless and audacious before Thee.

[[With these thoughts your heart will be unlocked straightway by grace, and you will shed tears at the beginning of your prayer. Your thoughts will be purified by the memory of the Lord, and your soul will receive tranquility and shining chastity. And while your mind is collected and shining, you will begin your liturgy without turmoil, and joyously you will continue until its completion.]] It behooves us to observe our liturgy in complete freedom from every childish and disquieting thought. If we see that there is little time and that dawn will overtake us before we finish our liturgy, then let us voluntarily omit one *Glory be* [of the Psalter] with prudence, or even two, from that which is the customary rule, lest we give place to turmoil, and obliterate the sweet taste of our liturgy, and make turbid the psalms of the early morning (The Greek printed text and some Greek MSS read *the psalms of the first hour*).

If, while you observe your liturgy, a thought should accost you and whisper to you, saying, 'Hasten a little, your work is multiplying', and you free yourself of it quickly,

then do not place some rule upon yourself (Syriac; *pay no attention to it*). But if this thought disturbs you the more, immediately go back to the last *Glory be*, or as many as you like, and with understanding chant each verse repeatedly which has the character of a prayer. And if again the thought troubles you, or straitens you, leave off your psalmody, and bend your knees in prayer, saying: 'I do not wish to count up words, but to attain to [heavenly] mansions; I shall journey on every path that takes me there quickly. That people which in the wilderness cast the calf, journeyed there forty years, ascending and descending the mountains and hills, and they did not behold the promised land even from afar.'

But if, in your night vigil, you are overwhelmed by your long standing and you become feeble from fatigue, and a thought should say to you, or rather, the wily fiend himself should address you by the thought as in the serpent of old, saying, 'Finish up, for you can stand no longer'; then say to it: 'No, but I shall sit down (The Greek reads *I shall sit one sitting* (*kathisma*—a section of the Psalter). But the Syriac has the emphatic *sitting I shall sit*, which must have been the original Greek reading) for even this is better than sleep. Although my tongue is silent and utters no psalm, yet my mind is engaged with God in prayer and in my converse with Him; wakefulness is always more profitable than sleep.'

Neither standing nor simple psalmody fully comprise a monk's vigil. One man con-

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tinues in psalmody all the night long; another passes the night in repentance, compunctionate entreaties, and prostrations; another in weeping, tears, and lamentation over his sins. It is written concerning one of our fathers that for forty years his prayer consisted of but one saying, 'As a man I have sinned, but Thou, as God, forgive me' (Abba Apollo. See Budge, *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, Palladius 2:38). The fathers heard him sorrowfully meditating upon this verse, and how he wept and would not be silent; this prayer took the place of his liturgy both night and day. Another man spends part of his evening in psalmody and the rest of the night he chants *troparia* [[glorifications, hymns, and other mournful melodies]]. Another man passes the night in glorifying God and in reading [[*kathismata*, and between each *kathisma* he illumines and refreshes himself with reading from the Bible until he is rested]]. And again another makes for himself the rule not to bend his knees [[not even in the prayer that concludes a *Glory be*, though this be customary during vigils, and he passes the entire night in an unbroken stance. It is said concerning one of the saints, that]] because the thought (Syriac; *demon*) of fornication warred against him [[and it did not cease from employing every means against him, he gave himself over to the labor of night vigil. He laid upon himself the rule not to bend his knees at all, but to stand throughout the night, keeping his eyes open, and to refrain from kneeling until the morning]]. To our God be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages (Here the Greek and the Vatican Syriac MS end). [[These are all distinctions in the labor of vigil and by them strenuous men put off the old man, which is corrupted by deceitful lusts, and put on Christ and are saved (Cf. Ephesians 4:22, 23). By these diverse labors performed with wisdom the saints are accounted worthy of the awestruck wonder of divine revelation, which surpasses the mind of the flesh.

While the strenuous take their delight in such diverse things and their like during their vigils, they pass the entire duration of the long hours of the night without

despondency. Their souls flourish and rejoice and forget the garment of flesh, woven from passions, wherewith they are shrouded. From the delight and the leaping of their hearts they do not bring sleep to mind, for they think that they have put off the body or that they have already reached that state which will be theirs after the resurrection. And because of their great joy they sometimes leave off psalmody, and they fall on their faces on account of the onrush of joy that surges in their souls. The whole length of the night is like the day to them, and the coming of darkness is like the rising of the sun by reason of that hope which exalts their hearts and inebriates them by its meditation, and from the blazing of their minds which burn with the recollection of the good things of the future age. While their tongue plays on the spiritual lyre, their intellect looks after its own matters. Sometimes it turns toward the sense of the verses, sometimes it repulses an alien thought as it

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appears, and sometimes, when the soul grows weary, the intellect turns to the contents of the reading for the day. For the narrations that it gathers from this source and lays away in its treasury produce insights at such times, and it takes such pleasure in them that there is no room at all for foreign thoughts. But once more the intellect is swiftly drawn and brought to the thought of prayer and psalmody, lest by tarrying in those insights (though indeed reflection upon them is profitable) it should be deprived of converse with God and the light of divine vision, which the intellect is wont to receive from undistracted prayer, when with reverent thoughts it speaks solely with the Lord in the secrecy of the heart. And so in these things they pass their whole lives, each one of them pleasing His Lord by his labors according to his measure and his strength, while he employs all the power of his will.

But if a man wishes to give his body a little rest, let him stop and sit down, facing the east. Howbeit, so long as he is sitting, he should not allow his mind to be idle, but he should ponder and muse and reflect upon the magnitude of this discipline: on what it consists of and on how toilsome is its labor; on how great is its crown and on how glorious is the fruit of its work; on what watchfulness it requires; on how the men of old practiced it, and of what things they were accounted worthy by completing their struggles; and on how by the mercy of Jesus he himself was snatched out of the world, though he toiled in vain labors whose end is to be lost to God and to endure shame for his sins; and on how he was brought to this angelic ministry, the hope of which is a true hope, the joy of which is never mastered by sorrow, and the confident trust of which is never defrauded. However much a man should toil, his labor will be slight in comparison to what he is to receive at his end (as an earnest of those good things) so that his soul may rejoice.

Now while he reflects in his heart on these and similar thoughts, he is astonished. He sends forth his intellect upon the spiritual chariot, causing it to take wing and to muse upon all the holy Fathers of all generations, the inheritance of whose discipline he possesses. He reflects on how each one of them in different ways has accomplished this spiritual husbandry, and on how they abandoned the inhabited world and mankind itself and betook themselves from the distractions of the world and from a life full of turmoil. He muses on how they departed and hid themselves in mountains, caves, and in solitary, secluded places, because they saw that this discipline cannot be perfectly accomplished in the society of men on account of the many obstacles. And again he muses on how these men have become dead during their lives for the sake of the life that is in God, wandering

in desert regions and amid rocky crags like men who have lost their way, and how the entire world is not comparable to the glory of each one of them (Cf. Hebrews 11:38). Some of them dwelt on

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sheer and rugged crags, some at the foot of mountains or in deep gorges, some in dens and hollows of the earth (Cf. Ibid) like men who burrow in the ground in order to lay snares for foxes, some in tombs, and some on the peaks of mountains. Some erected small hovels in the desert and therein passed the rest of their lives. And some built small stone enclosures on the summits of mountains, that is, small cells, and dwelt there as pleasurably as though they were in the palaces of kings. They had no concern for how they could find their livelihood, but only how each one of them could please God and bring his struggle to completion in a beautiful way.

And what sort of life did these holy men lead in these places? Did they live in the body, or did their life, perhaps, transcend flesh and blood? Did they become faint-hearted in the desolation of that desert? Did their power of patient endurance succumb over that long span of time, did their body grow weak during those many years because of the deprivation of the necessities required by nature? How was human life preserved in them? And besides all this, what struggles and afflictions did they undergo? How did they so manfully and calmly brave the manifold and different warfares that the evil spirits raised up against them? How is it that they did not grow slack in their arduous and wearisome labors throughout their lifetime even until their end? How did their spirit not become melancholy by reason of that utter solitude, being cut off from all visible consolations? Is there really all this strength in human nature? And how did divine power preserve them uninjured through all those manifold trials, how did it provide each one of them with diverse kinds of sustenance according to the place of his abode, thus supplying that necessity which he lacked? Some of them were sustained by a bird. 'Behold', said one, 'these last sixty years I have received half a loaf from this bird!' (Saint Paul the Hermit). And again, some were nourished by a certain tree, or a date-palm, in a supernatural way, even as one of them said, I mean the bishop who repented in the desert, 'I am now in this desert forty-nine years, and God has granted me life by means of this date-palm' (See budge, *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, Palladius 2:18). And so it was with the saint who dwelt in sin for six months and then departed into the inner desert so as to repent of his sin. And when his stomach caused him much pain, an angel came and cured him (Saint Timothy the Hermit. See *ibid.* 2:17). Some were nourished by wild animals, like that blessed man who dwelt in a cavern in the desert of Sodom. Some, who abode in the desert near the inhabited world, were provided for by men, like that valiant man whom Serapion saw, and like the blessed Martinian (Celebrated by the Orthodox Church on February 13) who dwelt on a silent island and was visited by a merchant twice a year.

But where no habitation was near and there were no means [to provide for their

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needs], they were visited by an angel, as it is said concerning the blessed Apelles who dwelt on a mountain-side in a small cave. His work consisted in offering up prayer to God throughout the day and one hundred times during the night. Without solicitude on his part, his food was brought to him in the desert by an angel. He was clad in a sleeveless garment and on his head he wore a small cowl; and these remained on him in

the desert without wearing away. Do you see how God cares for His servants in every respect?

And others were nourished by roots; others by edible herbs which sprout up of themselves; others by small crops which require watering and by dried vegetables carefully sown; and others by the fruits of trees. For some a celery bed and a trickling stream were sufficient for the needs of this fleeting life, so that the body's vitality would be maintained. But as for the rest, grace stirred up profitable recollections during those times [of need] for the consolation of these men.

When a man ponders in his intellect upon these and similar things, he becomes drunk as it were with fresh wine and he forgets himself. But afterward he sees himself again and he marvels that throughout all that journey in the desert and encounter with the saints his intellect has met with nothing harmful (i.e. an evil thought or distraction) at all. But now it seems to him that at that time he was actually with those saints and saw them clearly. And by reason of his remembrance of the lives of the saints which his intellect conceives through recalling their histories, and by reason of his musing upon them, from henceforth his despondency vanishes, sloth is put to flight, his limbs are strengthened, sleep is driven away from his eyelids, his thought becomes bold and casts off fear, distraction is manfully defeated, the mind is concentrated, and intense ardor is ignited in the heart, and ineffable joy arises in the soul. And further, sweet tears moisten the cheeks, spiritual jubilation inebriates the intellect, the soul receives inexpressible consolations, hope supports the heart and makes it courageous. Then it seems to that man that he dwells in Heaven during his vigil which is so replete with good things. By these and similar means those who labor in vigils with discretion go forward. For there is nothing which makes the mind so radiant and joyous and so enlightens it and expels evil thoughts, causing the soul to exult, as do continual vigils.

For this very reason all the holy Fathers persevered in this labor of vigil and clung to the rule of remaining vigilant in the night throughout the entire course of their lives. But they did so especially because they heard our Saviour in many places earnestly admonish us by His living word: 'Watch ye, therefore, and pray at all times' (Luke 21:36); and, 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation' (Matthew 26:41); and again, 'Pray and weary not' (Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17); and so forth. And as if it were not sufficient that He should admonish us by words alone, He also gave us an example in His own Person, in that at all times He honored the practice of

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prayer above all other things. Hence He continually separated Himself for prayer, and not indiscriminately, but He chose the night for this, and as a place, the desert (*Vide* Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35). Hereby [He taught] us to withdraw from all clamor and tumult, so that we could pray in stillness, as is proper.

All the revelations that were given to the saints concerning diverse matters, whether they served to make them prudent or were for the common instruction of men, came to them for the most part during the night and at the time of prayer. Therefore our Fathers received this lofty teaching concerning prayer as it were from our Saviour Himself and they received vigilance through prayer as being a commandment of the Apostle. They preeminently chose silence and seclusion from all things, so that they could be unremittingly in the proximity of God by means of their continual prayer. They fled into solitude not only to avoid any hindrances to their continual liturgy, but also lest perchance any alien thing should assail them from without and perturb the pure luster of

their mind and disquiet their gladdening vigils which are a light to the soul. But furthermore, they ate sparingly, lest the vapor that rises up from a full stomach should becloud the intellect and its discriminating tranquility should be disturbed and it should be robbed of the spiritual delight that prayer imparts. In short, in every respect they were very assiduous so as to be able to speak with God without a veil, in so far as possible, their mind being unencumbered by anything whatsoever.

Now because Satan is also persuaded that all these good things are laid up within this astonishing work, which in the body of the virtues occupies, as it were, the place of the soul for all the members, he envies it more than all other disciplines. And this all men also know by experience, for there is nothing else in a man by which the devil is so provoked and burns with such jealousy and against which he makes such preparations for war as night vigil, whether a man be a solitary, a coenobite, or a layman. Here he can no longer restrain himself, but he shows himself clearly in open conflict against vigil (or *a man*), employing no intermediary, although he does not perceive at all the gifts which those who keep vigil receive in secret. But he envies them especially for the chaste form of their standing, and for their perseverance against sleep through their wakefulness by means of glorifications and psalmody, and for their prayers made with bows and the stretching out of their hands, with prostrations and lying on the ground, and for heartfelt supplications throughout the night. Still, he is even more envious on account of others, who although they lie on their carpets like dead men and he makes sport of them as he pleases by sordid visions and lewd dreams, and the whole night long he causes them to wallow as it were in mire by means of diverse phantasies which arise in their heavy sleep from the fullness of their

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bellies, yet even so these same men henceforth form in their souls that wakeful state which belongs to the resurrection. And he sees that although they are still enclosed in the veil of the flesh and at every hour are assailed by the waves of mortality and are limited by a life that is held under the domain of this world's atmosphere, yet they still manifest in their mortal nature the figure of that manner of life which is to come.

Prayer offered up at night possesses a great power, more so than the prayer of the day-time. Therefore all the righteous prayed during the night, while combating the heaviness of the body and the sweetness of sleep and repelling corporeal nature. And this the prophet also says, 'I toiled in my groaning; every night I will wash my bed, with tears will I water my couch' (Psalms 6:6), while he sighed in fervent prayer. And again, 'At midnight I arose to give thanks unto Thee for the judgments of Thy righteousness' (Psalms 118:62). And for every entreaty for which they urgently besought God, they armed themselves with the prayer of night vigil, and at once they received their request.

There is nothing which even Satan fears so much as prayer that is offered during vigilance at night. And even if it is offered with distraction, it does not return empty, unless perhaps that which is asked for is unsuitable. For this reason the devil smites them with violent warfare, in order to hinder them, if possible, from this work, I mean those who continually practice it. Those, however, who have resisted even a little his wicked stratagems, who have tasted the gifts of God that are granted during vigil, and who have experienced in themselves the magnitude of God's help that is always nigh to them, utterly disdain him and all his devices. Therefore the order of the solitaries, even more than the entire community of the Church, wages war against him by the struggle of prayer and vigil, on the one hand because they are unencumbered by visible things, and on the

other hand because of their continual stillness. Since they are liberated from many affairs, the devil can no longer turn away their thoughts from rumination on God or obstruct them from their continual supplications in their contest with him. So it is that from the very beginning of their training (Literally; *discipleship*) until their deep old age they did not neglect the labor of vigils in any way whatever, but they knew well the work of standing throughout the entire night, even as we learn from the written histories of each one of them.

Saint Athanasios, in his history of that example for solitaries, Anthony, says that he kept very long vigils, so that he passed the greater part of the night without sleep. And it was in fact because of this that Satan found cause to assail this glorious man with his first conflict, and this occurred when the saint was still a boy. We find it frequently recorded in many of the narrations concerning him, that he never neglected vigil throughout his whole lifetime, and even when he went out to meet others at an appointed time.

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An example of this is when he went to see the blessed elder Paul, for after they ate the meal brought by a bird they stood in prayer all night long. Which one of the solitaries, though possessing all of the virtues together, could neglect this work, and not be reckoned to be idle without it? For night vigil is the light of the thinking (Syriac; *tar'itha*); and by it the understanding (Syriac; *mad'a*) is exalted, the mind (Syriac; *re'yana*) is collected, and the intellect (Syriac; *hauna*). This is a unique passage where Saint Isaac employs together all four terms for the mental faculties) takes flight and gazes at spiritual things and by prayer is rejuvenated and shines brilliantly. Through vigil there are bestowed on a man the earnestings of the good things of the life to come and the graces of those gifts, the mysteries of which are indicated in the holy Scriptures. Hence our Fathers did not neglect this labor from the beginning of their discipleship until they reached the measure of perfection. So it was that even at the time of deep old age when a man can hardly stand on his feet, they did not allow sloth to prevail against them and, by giving rest to their bodies with a little sleep, to hinder them from continual vigilance during the night. This we also learn from the narrations which are told concerning that perfect image of virtue and of all spiritual accomplishments (Literally; *beauties*) I mean the blessed Arsenios. When that famous man of Skete had totally withdrawn himself from all intercourse with men and had removed his dwelling far into the desert, distant even from the brethren, he gave himself completely over to the wondrous practice of vigil. His standing during his vigil differed even from that of all the fathers of his time, and his history bears witness to this. On the eve, it is said, of the Lord's day he would leave the sun behind his back and stretch out his hands toward heaven, until the sun rose and shone in his face (Cf. Budge, *Sayings of the Holy Fathers*, 1:105). And again, in another place it is said that he would pass the whole night in vigil, and when on account of nature he wished for the approach of morning so that he might have a little rest, he would struggle with sleep and say, 'Be gone from me, wicked handmaid!', (Ibid. 1:133). This was when he was quite aged, when it was said that he stooped from old age.

But so that his fortitude in vigil be better known, let us hear another tale concerning him, how he undauntedly withstood all his deep age and weakness, being a man of ninety years. Once he called his two disciples, who were themselves great fathers, and he said to them, 'Because the demons are striving with me and I do not know but that they rob me by sleep, labor here with me this night in your vigils, and watch me and see

if I fall asleep during my vigil.' So they sat down, one on his right hand and one on his left, from the evening even until the morning. And they said, 'We slept and we awoke, and we did not observe that he slept at all. But when it began to be light there came to us three times the

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sound of breathing in his nostrils, but whether he did this purposely so that we might think he slept or whether slumber had really fallen upon him, we know not. And he stood up and said to us, "Have I been asleep?" And we answered and said to him, "We do not know, O father, for we ourselves have slept" (Ibid 1:113).

In the sweet labors of vigil the leaders of our way of life took their delight. And what was the sweetness that the heroic Arsenios received from this hardship whereby he so greatly tormented his body? For it is clear that he did not vainly endure all these things. We see that not only his inner man was enlightened by a radiance from on high so that he rejoiced, but also his outward man, the nature of which is corruptible and dense, was clad with the glory in which all the saints will be arrayed at the end [of the world], because of the transfiguration that the whole inner nature of man undergoes.

From whence do we learn this? Once one of the brethren went to the cell of Abba Arsenios, and he looked through the window, and saw the elder standing, and his whole body was like a burning fire. For that brother who had gone to see the Elder was worthy of this vision, since he was not one of the lesser brethren, but one of the great ones. Because the blessed Arsenios was famous for the loftiness of his discipline, all the fathers desired to see him, but especially because they very rarely saw him, even as Abba Makarios said to him, 'Why do you flee from us?' Therefore the strangers also who came to Skete chiefly desired to see him and to receive his blessing. Now when that brother (to resume the narration) knocked at his door the Elder came out to him. And seeing that the brother was marveling at something which he had seen, he said to him, 'Have you been knocking a long time? Peradventure you have seen something?' And he said to him, 'No.' So he dismissed him (Ibid 1:625).

And what shall I say of the blessed Pachomios? For this man was the equal of Arsenios and a leader among the rest, distinguished in struggles, heroic in the wakefulness of vigil. He spent much time in striving with the demons like an illustrious athlete after the manner of Saint Anthony. And because many demons came against him during the night, that is, when he kept vigil, he besought God to remove sleep from him both by day and by night, so that he might not sleep at all, and might be able to bring low the power of the enemy, even as it is written, 'I shall not turn back until they fail' (Psalms 17:38), for they are powerless against the faith which is in the Lord. Now this gift was given unto him, even as he had asked, for a certain time. And because he was pure of heart, for the vision of his soul was purified by night vigil, stillness, and prayer, he saw God, Who is invisible, as it were in a mirror (Budge, op. Cit. 1:108). These are the fruits of vigil, these are the blessings of its practicers, and these are the crowns of its struggle.

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And if, my brother, you also wish to be a partaker with these saints and an heir to their way of life, without despondency hold fast to stillness, so that you may also persevere in unremitting prayer. Endure its afflictions, that you may keep possession of its blessings. And if your body for various reasons should become weary and desist from its labor, and you should not be able to accomplish the works of stillness as usual, and if

thereafter your conscience should begin to condemn you and you should grow despondent and dejected (for indeed it is the work of the conscience unceasingly to reprehend and trenchantly to reprove us, especially if our intention is good) do not say: 'Woe to me, for I am idle! It would be better for me to be outside [my cell] and to do any virtuous work whatever, rather than have this vain reputation of being a hesychast and recluse, being idle as I am in its liturgy, nay, to be a solitary and all alone, yet far from the proper deeds [of stillness]!' Do not say this. For our sweet God bears the burden of our weakness. He only asks of a man that which he has, and He knows better than we what our strength is.

When your strength is sufficient, toil. And even if you are not able to do anything at all, be joyful, accept the idleness of stillness, and be patient. But know that if you go out from stillness, not even that thought will remain with you which stirs up your conscience to smite you for your idleness. On the contrary, many accidents will befall you on account of the distraction and laxity of your senses, and they will corrupt even those virtuous deeds you performed previously, because the grace of stillness has been taken from you. And you will fall into temptations and encounter many accidents against your will.

But though you fall into temptations, do not despair. For there is no merchant who journeys on seas and highways and does not suffer losses, and there is no husbandman who merely reaps his harvest, and there is no athlete who does not suffer blows and buffeting, even though he should take the victory in the end. So it is also with the things of God, with the affairs of the merchants who travel this invisible path, for herein there are both profits and losses, wounds and triumph. When you are smitten, do not turn back. Forgive me.]]

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Homily 76.

An Answer Which Saint Isaac Made to a Brother Who Asked Him, 'Why Is It That, Although Our Lord Defined Mercy as Likeness to the Majesty of the Heavenly Father, Solitaries Honor Stillness Above Mercy?' And a Defense Concerning This.

It is well that you brought forward from the Gospel a comparison and an example for the investigation of the great discipline of stillness, as though we were opposed to it or sought to abolish it as something superfluous. The Lord defines mercy as likeness to the heavenly Father (Cf. Matthew 5:48) because mercy brings near to Him those who practice it, and this is true. Nor do we, the monks, honor stillness apart from mercifulness, but as far as possible we strive to be far removed from cares and turmoil. It is not our wish to refuse to do necessary things when they present themselves, but to make stillness our only concern, that we may be constant in rumination upon God, whereby we are most able to filter out our turbid waters and draw near to tranquility of intellect (Greek; *to Him or to it*). If rarely it should happen that for a time a certain necessity as regards the brethren (The words *as regards the brethren* are lacking in the Syriac) should come upon us, we must not neglect this. Thus we constantly compel ourselves at all times to be inwardly merciful to the entire nature of rational creatures. For so the Lord's teaching instructs us, and it is not by chance that it is this which characterizes our stillness. It is not needful merely to preserve this inner mercy of ours, but when the time suitable for works and certain necessities require it, we must not

neglect to give evident proof of our love. This is especially true for those who have not chosen total stillness (that is, not to meet with any man) but

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who hold to the rule of stillness throughout the week or for periods of seven weeks. Such men, even when they are within the confines of their rule, do not restrain themselves from fulfilling the works of mercy, unless there be one who is extremely abrupt, coarse, and inhuman, and who wishes to practice stillness before the faces and eyes of men. We know, however, that the mind cannot be illumined by converse and love for God apart from the love of our neighbor.

What sagacious monk, possessing food and clothing, can see his neighbor impoverished and naked, and will not give him whatever he has, sparing nothing? And again, who, upon seeing another who bears the same flesh as his own, wasted away by illness, exhausted by hardship and in need of help, would prefer his rule of seclusion to the love of his neighbor by reason of his ardent love of stillness? When, however, no such occasion arises, we observe love and mercifulness toward the brethren in our intellects. But when the occasion is at hand, God requires of us to fulfill and perform mercy with manifest works. Hence it is evident that if we have not acquired possessions, we are not permitted to descend into cares and anxieties for the sake of the poor. But if we do have means, it is demanded of us. Again, if because of our way of life we are far from the habitation and intercourse of men and from the sight of them, there is no need for us to leave our cell, our solitary and secluded dwelling, and to give ourselves over to roaming throughout the world so as to visit the sick and busy ourselves with ministrations of such matters. For it is obvious that such a thing brings a man from a higher state to a lower one. If, however, a man lives in the society of men and his dwelling is near to them and he is comforted by the labors of other men, whether at a time of sickness or of health, then he must render the same service; but he should not by any means ask others for such comfort. And if he should see a son of the same flesh as his own, who shares the same likeness, to be in straitness, yea rather Christ Himself outcast and belabored, and he should flee and hide himself from him, pretending to practice a sham stillness, then he, and those like him, are without mercy.

Do not bring forward John the Theban and Arsenios and say, 'Who of such men gave himself over to works of this sort, or cared for the sick and the poor, so neglecting their stillness?' Do not even speak of the deeds of such men! For if you are distant from all human comfort and intercourse as they were, the Lord will permit you to scorn such practices. If, however, you fall short of that perfect state, and at all times you are found in bodily labors and intercourse with men, for what reason do you disregard the commandments which your measure is obliged to keep, and you employ as an excuse the sublime discipline of the saints, which in fact you have never even approached?

But as for me, I will not neglect the saying concerning Saint Makarios the Great, which was recorded as a censure of those who despise their brethren. Once he went to

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visit a certain brother who was sick. When Saint Makarios asked the brother if there were anything he wished, he replied that he wished a little freshly baked bread. He said this because all the monks of that place had then the custom of baking bread once a year, at most. Straightway, therefore, that man worthy of blessedness stood up, and though he was ninety years of age, he walked from Skete to Alexandria and exchanged certain dried

loaves for fresh ones which he carried in his cloak and these he brought to that brother (See Budge, *The Sayings of the Holy Fathers*, 1:402).

And Abba Agathon, a man like unto the great Makarios, did something even greater than this. He was more experienced than all the other monks of his time and he both honored and loved stillness and silence above them all. This wondrous man, therefore, went at the time of a festival to sell his handwork, and in the market-place he found a foreigner, sick and outcast. He then rented a house and stayed with him, working with his own hands and spending on him the proceeds of his labor and paying the rent of the house. Thus he served him for six months, until the sick man became well. Abba Agathon, as it is told concerning him, was wont to say, 'I should wish to find a leper, give him my body and receive his' (See the *Alphabetical Patericon*, s.v. Abba Agathon 26, 27). This is perfect love.

Those who fear God, O beloved, are cheerfully assiduous in keeping the commandments, even if labors are required to do so (Literally; *even if it is by labors that their* [i.e. the commandments'] *finding falls into a man's hands*) and they imperil themselves for their sake. The Lifegiver confined the fullness of the commandments in, and made them to hang upon, two which embrace all: the love of God, and a love similar thereto, the love of His image. The first achieves the goal of the spirit's divine vision. The second achieves [the goal of] divine vision and *praxis*. For since the Divine nature is simple, uncompounded, invisible, and naturally is not subject to want, the consciousness (or *conscience*) in its meditation does not naturally require *praxis*, nor any sort of physical activity, nor gross material concepts (Syriac; *motions*). Indeed, its operation is simple and it is active in one portion of the intellect, in a manner corresponding to the simplicity of that worshipful Cause which transcends the perception of the flesh. The second commandment is the love of man in accord with the duality of human nature; consequently its observance is two fold. I mean that we invisibly fulfill it in our consciousness and at the same time we fulfill it with the body, and not only in an evident manner, but secretly as well. And that which is fulfilled by outward actions should be likewise fulfilled in our consciousness.

For as man was constituted from two parts, soul and body, so all things pertaining to him are accomplished in a twofold manner, corresponding to the duality of his state. And because *praxis* everywhere precedes divine vision, it is impossible for a man to rise to that lofty portion (i.e. divine vision) unless he first fulfills by labor what is lower. Now no one can dare to

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say concerning the love of his neighbor that he progresses in it within his soul, if he forsakes that part of it which is fulfilled by the body in accordance with his strength, the time, and the place, which things aid him in doing the deed. For only then is that [[portion of]] love verified that is held and apprehended in the consciousness (Greek; *in theoria*. In Syriac the words *theoria* and *consciousness* are similar in appearance). When in outward action we are faithful and true in so far as possible, then our soul is given power to stretch upward to that great portion of sublime and divine *theoria* in simple intellections which have no similitude. But where there is no possibility to practice the love of neighbor in visible actions with the body, the love of our neighbor fulfilled in our thinking alone suffices in the eyes of God, especially if we are able continually to practice that all-embracing portion (i.e. The love of God. The original Greek text literally translated the Syriac, but some confusion has entered the present Greek text due to double meaning of

confining portion or portion of reclusion. The Syriac word also has this double meaning) that is superior to the love of neighbor.

But if we are entirely destitute of this all embracing portion, let us fill up its lack by the commandment which follows it, which is visible *praxis*. Let us fulfill this by the toil of our body for the consolation of our brethren, lest, when we vainly labor in the name of solitude, our freedom be a pretext for subjection to the flesh. It is evident that the man who is separated from the company of men, whose mind is wholly immersed in God, who is dead to all men by reason of his absence from them, is not permitted to serve and minister to men. A man, however, who observes a rule of stillness for a period of seven weeks or for seven days at a time, and who, after completing his rule, meets and associates with men and receives consolation in their company, but neglects his brethren who suffer affliction, thinking all the while that he is thus strictly observing his rule of seven: the same is merciless and crude. For it is very clear that because he has no mercy, because of conceit, and because of his fallacious thoughts, he does not deign to undertake such deeds.

He who despises the sick will not see light, and the day of him who turns his face from a man straitened by affliction will become darkness. The sons of the man who scorns the voice of one suffering hardship will grope their way, being struck with blindness.

Let us not in our ignorance defame the great name of stillness. For every discipline there is a time, a place, and a distinction, and it is known to God whether its labor is acceptable. But apart from this, vain is the labor of all those who strive after the degree of perfection (Syriac; *the labor that in every degree strives after perfection*). The man who hopes to be comforted and visited in his infirmity by others will humble himself and will toil together with his neighbor at the time of temptation, that his work may be joyful in his stillness, being far removed from any conceit and delusion of the demons. One of the saints, a man possessing spiritual knowledge, said that nothing has such power to release a monk from the demon of pride and to strengthen the

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frontier of chastity when the passion of fornication is kindled, as visiting the sick who lie upon their beds and waste away in the affliction of their flesh. Great is the angelic practice of stillness, when such discretion as this is conjoined with it, because there is a need for humility. By that which we overlook we are robbed and plundered.

I have said these things, my brother, not so that we should neglect and despise the work of stillness; for in every place we exhort you to this work, and we do not now oppose what we have said elsewhere. Let no one take hold of, and bring forth out of context, a statement from our words and leave the rest, senselessly clutching that alone in his hands. I recall that in many places I have said with entreaty that even if it should happen that a man is totally idle in his cell by reason of the constraint of illness (which is wont to befall us) he should not for this cause think that a complete departure from his cell and works performed outside of it are superior to his idleness within his cell. But by a complete departure I do not refer to the circumstance when a necessity arises, causing you to depart from your cell for several weeks in order to purchase what is required for the consolation and life of your neighbor; do not judge this to be idleness and a waste of time. But if a man thinks that he is perfect and above everything of this life because of his continuance with God and his withdrawal from all visible labors, then with reason he may also refrain from these things. Great is the work of discernment practiced by those

whom God helps! And may He grant us to fulfill His word, 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise' (Luke 6:31). To Him be glory and honor from all creation unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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Homily 77.

On How Much Honor Humility Obtains, and How Very Lofty Is Its Rank.

Wishing to open my mouth, O brethren, and speak on the exalted theme of humility, I am filled with fear, even as a man who understands that he is about to discourse concerning God with the art of his own words. For humility is the raiment of the Godhead. The Word Who became man clothed Himself in it, and therewith He spoke to us in our body. Every man who has been clothed with it has truly been made like unto Him Who came down from His own exaltedness, and hid the splendor of His Majesty, and concealed His glory with humility, lest creation should be utterly consumed by the contemplation of Him. Creation could not look upon Him unless He took a part of it to Himself, and thus conversed with it, and neither could it hear the words of His mouth face to face.

The sons of Israel were not even able to hear His voice when He spoke with them from the cloud (*Vide* Deuteronomy 5:25 ff). How, then, should creation be able to bear the vision of Him openly? The Israelites were so afflicted that they said to Moses, 'Let God speak with thee, and thou shalt hear His words for us: and let not God speak with us, lest we die' (Exodus 20:19). So terrible is the sight of God that even the mediator [Moses] said, 'I exceedingly fear and quake' (Hebrews 12:21). The splendor of His glory appeared on Mount Sinai; and the mountain smoked and quaked in fear of the revelation that was in it, so that even the beasts that approached the lower parts of it died. The sons of Israel made ready and prepared themselves, keeping themselves chaste for three days according to the command of Moses (*Vide* Exodus 19:15, 16), that they might be

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made worthy of hearing the voice of God, and of the vision of His revelation. And when the time was come, they could not receive the vision of His light and the fierceness of the voice of His thunders. But now, when He has poured out His grace upon the world through His own Coming, He has descended not in an earthquake, not in a fire, not in a terrible and mighty sound (Cf. 3 Kings 19:12), but 'as the rain upon a fleece, and rain-drops that fall upon the earth' (Psalm 71:6) softly, and He was seen conversing with us after another fashion. This came to pass when, as though in a treasury, He concealed His majesty with the veil of His flesh (Cf. Hebrews 10:20), and among us spoke with us in that [body] which His own bidding wrought for Him out of the womb of the Virgin, even Mary the Theotokos. All this He did so that on beholding Him Who was of our race conversing with us, we should not be smitten with terror by the vision of Him.

Wherefore every man has put on Christ when he is clothed with the raiment wherein the Creator was seen through the body that He put on. For the likeness in which He was seen by His own creation and in which He kept company with it, He willed to put on in His inner man, and to be seen therein by His fellow-servants (Cf. Philippians 2:7). Instead of a robe of honor and outward glory, He was arrayed in this. When rational and irrational creation beholds any man clad in this likeness (i.e. humility) it worships him as

master, for the sake of its own Master's honor, Whom it beheld clad and walking therein. For what creature does not feel reverence at the spectacle of a humble man? And yet until the glory of humility was revealed to all, this vision which is filled with holiness was held in disdain. But now its majesty has dawned on the eyes of the world, and every man honors this likeness in every place where it is seen. In this mediator, creation has been counted worthy of receiving the vision of its Creator and Maker. Wherefore not even by the enemies of the truth is it despised; and even if he who has acquired it is the most impoverished of all creation, yet by it he is honored as though by the diadem and the purple.

No man ever hates, or wounds with words, or despises him that is humble, for because his Master loves him, he is loved by all. He loves all and is loved by all. All men cherish him, and in every place which he approaches they see him as an angel of light, and mark him out with honor. And though the wise man and the teacher discourse, they are silenced, that they might yield their place for the humble man to speak. The eyes of all give heed to his mouth, and to whatever word that issues forth from it. And every man waits on his words even as on the words of God. The brevity of his speech is like the words of sophists who scrutinize the nuances of all they say. His words are sweet to the hearing of the wise, more than honey and the honeycomb are to the palate. He is accounted as a god by

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all men, even though he be inexpert in his speech, and despicable and vile in his appearance.

He who speaks contemptuously against the humble man and does not consider him an animate creature, is like one who has opened his mouth against God. And though the humble man is contemptible in his eyes, his honor is esteemed by all creation. The humble man approaches ravening beasts, and when their gaze rests upon him, their wildness is tamed. They come up to him as to their Master, wag their heads and tails and lick his hands and feet, for they smell coming from him that same scent that exhaled from Adam before the fall, when they were gathered together before him and he gave them names in Paradise (*Vide* Genesis 2:19). This was taken away from us, but Jesus has renewed it, and given it back to us through His Coming. This it is which has sweetened the fragrance of the race of men.

Again, the humble man approaches deadly creeping things, and as soon as the feel of his hand comes near and touches their body, the virulence and the harshness of their deadly venom ceases; and he crushes them in his hands as if they were locusts. He approaches men, and they pay heed to him as to the Lord. And why do I say men? For even the demons with their fierceness, their hostility, and all their boastful thinking, become like dust as soon as they come before him. All their wickedness becomes folly, and their stratagems are undone, and their wiles and pernicious cunning are rendered powerless. So now, since we have shown the greatness of humility's God-given honor, and the power hidden in it, let us also show what humility is, and when a man is deemed worthy of receiving it perfectly as it truly is. But let us make a distinction between him that is humble in countenance, and the man who has been deemed worthy of true humility.

Humility is a certain mysterious power which perfected saints receive when they have completed the whole course of their discipline. This strength is given only to those who, by the power of grace, have accomplished all virtue in themselves, in so far as the

limits of nature permit; for this virtue includes all in itself. Therefore one cannot deem every man humble without discrimination, but only those who have been accounted worthy of this degree which we have mentioned.

Not everyone who is naturally gentle, or quiet, or prudent, or meek, has attained to the stature of humility. But he is truly humble of mind who possesses in secret something worthy of pride, and does not pride himself, but in his thought reckons it as dust, earth, and ashes. And neither do we call the man humble who humbles himself through remembrance of his sins and transgressions, and who recalls them until his heart is contrite, and his mind descends from its thoughts of pride by the remembrance of them, although this is a laudable thing. For he still possesses the thoughts of pride, and has not acquired humility, but brings the latter near to himself by means of devices. Though this is laudable, as

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I have said, yet lo, humility is still not his: nay, he seeks for it, and it is not his. But the man of perfect humility is he who has no need of devising reasons with his mind in order to be humble, but who has come to possess it in all these matters perfectly, naturally and without labor, like a man who has received in himself some great gift, more excellent than the whole of creation and nature. Yet with his own eyes he sees himself as a sinner, vile, and contemptible. He is like a man that enters into the mysteries of all the natures of the spiritual realms, and being perfect in the wisdom of all creation in all exactness, yet considers himself as one who knows not so much as a single thing. Not by means of devices, but without compelling himself he has become such a man in his heart.

Question: Is it possible, then, for a man to become such a one? Could nature thus change him?, (The Greek reads *and that by nature he could thus change himself, or not?* the *not* of the *or not* is really the answer to the question, i.e. *no*).

Answer: No, but do not doubt. For the power to bear mysteries which the humble man has received, which makes him perfect in every virtue without toil, this is the very power (Acts 1:8) which the blessed apostles received in the form of fire. For its sake the Saviour 'commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem' (Acts 1:4) until they should receive power from on high (The Greek adds here *Jerusalem is virtue, the power is humility, but power from on high is the....* This appears to be a marginal note that has worked its way into the text), that is to say, the Paraclete, which, being interpreted, is the Spirit of consolation. And this is the Spirit of divine visions. Concerning this it is said in divine Scripture: 'Mysteries are revealed to the humble' (Ecclesiasticus 3:19; Cf. Proverbs 3:34). The humble are accounted worthy of receiving in themselves this Spirit of revelations Who teaches mysteries. On this account it has been said by certain holy men that humility perfects the soul through divine visions. Therefore let no man be so audacious as to think concerning himself, that he has attained to the stage of humility within himself because of a single compunctionate thought which arises in him on some occasion, or through the few tears that he sheds, or because of one good quality that he has by nature or has gained for himself by force. For [in such a case] he would acquire in a short time with slight labors that which is the fullness of all mysteries and the citadel of all virtues, and he would consider (This verb has been added from the Syriac printed text. It was lost in the Western Syriac text (and consequently the Greek) thus making the phrase obscure) these things to be the gift of humility.

But if a man overcomes all hostile spirits, and not one of the works of every virtue escapes him, nor is there any which he himself has not worked or acquired; and if when he has overcome and subjugated all the strongholds of the enemy he becomes aware in the spirit that he has received this gift in himself (when 'the Spirit beareth witness to

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his spirit' (Romans 8:16), according to the Apostle's words): then this is the perfection of humility. Blessed is he that has gained it, because at every moment he kisses and embraces the bosom of Jesus!

But if a man asks: 'What shall I do? How shall I acquire it? By what manner of means shall I become worthy of receiving it? Behold, I force myself, and as soon as I think that I have gained it, I see that, lo, thoughts opposed to it are whirling about in my mind. And immediately, I fall thereby into despair.'

To him who asks this, it will be answered: 'It is enough for the disciple that he be as his teacher, and the servant as his lord' (Matthew 10:25). Behold Him Who commanded this, and Who bestows the gift, how He possessed it: imitate Him, and you will find it. For He Himself said, 'The prince of this world cometh, and he hath nothing in Me' (John 14:30). Do you see how, through the perfection of all virtues, humility can be gained? Let us imitate Him Who gave the commandment, 'The foxes have holes', He says, 'and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head' (Matthew 8:20), the same Who is glorified by all who have been perfected and sanctified and consummated in all generations, together with the Father that sent Him forth, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

[386] (illustration).

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APPENDIX A.

I. On the Gloomy Darkness That Befalls Those Who Pursue the Life of Knowledge in Stillness (Homily 49 in the Syriac printed text).

At a time of darkness, kneeling is more helpful than anything else. Indeed, the very fact that you cannot draw nigh to kneeling and persevere in it is due to the devil's warfare. You ought, however, to fight against this. The devil knows the help that comes from kneeling, and therefore with all his power he strives diligently to prevent you from drawing nigh to it. When you are about to fall down upon your face, he troubles you. And although you should overcome him and bend your knees, he will compel you not to linger in it. But even if our thoughts are cold and murky, we should persist long in kneeling. And although our hearts should be dead at those times and we should not even have a prayer or know what we should say, since no words of supplication come to us, nor even a petition, still we should remain continually prostrate upon our faces, though we keep silence.

When we are in need of help from God in some matter and we are deprived of it, we rightly have not received it because we do not draw nigh to God in prayer with earnestness and fervor both day and night, loudly crying out to Him with pain; rather, we expect Him to give it to us of His own accord. He, however, contrives a cause to bring us close to Him by leaving us in tribulation. For by His very delay in coming to our rescue,

He obliges us to tarry before His door in our supplications, and thus He brings about our help. Albeit, when the causes of our being helped come upon us we are dismayed, we

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hesitate and give ourselves over to sloth, negligence, and despondency, and we are colder than water.

In every evil and temptation that comes upon you, whether from within or from without, here is the path of prayer that lies open before you: fall on your face, be it for an entire day and night, beseeching God with a fervent heart. And God, since He is merciful and good, will not delay in giving you consolation and refreshment (Literally; *a breathing space*) when He sees that with pain of heart you beseech Him, unless you ask in a way that lies outside this path.

Throughout your life act in this manner. You will receive and you will lose. Again you will make entreaty with pain of heart and it will be given to you. And again it will go away from you, and then you will encounter such a thing that you will think that the end has come for you. But when you pray to God, once again, in a single hour it has vanished. Such is the course that has been ordained; be not disheartened.

During the time when that impenetrable darkness weighs upon the soul, let us beware of falling into despair! Harken to me, my brother: like a woman in the pangs of childbirth and like a man enduring tortures, struggle mightily against leaving your cell! For the enemy incessantly schemes, more than for anything else, to make you leave your cell by reason of impatience at the time of combat. With all his power he compels you to go out, lest perchance while you remain indoors, you should seek refuge in kneeling. Greatly does he fear this work, more than anything else.

II. *Beautiful Considerations Concerning a Man's Life* (Homily 56 in the Syriac printed text).

As often as a man draws nigh to this world in his way of life, the love of material things takes root in him. He is constantly disturbed by concern over them, and because of them he strives with other men, and he is captivated by friendship for certain persons. But when his mind progresses in rumination upon the world to come, an imageless meditation constantly stirs within him. In hope he eagerly awaits those things which he does not see, forgetting things here. From time to time he even forgets himself, being immersed in these intellections, and he disregards his thoughts concerning visible things. Thus he despises

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both thoughts and actions as long as he attends to this. The love that is mingled with instructing certain persons is erased from his heart and that unique friendship [for men] that does not depend on sight (or *is formless*. The meaning here seems to be that he does not need to see men in order to love them) is established in his soul. The memory's awareness of human affairs is gradually stolen away from his mind, and meditation upon hidden things increases in him, gains strength, and vanquishes corporeal thoughts, and henceforth he withdraws from corruptible things in so far as nature is capable. If it were not that natural recollection arouses him whenever he lacks something indispensable, his mind would be gathered up for the greater part of the time in undivided meditation upon those future things. And on their account he becomes foolish in the eyes of all this

world's wisdom. His memory becomes weak, and under the examination of human knowledge he will be, as it were, a dullard.

Blessed is the man who has been accounted worthy of these things! Tears will not cease to spill from his eyes when he turns within himself through the recollection of those things by which men are led astray, and of why those things are allowed to exist, and that in them the entirety of mankind is gathered up, and what labor and what delusion exist on their account. It is said of Paul that because such thoughts as these reigned in his soul, for the space of three years he was unable to still the tears that welled up in him. This reflection conjoined with the shedding of tears overcomes a man when he perceives the hope of things to come, and he turns his mind to the things of this world and to how short a man's life is compared with the hope reserved for the ages in the new life. Through this mourning he becomes dead to all transitory things (This could also mean *all transgressions*) and anxiety over them, and all the passions of the soul and body become dead in him.

Let us remember this, my beloved, and let us despise things here inasmuch as we are able, for thus in our thoughts we shall gradually draw nigh to those things to come. If a man does not constrain himself in the beginning and from time to time despise what lies before his eyes, so that he may gradually forsake these things and thus proceed forward, the meditation and reflection of future things increasing within him, then he will never rise above his body in his way of life. For unless those who travel on the road go forward day by day, shortening their journey—and, on the contrary, should they stand in one place—the road before them will never diminish and they will never arrive at their destination. So it is with us also. If we do not constrain ourselves little by little, we shall never have the strength to abstain from bodily things so as to gaze toward God.

Here is wisdom: because it is so difficult for a man to break away from bodily things once he is ensnared by any one of them, he should strive to stand aloof from them. In

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this manner a man may also decrease his thoughts of them and his mind will—because of the decrease of its cares—have leisure to gaze toward something else. I do not mean, however, that we should not have concern for our needs, for this is necessary, lest we deprive our nature of life itself. Still we should not make this our principal work and put the work of God in second place. Rather, attending to the former in part, we should leave the care of this matter to God, for it is better to place our confidence in God than in ourselves.

But if a man should venture totally to despise earthly things for the sake of spiritual ones, I would not consider this a disgraceful thing, since we have so many encouragements from Scripture that teach us to be strong in our hope. It is written, 'The Lord is at hand, have care for nothing' (Philippians 4:6), and David says, 'Cast thy care upon the Lord and He will nourish thee' (Psalms 54:22), and 'Rich men have turned poor and gone hungry, but they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good thing' (Psalms 33:10). Our Lord has also commanded us and said, 'Have care for nothing, but increase your rumination upon the things to come and you shall not lack these earthly things which are so necessary by reason of the demands of nature' (*Vide* Matthew 6:31, 33).

May God by His grace grant us that the love of Him abound in us, so that through continual rumination upon Him we may forget the world and the things thereof, being

released from its bonds! And instead of these many bonds may He grant us to be bound with that single bond which is never loosed from those who love Him, that is to say, the bond of the Kingdom of the worlds on high! May we be bound by this bond and be accounted worthy of the mystery of those good things, the fullness of which is reserved in the world to come for those who have attained it (i.e. the *mystery* or a foretaste) here! May we also possess it and be possessed by it, through the power that proceeds from it, forever and ever. Amen.

III. *On the Workings of Grace* (Homily 71 in the printed text).

Establish this sign in your soul and ponder upon it: whenever you perceive in your soul that God's care has begun to reveal itself to your soul, then understand that you are near to the harbor of purity. When a man begins to be elevated above the passions, this holy power immediately cleaves to his soul and does not depart from her either by

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night or by day, and it shows to her God's providence. And even the minutest details of all that is and was, of yes and no, of what visits a man both secretly and openly, and of the very creation of the world, this power which has entered the soul reveals to her. And further, it reveals to her God's creative power and shows her His divine care which unceasingly cleaves to and visits every single thing of this creation. And it shows to his soul how divine care accompanies a man at all times, though he is unaware and ignorant of it, and preserves him from adversities at all times and directs him toward that which is for his salvation and the repose of both his soul and body and for the gaining of life. This very same divine power, which works all these things, manifests itself to a man in secret through noetic revelation to his spiritual nature, that is, his intellect. When a man is deemed worthy to receive this power in his soul, he knows naught but awe and silence; his tears flow like streams and straightway he desists from all his works.

From henceforth you will gaze at all times upon the spectacle of God's continuous care for the work of His hands. Thereupon your intellect will be swallowed up in awestruck wonder, your senses will be silent, and you, the wretched man, will cast yourself down upon your face in prayer, your tongue being unable to speak, and your heart unable to offer a prayer; for by wonder at these divine acts even prayer becomes idle (or *ceases, becomes inactive*). This is the idleness that is superior to work, when a man is completely at rest from his senses and thoughts and he lies continually upon his face before his Lord. And even his bones with their silence will send up glorification to God in this idleness, as the prophet says, 'All my bones shall say, O Lord, who is like unto Thee?' (Psalms 34:10). At this time you will find that the demon of pride, more than all other passions, is bound and cast beneath the feet of your soul. By this gift, as they say, a man is deemed worthy of the love of God and perfect humility.

This gift is first tasted through stillness, and those who with labor (or *righteous activity, praxis*) and watchfulness persevere in absolute stillness cannot but know it. But when a man departs from stillness and embraces laxity, it withdraws from him. When, however, he enters stillness once again, is mindful of his soul and vigorously takes up his customary labor, it reaches out again to his soul and manifests to her its power. Once, therefore, a man becomes completely perfect, this power is united to him both inwardly and outwardly, and he will not pause even for an hour from sighing and weeping and the rest, provided that he does not spring away from the prudent order of his labor. Even now

there are men who have been accounted worthy of this gift in part. But from this portion that they have received they understand the properties of that which is the perfection of this gift. For when a man

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tastes a ladleful of wine from a large flask, he knows how all the rest is, even though others should drink it partly or completely.

A man who possesses this gift in perfection will not readily be found, nay, scarcely at all. For this power is a gift of the watchfulness of stillness; and because there is no one in our dispirited generation who has embraced perfect stillness and complete watchfulness, we are also devoid of its gifts. The man who possesses these indications in writings of ink, but in actual deed has not found them through his experience, resembles the man who carries under his arm a lyre adorned and furnished with strong strings, but his fingers do not know, being untrained, how to play them and to produce diverse melodies for his own pleasure. He possesses, then, a lyre, but not its art. He has need of other men to play it before him and give him pleasure.

Do not rejoice when you grow rich in the knowledge of many things, but rejoice when that which you know is found to be yours by the actual doing of it. The former without the latter will gradually recede, and it can even produce pride because it goes unpracticed. When, however, you are diligent in the latter (i.e. the practicing of what one knows), without study (or *instruction*) you will certainly be illumined in the former also. The eye of knowledge is experience, and its fostering is continual labor.

Let this be for you a luminous sign that your soul has reached *limpid purity* (or *clearness*): when, after thoroughly examining yourself, you find that you are full of mercy for all mankind, and that your heart is afflicted by the intensity of your pity for men and burns as it were with fire, without your making distinctions between persons. By this, when it is continually present, the image of the heavenly Father will be seen in you (Cf. Matthew 5:45, 48).

You will be able to comprehend the measure of your way of life not from the distinctive quality of your works, but from the variations that your understanding (Syriac; *mad'a*) undergoes. The body is wont to bathe in tears when the intellect (Syriac; *hauna*) beholds spiritual things, for then as it were from gorges a man's tears pour forth freely and spontaneously from his eyes, drenching his cheeks.

I myself know a man who even during sleep was seized by awestruck wonder at God through *theoria* on something from the material of his evening's reading. And while his soul was astonished at the meditation of this divine vision, he perceived as it were that for a long time he was dwelling upon the thoughts of his sleep and delving into the marvel of that vision. It was, indeed, in the very deep of night when suddenly he awoke from his sleep, his tears flowing like streams and falling even to his chest. His mouth was filled with glorifications and his heart mused long upon that divine vision with sweetness that

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knew no satiety. From the abundance of his tears, which without measure spilled from his pupils, and from the stupefaction of his soul, whereby all the members of his body became limp, and of his heart, wherein a certain sweetness throbbed, he was not even able to perform his usual liturgy of night prayer. Only with difficulty could he utter a psalm at daybreak, so overwhelmed was he by the multitude of his tears which gushed

involuntarily from the fountains of his eyes, and by the other things.

Let us then be diligent, my brethren, and long before we wish to go to sleep let us ponder upon the glorifications and our psalm-singing and our readings from the holy Scriptures, keeping our soul from evil recollections and from every odious reflection, and let us furnish our treasury with every sort of beautiful thing. Then sleep will overtake us while we are full of the recollection of God, and our soul will be aflame with ardent longing for the good things [yonder] (or *for things that are good*), because God's grace surrounds us in our sleep and pours forth upon us its gifts, though we slumber. For, indeed, it examines us, whether our body is pure of every kind of defilement and whether the thoughts of our heart are cleansed from odious things. On account of grace the sons of the prince of darkness cannot draw near us or surround us, for the sword and spear of grace encircle us. But if they find us as they would like to—when grace has withdrawn from us, as it were abhorring us, and has driven us away from itself as though we were corpses devoid of life—then they draw nigh us with all their wickedness, and they ply us with all kinds of foul and terrifying thoughts according to the desire of their loathsome will.

When, therefore, something of this sort befalls us in our sleep, we should understand it immediately and recollect ourselves and perceive that in this night God's overshadowing was far from us. How was it that the demons did not swallow us up? It was God's bidding (Literally; *the Divine nod*) alone, in Whose hand is the soul of everything made of flesh, that permitted them to draw nigh us so that we might become vigilant and look at ourselves. But it is impossible for them to approach when God's overshadowing is near us.

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IV. *On Hidden States and the Powers and Operations Therein* (Homily 75 in the Syriac printed text).

My brother, may this be regarded by you as true. God always inclines to a man's will, beholding his purpose and his earnest desire, and He grants his request and satisfies him when it concerns the following: the performance of wondrous deeds, the foreknowing of things to come, deliverance from temptations, peace from warfare, victory over each one of the passions, the attaining of each one of the virtues, grace-given consolation for a time, purity of prayer, fervor of spirit, spiritual joy, and all the other requests for the sake of which a man toils at various times, having a good intention and a mournful heart.

But as regards the mysteries that belong to the Spirit, as being the motions of spiritual prayer, and the intellect's entrance within the veil of the Holy of Holies, and the perception of that imperishable inheritance: unless a man pays their tribute, God will not be persuaded to give them, even if all creation were to make entreaty for him. Now their tribute is purity of soul. When a man attains to purity from the passions, then things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have gone up into the heart of a man (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9) that he should ask for them in prayer, are revealed to him through purity, which does not desist even for a moment from mysteries and spiritual visions.

What the power of spring customarily does to the earth's nature, this also does grace do to the soul through purity. The power of springtime causes even the delicate roots that grow in the valleys to sprout, warming the earth like a fire does a cauldron, so that it sends forth the treasures of verdure that God has planted in the earth's nature to

gladden creation and for His own glory. In like manner grace causes the manifest blossoming of all the splendor that God has concealed in the soul's nature, and it shows this to her and causes her to rejoice in its beauty.

So it is that when the soul beholds the great and ineffable treasures that God has laid up within her, that were hidden from her by the polluted garment of the passions and of ignorance, but which God now shows to her because the coat of the passions is torn asunder, then from her joy she is carried away from earthly things by His love. No longer

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does she remember the flesh that concealed her beauties from her sight. She then beholds in herself heavenly beauties as in a perfect mirror, one that through its absolute purity reflects the beauty of men's faces. For, as it is said, 'Holiness is meet for the holy.' Every kind of virtue and every labor by which righteousness is accomplished can be practiced, achieved, and fulfilled outside of stillness. But dispassion and purity cannot be achieved (Literally; *have no place*) outside of stillness.

V. *Brief Subjects* (Homily 76 in the Syriac printed text).

The blessed Paul teaches us, saying, 'Put off the old man and put on the new man which after God is created in holiness and the righteousness of truth' (Cf. Ephesians 4:22, 24). Now he does not say, 'Put on the new man over the old man', for he knew that this would be impossible. See how wisely he enjoins this. He does not say, 'Put on the new man who is renewed by the knowledge of God', but he says, 'First put off the old, then put on the new.' This is like what he says in another place, 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption' (1 Corinthians 15:50). By 'incorruption' he means the knowledge of that other world, and by 'corruption' and 'flesh and blood' he designates the corrupting passions of both the soul and the body, the realm of whose motions is in the 'mind of the flesh' (Romans 8:6). He calls purity here the 'new man', and by the 'Kingdom of God' he means the lofty, noetic *theoria* of the blessed intuitions of that eternal effulgence, into which the holy soul is only permitted to enter by means of incorruptible intuitions that are exalted above corruption, flesh, and blood.

If the little pupil of your soul's eye has not been purified, do not venture to gaze at the sun, lest you be deprived of your normal visual power and you be cast into one of those noetic realms, that is to say, Tartarus, which is a type of Sheol: I mean, darkness outside of God. For those who have gone outside their nature by means of the thoughts of their intellects roam in that region by means of the intellectual nature which they possess (Here Saint Isaac is speaking of philosophers, intellectuals, atheists, and the like). Therefore the man who dared to enter the wedding feast in unclean garments

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was commanded to be cast into this outer darkness (Cf. Matthew 22:11-13). By 'wedding feast' the vision of spiritual knowledge is meant. The dishes of that feast are the plenitude of divine mysteries, which are full of rejoicing, jubilation, and delight of soul. He calls a 'wedding garment' the mantle of purity, whereas 'unclean garments' are passionate thoughts (or *motions*) in the soul, for these are defiled things. The 'outer darkness' is to be outside of any delight of knowledge of the truth and intimacy with God. If the man who is clothed in unclean garments such as these dares with his understanding to imagine the exaltedness of God, to enter and sit his soul down in the midst of the spiritual divine

visions of that holy wedding feast (which shines forth only in the pure) and to desire to partake of its pleasure while he is engrossed in the pleasure of the passions, he is immediately swallowed up as it were by phantasies (or *mirages*, i.e. of the truth) and driven away from there into a region devoid of splendor, the same which is called Sheol and Perdition. This place is ignorance and being forgotten by God.

The things of God, it is said, come of themselves, if the place is pure and undefiled. The words 'come of themselves' mean that it is natural for purity that the heavenly light shines in it without searching and labor on our part. Within a pure heart the new heaven is stamped, for the sight thereof is light and the place thereof is spiritual. And it is said in another place that as the magnet has the natural power to attract particles of iron, so spiritual knowledge attracts a pure heart.

Although it has been handed down by truly veracious men that no one's mind is absolutely invulnerable to the plundering of the allurements of this present life, still I say with confidence, not fearing to be convicted by the truth of experience, that the man who is clothed with the raiment of mourning in his thinking is not only invincible to the allurements of the passions, but he is mighty and triumphant in the war against them. Indeed, they do not venture at all to show themselves for battle, nor even from afar to try their various devices, wherever there is a mourning soul that has made herself a house of lamentation by her diverse laments over her sins. And as the blessed Jacob said, she will make her dwelling in the grave until she meets her beloved Joseph again (Cf. Genesis 37:35). I cannot be persuaded, therefore, that where there is the bitterness of mourning, the aforementioned pleasure of the passions can enter. I affirm rather that this man's labor is in security and safety and lies above fear. The man who continually mourns because of fear—that is, because he does not know what the final end of his course will be—is superior to the man who continually passes his life in joy because he perceives the hope of his labor.

O man, whose city is downtrodden by inner passions, take up the weapon of mourning and pursue them and wrest your servants from their hands!, (*Vide* Genesis 14:14-16). For this weapon is always invincible and [a provider] of safety and it is tried by veracious men.

End of Appendix A.

Introduction; excerpt.

(Appendix B immediately follows this section).

[lxxxi, paragraph 3]

The Book of Grace – Commentary.

The Book of Grace consists of seven centuries concerning every aspect of the spiritual life. Although, on the whole, there is little connexion between each maxim, it is clear that they are not extracts from some larger work. Each century follows the same general plan, employs the same style and terminology, and expresses similar thoughts; they are certainly penned by the same author. There are at least two manuscripts in the libraries of the West which contain this work together with the Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian. These are Mingana 151, held in the Selly Oaks Colleges Library, and Berlin Or. 1159, held in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz; the former was copied in 1906 in a West Syrian hand, and the latter in 1898 in an East Syrian hand (To these two MSS must be added a third, Vatican Syriac 562, dated 1487. Unfortunately

we have not been able to study this MS). Judging by the identical lacunae and the very few variant readings between them, they were copied from the same source. Both of these manuscripts attribute the work to Saint Isaac. Recently A. Voobus has discovered five manuscripts (one dating from A.D. 1294, three from the 15th century, and one from 1905) in the libraries of the Syrian East which contain *The Book of Grace* and, presumably, ascribe it to Saint Isaac (A. Voobus; 'Eine neue Schrift von Ishaq von Ninive', *Ostkirchlichen Studien* 21 (1972) pp. 309-12). The terminology used in *The Book of Grace* is, for the most part, quite similar to that of the Homilies and, more significantly, many of Saint Isaac's favorite teachings are repeated in this work. For example, zeal manifested against the misdeeds of other men is condemned in several places (Century 6:29, 7:38, 7:69); purity is defined as 'perfect, indiscriminating, and undeficient love for the entire race of men equally' (Century 5:58); the silence of awestruck wonder is said to

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be the state of the new world (See Century 7:8 and the Homilies, page 321); and an expression occurring several times in the Homilies, 'The things of God, they say, come of themselves' (Pages 13, 396), is employed (Century 2:25). Furthermore, in Century 4:50, the author relates a story about the monks of Mount Matout, where Saint Isaac spent the end of his life.

Despite this apparently conclusive evidence, when reading *The Book of Grace* one involuntarily questions whether it was really written by the same author as the Ascetical Homilies. *The Book of Grace*, though an extremely interesting work containing many profound insights, has neither the same spiritual quality, nor the same interior ring and clarity as the Ascetical Homilies. Also, the longer passages in *The Book of Grace* are written in a tenuous, rambling style not found in the Homilies. These objections could be dismissed by attributing the apparent difference to the literary form employed, that is, maxims or chapters, and to the possibility that *The Book of Grace* was composed at an earlier period in the saint's life. However, there are also other considerations which throw doubt on Saint Isaac's authorship of this work. First, and most important, there are many Syriac manuscripts of the Ascetical Homilies, some dating from the tenth century, but very few of these include *The Book of Grace*, the earliest being from the thirteenth century. Second, there is no internal evidence, such as we find in the authentic Second Part, which demonstrates that the author of the Ascetical Homilies and *The Book of Grace* is one and the same. Third, the key term *theoria* is often used in the sense of intuition or deep reflection, not God-inspired vision as Saint Isaac uses it. For instance:

2:99 When the *theoria* of the soul traverses the diverse natures and objects of creation, when it is raised up and brought low together with them by transition from one to another, it is considered distraction by a seer of the truth.

Finally, in the fourth century we find the following narration:

4:51 One of the brethren and I went to Mount Matout to the Elder [John]. When he had cheerfully asked us about the brotherhood and about Gabriel, the superior of the monastery, we told him that a certain miserable Arab wanted treacherously to murder the superior. Then [the Elder] was indignant with us, raised himself up, and went into his inner chamber, where he tarried a long time. When he emerged, he stood some distance from us, and we could not gaze upon his face, for it blazed like fire. Then he said to us,

'Is the beard of that Arab reddish?' We answered, 'Yes.' Whereupon he said, smiling, 'He is dead.' When we returned, we found that in fact he had died suddenly.

From this it is evident that the writer, who is presumably that 'I' of the story, did not live on Mount Matout, but in a nearby monastery—the monastery, no doubt, of Rabban

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Shabur (Gabriel must have been one of Rabban Shabur's successors. It is clear that this event took place after the Arab conquest of Huzistan, i.e. after 640). We know, however, that Saint Isaac retired from Mount Matout to the monastery only after he had become blind and was very aged.

Is there another Syriac author who could have written *The Book of Grace*? The seventh volume of Ningana's *Woodbrooke Studies* contains a treatise by the seventh or eighth century Syriac author Symeon d-Taibutha. The teachings expressed here, the style, and the terminology are identical with that of *The Book of Grace*. For example, we read on p. 179a (Syriac text) of the *Woodbrooke Studies*:

A good shepherd grazes his thoughts in the meadows of the Scriptures and in rumination upon good things, and his soul is filled with perfect light and joy. But a foolish shepherd grazes his rumination in recollections of the failings of his neighbor, and his soul is filled with dark zeal and the wickedness of anger. We learn the truth of this by experience; for when grace visits us, the light of mankind is so poured out upon the mirror of our heart, that [for us] there exist no sinners or evil men in the world. But when we accept the operation of the demons, we are so darkened by anger that [for us] there does not exist one righteous and good man in the world.

In *The Book of Grace* we read:

7:38 When the well-spring of the heart is cleansed of the filth of the passions, and when peace and light reign, the heart does not growl at the recollection of the failings of persons afar off, nor does it become excited by wrath and zeal during encounters with sinners....

7:39 When by grace the intellect is deemed worthy to graze in the meadow of the Scriptures, created beings, God's tender care, the wisdom of His creation, and the many acts of His providence, then it is so swallowed up by the sweetness of these things that it does not perceive either the good or evil lives of a man's companions on his journey.

Again, on p. 173a (Syriac text) of the *Woodbrooke Studies* we read:

As you are being immersed in sleep, throw the choice aromatic incense of prayers, glorifications, and spiritual *theoria* into the censer of your heart, and ruminate upon these things while you are midway between wakefulness and sleep. When you awake, you will perceive the sweet odor which has smoked fragrantly in your soul throughout the night. Let your prayer be like smoking incense before you, and you will even be freed of evil dreams.

In *The Book of Grace* we find:

4:98 From morning until evening a man diligently toils and cultivates the virtues, but at the time when he is being immersed in sleep he should especially strive to throw the choice aromatic incense of beautiful rumination into the censer of his heart, so that throughout the night this should smoke fragrantly in his heart and he be freed of the disgraceful dreams and spectacles of the night.

Furthermore, it is known that Symeon d-Taibutha was a disciple of Rabban Shabur, or at

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least dwelt in his monastery, and that he lived at approximately the same time as Saint Isaac (See A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1922) p. 210). As noted above, he relates the very same tale about an elder—whom he identifies as Rabban Shabur—who suffered temptation for a long time without receiving consolation which Saint Isaac records in the Homilies (see Homily 54, pages 271-2). Like Saint Isaac, he intimates that the world was 6000 years old at the time of his writing (Op. Cit. p. 189b (51)). Since he dwelt in the neighborhood of Mount Matout, he could have authored the narrations found in Century 4:50 and 4:51.

In the beginning of this century Addai Scher published a catalog of the library of Mosul, soon destroyed during the First World War, where he lists a twelfth century MS, ninety-seven in his catalog, which contained seven centuries by Symeon d-Taibutha. Unfortunately, he gives no excerpts that would enable one to determine whether these seven centuries are in fact *The Book of Grace*. However, in his article on Joseph Hazzaya, he compares Joseph's style to that employed by Symeon in the Mosul MS 97 ('Joseph Hazzaya', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 3 (1910) p. 53). Scher gives several examples of what he calls Joseph's *jeux d'esprit*, and we find in *The Book of Grace* passages of a very similar style which would indicate that the Mosul MS did indeed contain this work. For example, Joseph Hazzaya writes: 'Abundant in its streams is the spring which flows from Eden and waters the visible paradise, but more abundant still is the intellect which has enjoyed the divine vision of the Holy Trinity.' In *The Book of Grace* we read: 'Glorious is the light of the sun, but not so glorious as the light of the saints.... Gladsome is the earth in Nisan, but more so the earth of the hearts of the saints' (2:77).

Another consideration is Symeon's epithet, d-Taibutha, which means 'of grace'. This leads one to suspect that either the original title of *The Book of Grace* was *The Book of Symeon 'of Grace'*, or the epithet d-Taibutha should be interpreted, Symeon [who wrote *The book*] of Grace. The affinity between Saint Isaac and Symeon d-Taibutha is so great that their writings could easily be ascribed to one another. Thus, in a thirteenth century MS, Cambridge Add. 2023, we find a short piece with the title, 'A discourse of Symeon called "d-Taibutha", but there is a suspicion that it is by Mar Isaac of Nineveh' (Folio 60a. See W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac MSS in the Cambridge University* (Cambridge, 1901). p. 611). Both the work published by Mingana and *The Book of Grace* contain thoughts and short sentences found almost verbatim in the Ascetical Homilies. It seems likely either that Saint Isaac and Symeon d-Taibutha were kindred spirits who knew one another and imparted to each other their reflections, or, more plausible still, that Symeon lived and wrote shortly after Saint Isaac and was strongly influenced by his writings. Although we cannot demonstrate it conclusively, we are inclined to think that Symeon d-Taibutha wrote *The Book*

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of *Grace*. For this reason, and because its teaching is so similar to that of the Homilies, we have included a selection from *The Book of Grace* in Appendix B.

As mentioned, Syriac manuscripts also credit Saint Isaac with the authorship of numerous versified homilies. These poetical works have long ago been shown to belong to the pen of Isaac the Great of Antioch, a late fourth or early fifth century poet (See J. B. Chabot, *Op. Cit.* pp. 34-35). The theological treatise written on the disputed christological term 'hypostasis' is acknowledged as spurious by its editors (L. Abramowski and A. Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts II* (Cambridge, 1972) p. xxxii). Finally, a proper criterion for judging the authenticity of the many prayers attributed to Saint Isaac must be whether or not they can be found in his genuine writings, that is, the Ascetical Homilies and the Second Part, from which they could have been extracted. Because it was a common practice among Syrians to compose prayers under the name of famous authors (See, for instance, the lovely prayer in Syriac verse attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia, who did not know Syriac, in E. Sachau, *op. Cit.* pp. 94-95), such a criterion must be applied to all the prayers ascribed to Saint Isaac (At the end of his German translation of the first six Ascetical Homilies, Bickel translated a long hymn composed of many short prayers, which he entitled 'Hymnus der Monche wahrend der Nachtwachen' (pp. 400-408). He found this hymn, composed in seven-syllable verse, in Oxford's Bodleian Library, Cod. Hunt. 595 ff. 89-92, attributed to Saint Isaac. The same hymn was taken by Lamy from various MSS and published in his collection of the works of Saint Ephraim, *Sancti Ephraem Syri, Hymni et Sermones II* (Mechlin, 1896) cols. 211-29. Perhaps neither author wrote the hymn, but of the two, Saint Ephraim, a poet, is the more likely).

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APPENDIX B.

Part I – A Selection From *The Book of Grace*.

(Concerning *The Book of Grace* see Introduction; excerpt (immediately preceding this section), pages lxxxi-lxxxv).

-FROM THE FIRST CENTURY.

1:1 Faith in Christ is living, noetic light.

1:2 The teaching of Jesus is the knowledge of the truth. Through the word of light (i.e. Scripture) it is poured upon the hearts of believers and confers on them true light and life.

1:7 The man who possesses hidden consolation drives away from himself outward converse, lest he lose his interior consolation. And the man who has found the truth within himself will no more weary himself with methods.

1:8 The man who possesses noetic light has no need of visible light. Now the light of the mind, they say, is the knowledge of the truth, whereby the soul can distinguish the truth from similitudes. The man who has found this, has found a treasury of life.

1:17 Although knowledge precedes ascetical discipline, still, through the crucible of excellent discipline, knowledge is cultivated, and it flourishes, yielding good fruit.

1:18 The foundation of all knowledge of the truth is excellent ascetical discipline; and the foundation of excellent discipline is patience in good works.

1:19 If, as the Fathers say, stillness gives birth to stillness, knowledge to knowledge,

and discipline to discipline, then it is evident also that patient endurance of compulsory labors gives birth to voluntary patience.

1:24 Virtues accomplished by the body cause onlookers to marvel and draw them to

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repentance, just as the visible sun enlightens the exterior eyes and by its light delivers most men from darkness.

1:25 But virtues accomplished secretly within the soul, and noetically by means of the intellect's rumination, enlighten the eyes of the soul and cause them to behold divine, supernatural beauty with inexpressible delight.

1:27 We are captivated and drawn to new life in God by the mercy of God's tender care for us (shown in the delectable things and the delight of the Kingdom) and by the terror and torment of Gehenna.

1:45 The intellect in which divine love is implanted, and which by grace has been accounted worthy of the knowledge of the truth, never ceases from spiritual rumination upon divine mysteries. At times it contemplates God's tender care which embraces all things. At times it muses upon the providence of His mercy shown in all generations. And at times it reflects upon the wisdom of His creation, so full of diversity. Then it turns to the twofold character of a man's own formation, the marvelous unification of body and soul, the glorious mysteries hidden within him, and the divine vision and the intuitions which supernaturally rise up in him. Then it reflects again how, being one and the same, a man is both glorious and contemptible, both lofty and above corruption, and yet abhorrent and wallowing in corruption and aberration.

1:50 A man who stands on a high place breathing fresh air is filled with more cheerfulness and strength than someone who stands below in darkness breathing gloomy, stagnant air. Likewise the man who, because of his hope upon the promises of the Spirit, labors with steadfast faith receives greater consolation, joy, and encouragement, and is more sanctified by the Spirit, than the man who with remorse, sorrow, bitterness, and distress of heart labors in self-applied compulsion without the consolation of reaching the harbor of hope.

1:53 When the love of Jesus is kindled and burns in the souls of the saints, it imprints in their hearts the new things of Heaven.

1:54 The light of Jesus is noetic light, and blessed is the soul which is accounted worthy to see it!

1:57 God will not be slow to hearken to a soul which unremittingly implores Him with groans, with contrition, and with pain of heart.

1:58 The labor of the saints, the sons of light, is the labor of Gabriel's and Michael's assembly, and they are nourished from one and the same table.

1:59 The prayers of the saints, the sons of light, are unceasing. They have consecrated unto God a temple, even their souls. An inner priest (i.e. The intellect) has been anointed and a spiritual

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altar (i.e. The heart) is prepared. The priest takes his stand and offers up a living sacrifice for the people of Christ.

1:63 For a man to exist, or not to exist, is not within his power. But for us to be righteous or sinners is within our power, and the power of the help furnished by Christ's grace. The help of the grace of Christ cleaves to the work of righteousness, but not to sin.

1:76 Although the rebellious demons are the enemies of God's creation, yet unless we voluntarily become the cause of [God's] abandonment, and they find in us material for their wickedness, they cannot harm us.

1:84 The angel who is always near us is by nothing so distressed and made indignant as when, without being constrained by some necessity, we deprive ourselves of the ministration of the Holy Mysteries and of reception of Holy Communion, which grants remission of sins. For at that hour the priest offers up the sacrifice of the Body of Him Who gives us life, and the Holy Spirit descends and consecrates the Body and Blood and grants remission to creation. The Cherubim, the Seraphim, and the angels stand with great awe, fear, and joy. They rejoice over the Holy Mysteries while experiencing inexpressible astonishment. The angel who is always by us is consoled, because he also partakes in that dread spectacle and is not deprived of that perfect intercourse. For spiritual beings gaze (Reading *hzin* for *hdin* (*rejoice*)) spiritually at this living Mystery and it causes them delight, even as the saints also gaze with a spiritual eye at the living Mystery which is being offered up.

1:94 The intellect which desires to perceive the revelations of the mysteries of God should not possess anything else besides, nor accept within itself any alien thought at all, whether good or evil.

-FROM THE SECOND CENTURY.

2:1 The truth of Christ has bestowed light and life upon the world. The word of Jesus transcends all who know it. Through His holy commandments the knowledge of the truth has dawned in the hearts of the faithful.

2:2 The door whereby the saints enter into the knowledge of the truth is the teaching of the holy Scriptures. Through the light of the soul's rationality they search out the mysteries which lie hidden in the Scriptures; and through profound intuitions they perceive God's tender care and governance, the wisdom of His creative acts, and the glories of the new world. Now to the degree that men increase the subtlety of their disciplines, they make progress in instruction and insight, and they explore heaven and earth and all that is

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therein according to the intention of their minds. The majority of men are like partridges caught in the bird-cage of the world. But some of them take the place of conduits to bring life to many souls. Some of them, again, bury themselves in willfulness, envy, and so on. Others are lamps upon the lamp-stand of the Church (Cf. Matthew 5:15). But scarcely a few love the poverty and crucifixion of Jesus, neglect the wealth of education they have amassed, and choose instead the simplicity and innocence of the fishermen. In the ingenuousness of their hearts they are crowned with the crown of Christ.

2:3 O how difficult it is to amass the wealth of education! Nay, but how many times more difficult to disperse it!

2:5 Alas for the wealth of the soul! The more her knowledge is enriched by the instruction of books, the more she entangles herself in the labyrinthine ways of the subtle passions and the twistings of error, and she will not submit herself to the sweetness and the self-abasement (Perhaps one should read here *the sweetness of the self-abasement*) of Jesus, which is enjoyed by those who are conscious of their infirmity and sinfulness.

2:8 One cannot eat of the tree of ((the knowledge of)) good and evil and, at the same

time, eat of the tree of life. For the former generates the turmoil of willfulness, awakens envy, and creates darkness. But the latter generates the tranquility, meekness, and kindness of love, and pours out light upon the mind.

2:9 By nature, the soul is unable to carry on two meditations at once, and she is always found with one. But when a second and a third meditation press upon her at the same time, she herself is divided into many. She regards the one guilefully, with the second she converses artfully, and to the third she is oblivious. When the soul is divided against herself, she is brought to desolation, as our Lord said (Cf. Luke 11:17).

2:15 The harbor of destination for the steadfast discipline of the new man (in so far as the soul can attain to this by her discipline in the present life) is *limpid purity* and serenity of soul, when she stands firmly in the freedom of her created nature.

2:16 *limpid purity* is the harbor of the saints who have endured hardship and weariness here because of the passions and who, by divine help, have redeemed their lives, entering into the land that is free of the stumbling-blocks of wickedness, envy, willfulness, treachery, devices, vexations, and bitterness of soul, and is filled with tranquility, peace, love, and joy.

2:18 *limpid purity* is not to be called a virtue, because it is not a path wherein the virtues of ascetic discipline are practiced. It is, rather, the rest of the saints and a limpid region free of the wickedness of the passions and full of tranquility, peace, and joy. Here,

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labors have ceased; and the saints, being accounted worthy to perceive in their intellects the spiritual knowledge of the mystery of the new world, take delight in the revelation of God's mysteries.

2:19 The perfect rest of the saints is the land of promises and the heavenly Jerusalem into which they cannot enter as long as they are clothed with this garment of flesh. But as in a mirror they are vouchsafed the sight of its glory from the broad plain of *limpid purity* like the great Moses (*Vide* Deuteronomy 34:1). And they find rest from their hardships in the regions of peace, according to the degree that they have been deemed worthy to strip off the body and what pertains to it, while taking delight at times in awesome vision.

2:21 Even venerable elders, who from youth to old age have exhausted themselves with asceticism in the vineyard of the Son, practicing excellent disciplines, are scarcely accounted worthy of partially receiving one of the gifts of the lands of peace.

2:22 But youths, with the impetuosity of their nature and with disorderly fervor, audaciously rush upon the mysteries of the Fathers hidden in their books. Or else they receive by instruction and hearsay from others that which they ought not. Then grace cuffs them and educates them to delay and not to rush headlong upon lofty things, but, on the contrary, to labor quietly in the vineyard until such a time as they attain to true rest.

2:23 If, however, they continue in their audacity, grace withdraws from them a little, and they are seized by ten thousand temptations. They are smitten by the passions of the body, the very same passions which they had formerly held in contempt, and they are tormented by dark periods of soul and abused by the demons. Violent uprisings, as well as confusion and listlessness of mind, assail them. If they do not recollect themselves and put themselves in order, they will go insane.

2:24 O now many afflictions, trials, snares, and stumbling-blocks in this, our Lord's, narrow way are arrayed against those who, with the impulses of nature, disorderly fervor, keen wits, and the accepting [of hearsay] from others, wish to enter the abode of life and partake of the honeycomb of the Spirit?, (*Vide* Luke 24:42).

2:26 A soul which has dedicated herself to Christ and whose intellect has perceived the mysteries of the Kingdom, has reclined at the spiritual table, has tasted the sublime things of God in the converse of secret prayer, has supernaturally beheld His glories, but then forgets her own nature, unbinds her mind to roam amid conceptions of created things and to creep among things visible, exchanges one table for another and one converse for another. At first grace awakens her by the summoning of the conscience. But thereafter grace begins to terrify her in the dreams of sleep, to shock her by stupefying visions, and to buffet her with injuries both internal and external. It belongs to the soul herself to choose the new life or noetic death.

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2:28 The true door whereby painstaking elders have entered into the land of promise is submersion in the river Jordan by means of the streams that flow from the eyes, not from compulsion or voluntarily, but from joy which transcends nature. Besides this, a man is in need of the help of grace and the guidance of a spiritual father.

2:29 The monk who has been deemed worthy of dispassion and has perceived in a supernatural way the sublime things of God, will not fall into despair when he is defeated by natural passions; rather, he will heal his wound by repentance. The natural passions, while strengthening nature, also strengthen all our sufferings. Even the saints are in need of repentance until their last breath.

2:30 When a passion tarries in the heart, and the soul is excited by love for it, the Spirit of the Lord has not yet found rest in the soul. He knocks, but passes by. If the soul resists passion, then the sign of the love of Him tarries in her.

2:31 A man who is spiritually born by holy baptism and has been instructed in the angelic discipline ought to toil and wrestle against the passions. And he should entreat grace that he also receive birth into purity and be accounted worthy in a supernatural manner of perceiving the mysteries of the revelation of the Spirit. Thus even from now he will receive mystically through revelation the earnest of the glory of adoption, which we shall receive in very deed at the universal renewal.

2:32 A monk dwells in our Lord and our Lord dwells in a monk when his heart attains to the mansion of purity and beholds the light of dispassion.

2:33 When the light of Christ's revelation is suddenly poured forth upon the light of the mind, the mind is silenced by awe and retires to its own place.

2:34 An alien recollection or thought does not enter into the bridal chamber of an intellect which is accounted worthy of the revelation of the Spirit and is united mystically to our Lord. For otherwise it would defile the Spirit's habitation.

2:35 We obtain the Holy Spirit from baptism as an earnest for the abolition of sin and for power to wage war against the passions and Satan. When, so they say, through labors in stillness and struggle against the passions we are accounted worthy of purity of heart, the very same power of the Spirit is added unto us, so that we should be able in a supernatural way to receive the majesty of our Lord by the revelation of His ineffable glory.

2:36 This power of the Holy Spirit perfects the just and the righteous in their paths, and it perfects the saints supernaturally by grace, because of the unity of Jesus, since they are united to God the Word supernaturally.

2:37 This is the Holy Spirit Who was named the Comforter by our Lord (John 14:16), the Perfecter of the saints by His Apostle (Cf. Hebrews 12:2), and the Spirit of revelations by the Fathers.

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2:38 The Fathers say that until the soul becomes perfect in the light of her nature and is accounted worthy to receive the light of the revelation of our Lord, she undergoes many variations in gloom and brightness, darkness and light, truth and error.

2:39 Just as there are many different degrees of purity in the mirrors of the hearts of the saints, so the saints likewise have many different revelations of our Lord.

2:40 Although in many and diverse manners the minds of the saints are illumined, in various divine visions full of the Spirit, in faith in God's promises, in reflection upon the glories of the new world, in the pure prayer of a collected mind, and so on, and although Christ mystically gives refreshment to them all, yet He especially works His glorious revelations through the light of dispassion when the mind, being emptied of all things and abiding in the light of its own nature, is engulfed by love and becomes one with Him.

2:42 A sun that continually rises and sets is a sign of both dispassion and negligence [in a man].

2:43 The crown of the intellects of the saints is the radiance of the orb that dawns in the firmament of their hearts.

2:44 When the air of the heart is clear, even if there be no noetic moon, the heart has consolation from the radiance of the stars. When the heart is found in the murkiness of grief, it has no consolation, but darkness and remorse fill the soul.

2:45 The mist of envy, willfulness, and wickedness partially conceals the sun that dawns in the heart's firmament. But the cloud of anger and wrath completely eclipses it.

2:46 Peace of heart, quiet of mind, tranquility of thoughts, and joy in God are born of each other. Although this be so, yet a man will not be vouchsafed the gifts of them all.

2:47 The mind of a monk who is dead to the world and its knowledge, and who continually ponders upon the glories of the new world, is a bright midday.

2:48 The workings of the revelations of Christ are many and diverse; they transcend speech and do not fall within limitations.

2:50 When a monk struggles, practices the labors of both body and soul, pays the debt of the passions, and is accounted worthy of purity, then his intellect is also vouchsafed to receive the spiritual discipline in a supernatural manner. This discipline is not accomplished with the labor of the body or the heart, but is the spiritual movement of grace which stirs and whispers secretly in the inner chamber of the heart and moves the soul's motions toward spiritual prayer.

2:51 The vision of the mind, the blossoming of the heart, and a collected and silent intellect are the spiritual festival of the soul and a haunt of the Holy Spirit.

2:52 If the inner sanctuary is consecrated when the motions of the soul become still, then the understanding, like a priest, whispers and offers glorification with an angelic tongue through the perceptivity of the intellect.

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2:53 The motions of the soul will not become still and they will not taste of the tree of life until the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is uprooted from the heart. Such is the Lord's commandment (*Vide* Genesis 3:3).

2:54 The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a lair for the passions, and they, in turn, are the recesses of the soul's darkness.

2:55 A mind which shines with the keenness of its thoughts, and by the same is engrossed in contemplation of created beings, will hardly ever be still. But the mind

which becomes inflamed with enthusiasm and greedily desires [lofty things] destroys itself (i.e. Because of its foolish zeal).

2:56 A mind which is uplifted by severe labors and mighty struggles will scarcely gain humility before it is cuffed by grace. But a mind which boasts in its own loquacity is a domicile of the passions.

2:57 A mind which shines with faith in the promises of life sees Christ, as does the mind also which ponders upon the glories of the new world, which is liberated from distraction, and is pure and inebriated with love.

2:58 A mind which, with the performance of good works, humbly meditates upon God, is illumined in its discipline; and through grace the inner man shines like the sun.

2:59 If the soul's abasement through discerning sorrow and tears does not take precedence over the tranquil and lofty emotions that spring up from the heart's joy and astonish the inner man, and if a man's conscience does not buffet him with his former failings and his nature's tendency toward aberration, and if he is not also cuffed by grace, his nurse, and accused by his conscience that many times he committed evil unawares, and if the conscience, because of these things, does not bring his mind down from the uplifting of pride and conceit: then the wretched man will perish.

2:60 Christ hides the virtues which the saints practice from their recollection and from their minds, lest because of them they destroy themselves. For it is written that unless a miller places blinds over the eyes of the beast of burden, it will turn round, stop, and eat.

2:61 When the finger of the Lord of all approaches a discerning man, either for instruction or during peace, it causes him, if he is intelligent, to recollect himself: for instruction, when it corrects a man's stumbling; during peace, when it gives him diligence.

2:65 Although the blessed Jacob loved Rachel exceedingly, although he was patient and for seven years he labored eagerly for her, she was not given to him before Lea. And although he persisted and worked another seven years, still, after he had received her, she did not bear him children until Lea had given birth to all her children (*Vide* Genesis 29:20 ff). In the same manner, although a monk desires the noetic discipline and the lofty things of the saints' mode

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of life, he will not be accounted worthy of this unless beforehand he has undergone struggle, healed his outward senses, accomplished the labor of both body and soul, and paid the debt of the passions by observing the commandments.

2:66 As hunters change their bait for birds, fish, and wild animals corresponding to their appetites at different times, so the demons likewise take material from us and, to entice us toward the passions, they change their inducements in accord with the leaning of our will, whether toward good things or evil.

2:67 Although all the demons are intent on our destruction, certain of them war against bodily disciplines, others war against noetic disciplines, and still others are like spies and they whisper allurements to those who ardently yearn for perfection.

2:69 When the paths of a monk's discipline are ungoverned, he slides from one wave to another without even being aware of it. But when he is sliding, let him look up toward his own healing, while sorrowing, repenting, and setting himself aright.

2:70 Do not seek to find tranquility in the heart as long as the senses wander and the conscience is trampled underfoot. From the blossoms, they say, which sprout up from the heart understand your hidden things. And you may do the same from your dreams as

well, if you are wise.

2:76 The glory of the saints does not belong to their nature, their joy does not belong to their will, and the crown of their intellects is the gift of God.

2:77 Glorious is the light of the sun, but not so glorious as the light of the saints. The firmament is embellished by the luster of the stars, but not so embellished as the firmament of the hearts of the saints. Gladsome is the earth in Nisan (i.e. April or springtime), but more so the earth of the hearts of the saints.

2:78 The star of prayer which shines in the hearts of the saints is the 'peace of God that passeth all understanding' (Philippians 4:7).

2:90 Grief is a manifestation that abounds with passions and worldly knowledge. A monk who is afflicted with grief in his old age bears witness to the fact that he did not labor in the beginning of his monastic life, and that the passions have bound him with the cords of grief and surrendered him to the scourges of remorse and sorrow.

2:97 Tranquility of soul resembles standing limpid water which has no reptiles within, nor anything without, to trouble and make turbid its *limpidity*, and which can serve as a mirror for the eyes by reason of its settled state. It is thus also with the soul's *limpidity*. If it is not made turbid by recollections and thoughts from within, and if what is heard and seen, and so on (that is, things which the senses bring in from outside) do not cause memories, then it will be like a polished mirror for the eyes of the soul, and the soul will be astonished and struck with awe at her own beauty.

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2:100 In the divine vision of the Holy Trinity there are no ascents and descents, nor the distraction of transition [from one thing to another]. This divine vision is a strong cord which binds those who are worthy of it in awestruck wonder at the Holy Trinity.

-FROM THE THIRD CENTURY.

3:3 When a man's hope is made firm by his faith in Christ, and His promises hold sway in his soul, then the soul is set aflame with divine love, straightway the inner doors of the heart are unlocked, and suddenly the light of joy and consolation flashes forth.

3:4 To the degree that a man is aflame with the love of Christ, waits earnestly in His hope, is comforted by His promises, and ponders upon the same, to that degree also he is crowned in his discipline, and his mind shines spiritually.

3:12 O man who truly repents, do not abandon the beginning and middle stages of repentance and suddenly grasp at the stage of perfection, and say, 'God is merciful, and if He wishes, His mercies will, by grace, bestow a spiritual gift on me, even as the gift of His grace was bestowed on many in all generations.' You ignorantly think such things, for signs and miracles, the operations of grace, are not for the faithful, but for unbelievers (Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:22).

3:21 As the light of the mind is more glorious than the light of the sun for the man who has been accounted worthy of it, so the blossoming that springs up from a pure heart rich in things divine is superior to whatever material we may receive from others without our own labor.

3:24 As the light of the mind is more glorious than the light of the sun for the man who has been accounted worthy of it, so the blossoming that springs up from a pure heart rich in things divine is superior to whatever material we may receive from others without our own labor.

3:26 Rationality is of no profit to us if freedom is removed from it. Likewise, freedom is of no profit to us if rationality is removed from it. True rationality is when the stability of reason has authority over the free will, and the deeds of its freedom are commended both by its own good conscience and by others.

3:31 Blessed is the soul which tastes within herself the honey of the heart's blossoming when she is entirely still!

3:33 A well-spring of light is a heart that is at peace with all men and with itself.

3:34 A new sun dawns in the heart of a guileless soul which rejoices over the good qualities of all men alike.

3:35 A solitary guards his intellect. Many suppose that he is idle from all work, but there is no one who labors more than he.

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3:36 Only in the stillness of the intellect does every activity cease, for [herein] a man's mind is swallowed up in the love of God in a way transcending nature. Then God dwells among men, that is, in the hidden realm of a man's intellect.

3:46 A solitary cannot acquire freedom of soul and broadness of heart without seclusion from men. Nor can the heart be accounted worthy of the spiritual blossoming of grace until the fountain of the intellect ceases from pouring forth everything which it knows.

3:55 The life of the cross is hidden in deadness to all things. You will be unable to ascend the voluntary cross as long as you are attached to anything. Drive away and cast out of your heart the considerations of the knowledge of good and evil; then Christ, the Tree of life, will enter and dwell in you. Then you will supernaturally perceive the glorious things of the mystery of the new world.

3:56 A monk who does not gaze into his heart when he prays beats the air, and he does not shine during prayer.

3:57 A monk who with the eyes of his intellect gazes intently into his heart while praying will quickly be deemed worthy of mercy.

3:58 A monk who yokes his tongue to his mind will sing psalms in the Spirit.

3:59 Even by the subjection of the senses the body is humbled and the heart is enlightened. Still, the fruit of the heart is more glorious than the fruit of the tongue, for the lips speak from the abundance of the heart (Cf. Matthew 12:34).

3:78 If a soul, by employing justice, separates good men from evil, and righteous men from sinners, her knowledge also separates her from God without her perceiving it.

3:79 The monk who leads his life with the employment of justice and compares his bad points with his good points, who is acclaimed to be a man clothed with Christ, and expects reward for his good deeds, has not yet perceived his own weakness, nor the grace of Christ which is poured out freely upon sinners as well as the righteous.

-FROM THE FOURTH CENTURY.

4:2 The beginning of steadfast ascetical discipline is deadness to all intercourse with persons in one's desire for things divine, for these generate love and fervor for true ascetical discipline.

4:3 Fervor of soul is born of constant reading about ascetical discipline conjoined with the frequent labor of prayer.

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4:5 Concentration of mind is born of the intellect's spiritual rumination. Freedom from distraction is born of concentration of mind. And of these is born the prayer of the intellect's secret converse.

4:7 From now, by reason of the simplicity of the soul's faith and the force of living hope, we may receive, by grace and supernaturally, the earnest of freedom and the conscience's boldness, with the confidence of sons, in prayer filled with divine love.

4:8 Prayer filled with divine love is the stillness of a divine mind which is wholly immersed in God and secretly stirs and stammers in noetic awareness.

4:9 Even though the stage of divine love is higher than prayer, still, without prayers, supplications, and mournful, protracted shedding of tears, together with vigil and the other labors of asceticism, divine love cannot be achieved.

4:14 Who will dare to speak of the blossoming of tranquility which suddenly burgeons from within the heart, spills out upon the soul, and spreads over the members of the body, as the soul's motions and the senses are quelled in an unaccustomed manner, and the thoughts are stupefied and stopped from all activity?

4:16 Who can ponder upon the blossoming of spiritual joy which springs from the heart while the motions of the soul dance with uncommon gladness and cheer?

4:17 Who has tasted the sweetness of divine love which stirs in the heart and sweetens the soul's palate, while the soul is so inebriated by the fervor of divine longing that she forgets herself?

4:19 Who can tell of the spiritual ascents which take place in the heart (Cf. Psalms 83:5) when, in the discipline of stillness, the intellect becomes inebriated with the impulses of fervor?

4:20 Or who can express the light of divine vision which dawns in the heart from reading the Scriptures and from the meditation of earnest and poignant prayer?

4:21 Who can perceive by grace that piercing contrition which suddenly bursts forth from the heart and ascends to the head, gripping the eyes and the nose, causing joyful tears to flow, while warmth gently steals over all the members due to the sweetness that stirs (Reading *nps* for *nsp*) in the heart, while the passions are effaced, and while both motions and thoughts are silenced by awe?

4:26 Who is the man that is visited by grace as he chants the psalms and prays, and suddenly becomes, as it were, a different person, while his tongue is silenced, the motions of his soul are stilled and quieted, and he is bound (Reading *pkr* for *kpr*) by the working of grace?

4:50 The blessed Moses, the disciple of Saint John, the elder of Mount Matout, related the following: 'One day in a cave of the mountain I saw a brother who was sleeping, but although I called out many times to him, he gave me no answer. Then I made this known

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to the elder, and he advised me, "Take him a loaf of bread and some water and put them down without speaking to him." This I did for six days, and on the seventh he came to the elder and laid bare his thoughts to him. When the elder set him at rest and dismissed him, I besought the elder to tell me his affair. He said, "He found a little repose from the hands of the thieves (i.e. The passions) within him, and so he forgot about bread and water and withdrew into stillness to rest a little."

4:55 Through the desire of his eyes Adam departed from his inheritance and through the desire of love for the Cross of Jesus men return to their spiritual inheritance.

4:58 If a man is unaccustomed to diving under the water, he suffers cramps and comes up to breathe in air. In the same manner, if a pure man is unpracticed when, by means of grace, he dives away from the world and supernaturally enters into the noetic mysteries of the Spirit, he will suffer cramps and become swollen (or *be puffed up [with pride]*); he will sink downward, will be reduced to silence, and will return to the realm of his sojourn (i.e. This world).

4:59 When unaccustomed peace and tranquility suddenly dominate all the motions of your soul and all your members, and your soul dances with joy, and all reflections and thoughts cease within you, then know that at this very hour you have been deemed worthy of the operation of grace.

4:60 When, without any [outward] cause, despondency and depression overpower your soul, causing her to become confused and to feel strangled, and you are tortured with mental anguish, then know that you yourself are the cause of this. Grace has handed you over to these scourges for your benefit, that you may become wise in the path of the angelic discipline, which is traversed in such a manner. If you persevere without complaint, with confession and thanksgiving to God and interior cheerfulness, expect to receive the operation of grace.

4:62 The mind of a monk is unable to converse mystically with the One in prayer as long as it has within it some other deliberation or thought or a foreign reflection, nay, until it is even led away from the inheritance of the saints and becomes one with the One in an entirely simple manner.

4:63 In the mystery of prayer one cannot converse supernaturally with the Creator and with His creation at the same time. When the intellect wishes to go mystically before the One, it must refrain from alien [thoughts]. But if it becomes bold, the merciful answer will be given it as it was given to the great Moses, 'Dismiss all thy people and come up alone to Me' (Cf. Exodus 24:2; 34:2-3). For this hidden mystery, which is uttered mystically and supernaturally by the Spirit, is experienced through the operation of grace. 'I have a secret, I have a secret, I have a secret' (Isaiah 24:16 (Peshitta)), as also do the sons of My house.

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4:64 Many times the mind wearies itself in its quest for divine vision and it does not find it. And as soon as a man stands up for prayer, the recollection of finding divine vision and whether the mind will discover it, stirs in the mind, and it thus loses the fruit of prayer. If the mind is not illumined by divine vision, it is grieved, distressed, and is deprived of the converse of prayer. Therefore it is evident that at the time of spiritual prayer the mind must not be double, but one and single (being simple, peaceful, and still), so as to receive the mystery of grace by God's mercy. But if there be with the mind any alien thing, it will not be accounted worthy of this, as it was formerly.

4:71 The sign, they say, of the blossoming of the intellect's spiritual prayer that comes to pass through grace is this: with every breath, noetically sweet recollection of God is imprinted in the heart and prayer sings with a spiritual tongue and joyously (Reading *b-hadutha* for *b-hadatha*) cries out 'Holy', while the thoughts and the mind are silent without interruption.

4:75 The monk who in the period of servitude and the toil of work chooses for himself the rest and the freedom of the sons (i.e. Of the Kingdom), will, in the time of true rest, justly mourn, starve, and be afflicted by remorse.

4:78 The man who does not acknowledge the resurrection of the body will not

acknowledge [the value of] bodily labors. And the man who does not acknowledge the renewal which the soul will receive will not acknowledge the noetic discipline. But the man who acknowledges the renewal which both alike will receive, labors in making gradual progress.

4:79 Many men toil without a goal in many different ways. But the fruits of the truth germinate from the goal and not from labors.

4:96 The majority of the Fathers say that the souls of the righteous are found in the abodes [of Heaven]. Others of them say that, as it were in sleep, they sweetly repose in their abodes, having no activity.

4:97 The souls of Christ's saints, which are accounted worthy to receive, by the renewal of their minds, the revelation of the Holy Spirit in a manner surpassing the nature of the body, receive in their intellects, by an ineffable perception, an earnest of how much they will have perception [yonder], and how they will be found, whether awake or resting, in their abodes until the universal renewal.

4:98 From morning until evening a man diligently toils and cultivates the virtues (Cf. Psalms 103:23), but at the time when he is becoming immersed in sleep he should especially strive to throw the choice aromatic incense of beautiful rumination into the censer of his heart, so that throughout the night this should smoke fragrantly in his heart and he be freed of the disgraceful dreams and spectacles of the night.

4:99 But the righteous, even though they labor from youth to old age in the disciplines

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of virtue, toil especially as they approach the time when they will be immersed in the sleep of death, so that the incense of the virtues and the love of God will smoke fragrantly in their souls until they are awakened for the universal renewal.

-FROM THE FIFTH CENTURY.

5:1 God is able to do all that He wills, but the initiate of the truth wills to do all that he is able.

5:2 Our nature does not have the power to attain to all that our mind wishes to know; but our mind has the power to understand all that our nature can attain to.

5:4 A soul that is grieved by the occurrences which nature brings upon her lacks inward consolation.

5:12 Release from all that is bondage to the One. A man cannot be bound to the One unless his mind is released from all.

5:17 A man cannot draw nigh the Lord's commandments through the discipline of the justice of the Law. In the latter there is 'an eye for an eye' and 'a stripe for a stripe' (Exodus 21:24, 25), and so forth. But the grace of Christ commands, 'Overcome evil with good' (Romans 12:21), that is, 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also' (Cf. Matthew 5:39), and 'If any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also' (Cf. Matthew 5:40).

5:18 The mind is unable to contain at the same time the opposition of justice and grace, for justice begets zeal (i.e. Indignation at the misdeeds of other men) and excites anger, whereas grace pours out peace, love, and mercifulness upon the mind.

5:20 A monk who cuts off the heads of the first blossoms of the thoughts is a distinguished athlete, and he will easily be deemed worthy of purity and liberation from mental wandering.

5:23 The correct aim of noetic discipline, when directed to the love of instruction, causes a man to be engulfed in reading the Scriptures, to be enlightened by reflection upon their meanings, and to taste the sweetness of the divine mysteries concealed in Scripture. Then there is nothing which hinders the soul from becoming inebriated with divine love, if by ascetical discipline she cuts away the passions and is not overcome by their pleasure.

5:24 A monk whose aim is correct and whose mind cleaves to a single rumination, who

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cuts off from himself all concern and every thought that is not directed toward his one rumination, and who unceasingly ponders, converses, trains, and exercises himself in it over a long period of time, will find it so imprinted (like the image on a coin) in his heart through [the action of] grace and habit, that even in his dreams he will converse with it, and his mind will reflect on it involuntarily.

5:38 The new world is noetic light, and every man according to the material he has prepared here receives noetic light there. Suddenly the lamp of a man's soul will blaze and shine forth according to the degree of his discipline.

5:39 For every one of us carries within himself the light and the darkness of the world to come. From within us will blaze forth the light of joy and the darkness of grief and remorse; we shall not receive these things from some other quarter.

5:58 True purity of heart is perfect, indiscriminating, and undeficient love for the entire race of man equally (see Homily 37; Cf. Page 177; *Question*: What is the sign that a man has attained to purity of heart, and when does a man know that his heart has entered into purity?). But this cannot exist without the keeping of the commandments, victory over the passions, the light of dispassion, and grace.

5:66 Righteousness is the fruit of good works that are wrought even before the rising of the great Sun of righteousness (Cf. 2 Peter 1:19). Holiness is the fruit of the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies the soul at the completion of the course of her struggle, crowns her with the crown of the glory to come, and gives her spiritual vision in a manner that transcends nature.

5:67 When you think that, by the voluntary and special labors of the sons of your inner church (that is, by the beautiful deeds of the virtues) the inner temple of your soul is adorned and completed, and you wish to know whether they are pleasing, and whether the gate of the inner holy of holies is opened, and the inner altar of oblation is consecrated, and grace has overshadowed it, and whether the intellect is permitted to enter within and mystically to celebrate the holy rites and to offer continually the incense of prayer: such things you may understand from the diversity of the fragrant perfumes of peace, love, and spiritual joy which constantly exhale within you through a recollection and unceasing rumination which is stamped with the love of God, and also from the joy and consolation that secretly stir in your soul without your causing them.

5:70 It were not right that our heart should be in need of writings (or *scriptures*), but for the fact that our freedom destroyed the consolation of the heart's understanding of the truth. We should have been so watchful over our discipline that we would not have lost the truth of the understanding of that which was written upon our heart by the Spirit of God and about which our conscience bore witness to us, like the word of Scripture [does now].

5:71 As long as our nature possessed a pure heart, God had no need to speak to us

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through the composition of writings, but He spoke to us as He did to Noe, Abraham, Job, and Moses, without the intermediary of a book (or *scripture*).

5:72 But because our nature fell into an abyss of evils, God spoke with us through writings on tablets of stone, a sign of the hardness of our hearts.

5:73 Now our Lord Jesus Christ did not commit the mystery of His teaching to the holy apostles by means of writings, but instead of writings He gave them the promise of the Holy Spirit when He said, 'He shall bring to your remembrance all things ye need and require regarding the truth' (Cf. John 14:26; 16:13).

5:74 In the same way He wrote through the prophets, for 'He put His laws into their minds and He wrote them upon their hearts' (Cf. Hebrews 8:10, Jeremiah 38 (31):33), so that they should all be 'taught of God' (Isaiah 54:13).

5:75 If we now set aright our disgraceful lives with the aid of writings on account of the rationality that our nature received from the beginning, how much shall we turn aside from God if we show contempt for the natural book of the heart, the book written by Moses and the prophets, and the light of our Saviour's Gospel of life! Hence we shall bring capital punishment upon ourselves if we gain no help from the hidden book, or from the visible one, or from the Gospel of the life-giving commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ.

5:76 Not even the man who toils and exerts himself in prayer, reading, divine vision, and insight, will make progress in the truth and gain an illumined intellect, unless he aims the intention of his mind toward the strength of what is written by the Spirit in the book of his heart.

5:77 The veil of the passions that overlays our heart prevents us from truly beholding that which is written on our heart by the Spirit. When we pray, read, and sing praises, we float over the surface of our heart without truly perceiving what lies within. But if we raise the veil of the passions by observing the commandments, then with the eye of the spirit we shall see the truth that is imprinted in our heart.

5:85 A sound in the air is shaped by the soul's power of speech, is depicted upon tablets with ink, and then becomes visible to the eyes of the flesh. Likewise the intellect, which is alive through grace, noetically depicts and engraves with the pen of spiritual meditation the simple words of spiritual prayer upon the tablets of the book of the heart. Then the intellect reads them whenever the mind wanders, or the lyre is asleep (i.e. Prayer ceases), or weakens, or when the light of dispassion dawns and the great Sun of righteousness shines His splendor upon it (Malachi 4:2).

5:91 Darkness is abolished by light, and light is covered over by dense darkness. Like-

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wise the simple knowledge of the truth is clouded over and becomes dark from abundant knowledge of methods.

5:94 Let us, then, gain Christ our Life within our hidden, inner man through love which becomes fervent by the keeping of the commandments. And when we gain Him and mystically unite with Him, all that He has will be ours, whether as we now live, or as we live in the age to come. For it would be absurd for us to gain the lofty things of God and His gifts rather than God Himself.

5:95 We gain God when we abandon all, even the Kingdom of Heaven, for His love, like the blessed Apostle (*Vide* Romans 9:3). Let our rumination, our hope, and our expectation be fastened to a heart that during the converse of prayer is secretly and

manifestly fired with the love of Jesus Christ, the Mediator of our blessings. Then, in proportion to our earnest desire, He will shine upon us and give us rest as He Himself knows.

5:96 The monk who purifies and adorns himself with the beauties of the virtues as a bride adorns herself with finery, who receives Christ within himself and surrenders to Him his will and everything he has, having no concern for the good and evil things which befall us, will be nourished from Christ's table with the food of angels. Blessed is the soul which is deemed worthy of this!

-FROM THE SIXTH CENTURY.

6:4 Spiritual love burns (and is made to burn) in the soul through mercifulness, gentleness, cheerfulness, and kindness shown indiscriminately toward good and evil men alike.

6:5 Hope is made steadfast and becomes firmly established in a man through earnest desire and expectation of the good things which he looks for [in the world to come].

6:6 Faith shines and casts its light in the soul through hope in the Spirit's promises concerning the things which will be revealed in us.

6:8 Although the new peace of the soul, tranquility, love and meekness (which come from grace) are acquired through voluntary labors, yet when they are accomplished through the Holy Spirit, they do not belong to nature or to the will, nor is their genuineness subject to nature or the will, nor can their genuineness be experienced without grace.

6:9 Blessed is a man if, as he chants the psalms and as he prays, the eyes of his intellect are opened wide by the light of dispassion, and he noetically gazes at the words of prayer which are written down by the pen of the Spirit upon the mirror of his heart! Due to

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these words he will offer up praise to Him Who bestows on him the gift, making him a seer of the soul.

6:12 The sea is said to be calm when all the winds which whip up waves are still. And the mind is perceived to be calm when deliberations and recollections cease from searching out every idea.

6:18 There is no prudent man who will voluntarily be persuaded to board a ship and launch it into the great and spacious sea, there to be buffeted and dashed all the days of his life by violent ocean waves, without possessing hope of reaching a calm haven or a peaceful refuge. Likewise, there is no man who repents with discretion who will launch the ship of his soul into the great sea of repentance without possessing strong hope of reaching the peaceful haven and calm refuge of God's mercy.

6:29 There are two schools within us. One is found in the exercise of unspiritual knowledge and is knowledge of good and evil. The other is found in the exercise of true knowledge and is knowledge of the life and light of grace. In the school of investigation, the knowledge of justice concerning good and evil is cultivated. Now the knowledge of justice gives birth to zeal, confusion, willfulness, envy, anger, contentiousness, and the rest of the passions. In the school of grace, however, there is cultivated love, peace, meekness, humility, patience, together with the rest of the fruits of the Spirit enumerated by Paul (*Vide* Galatians 5:22). See, then, what the school of good and evil teaches and

understand from whom it originates.

6:32 The majority of men finish their days in the school of justice, passing judgments upon the deeds of all men. They compare the good and evil lives of others, employing justice, without even being aware that there exists another teaching, that is, the school of grace, compassion, and mercy, which our Lord revealed in His Gospel. Few are able to escape, even with difficulty, from the school of justice, and to enter into the school of grace and compassion. But should they escape, they immediately encounter abundant love, tranquility, peace, and mercifulness toward good and evil men equally, and they are astonished at the greatness of God's gift.

6:33 The simple rationality of the soul is noetic light which God gives by His grace to the nature of angels and [human] souls.

6:35 The stirring of the simple, inner word which is not compounded with sound, is a noetic power implanted in the soul and continually active. This word resembles simple, unwrought, and unembellished matter. It is, however, adorned by the light of rationality, and is actualized through the intermediary of sounds and the senses.

6:39 If the outward senses are farmers which plant seeds in the field of the heart, it is

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evident that they sow the heart with the material of the seed which they find close at hand, be it tares (i.e. The passions) or sins. Now that which a man sows, he also reaps (Cf. Galatians 6:7).

6:48 When the passions are uprooted by the doing of the commandments, when the gloom of the darkness of delusion is dispelled by labors and there is no shadow of passion over the soul, and when by grace [human] nature stands in the natural glory of its created state, then a man sees with the light of dispassion, discerns the truth from similitudes and error, and without confusion puts thoughts, words, and deeds into action.

6:53 As long as we have within us a passion to which the soul is voluntarily bound by her love of it, the Spirit of God's glorious revelations will not act in us. But if sometimes He should act, this action is only for the encouragement and consolation of simple-hearted persons.

6:59 The life of a monk and the expectation of his hope is to strip himself of this visible world, to efface the memory of its portrayals from his heart, and to depict the new world in his intellect, as he engraves therein its memory and ponders upon it unceasingly.

6:68 Fathers do not reveal to their sons the secret location of their treasures as long as enemies are hiding in their sons' houses. And the Holy Spirit does not reveal the secret of the Kingdom of God within us as long as the soul is voluntarily bound to the passions.

6:79 Just as every virtue shines in its own place, so the saints mystically taste the truth and the love of God in the realm of the Spirit.

6:84 As long as the recollections stir up thoughts, and thoughts disturb the mind, and the mind, by reason of its division, confuses the intellect, discernment, and understanding, do not expect to take possession of peace in the land of your heart.

6:86 When you pray, look into yourself to see whether your land is void of passions, that God might place in you the things which you ask of Him. Otherwise, He will compassionately answer you, 'Empty yourself of your inner things, that I may place in you My own things for which you ask.'

6:90 Pure divine vision during the time of prayer resembles a spiritual sacrifice placed with the paten of the intellect upon the altar of the heart, and it gazes into the heart without seeing anything else.

6:93 When the sun dawns, it quickly disperses all the darkness of the night without employing artificial light. Likewise, when the light of Christ dawns within us, the soul has no need of knowing methods.

6:95 At the time of the Spirit's overshadowing when the inner gate of the holy of holies is guarded by grace, and stillness, silence, and stupefaction reigns over the throng within, do not be so bold as to raise up within yourself any request or reflection, like an ignorant

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fellow, lest you repent of it later, but conceal yourself, as it were in sleep, from every activity.

6:97 Do not be astonished if, when you are unoccupied, grace overshadows you and you are found in great peace. This good is not your doing, but belongs to the mercy of God which freely urges and draws us sinners to life.

6:98 When the souls of the saints depart from under the veil of the passions and are renewed by the Spirit, at the time of prayer they are deemed worthy of secret boldness before their Father, and the stamp and material [of this world] is dispersed from before their vision.

-FROM THE SEVENTH CENTURY.

7:1 The noetic renewal of the saints is the crown of the intellect and the understanding which have communion with God through the revelation of His glorious mysteries, but the universal renewal is the general resurrection of all.

7:2 When mothers completely cease from bearing children, 'The last enemy shall be destroyed, which is death' (1 Corinthians 15:26), and straightway the beauty of the resurrection will radiantly shine forth. The sign of the Lord's Cross will be seen (Cf. Matthew 24:30), Christ will shine resplendently in the great glory of His angels (Cf. Matthew 16:27), the veil of delusion will be stripped off from all, and the resurrection will reign, as it is written. At a signal all created things will be changed (Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:52) and will receive renewal.

7:3 Suddenly justice conjoined with mercy will be revealed. Transgressors and demons will be clothed with shame, darkness, and remorse. The garment of their deeds will come forth from within them; but the righteous will be arrayed in their own raiment of glory. Grace will be poured forth, the firmament will shine brilliantly, and angels, men, and demons will stand in profound awe. The righteous will be raised up on wings of light to meet our Lord (Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17). The Bridegroom will enter into the spiritual bridal chamber (Cf. Matthew 25:10), making ready for His guests. And with Him will enter in the sons of light, the invited guests, those who by the faithfulness of their works awaited the marriage feast. Then immediately the door of the bridal chamber will be shut (Cf. Ibid) and the evil will remain below in the lot which they have purchased by their fraudulent deeds.

7:4 Great consternation at their own state will suddenly fall upon those who remain

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below, when they see the righteous being raised up in light to meet our Lord, and that from within themselves a roaring flame of darkness, torment, and mournful regret issues forth, consuming their lives. Thus will they be punished by the justice of God's mercy, and the whole of their existence yonder will be lamentation and gnashing of teeth.

7:5 Then the Son of God, Christ, to Whom all things are submitted, will bring forth the crown of victory in praise of Him Who submitted all things to Him, and God will be all in all, as it is written (Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:23).

7:6 The heavenly Bridegroom will recline at the head of His invited guests, crowning them with twofold glory. He will cause His guests to recline, they being adorned forever with the glory of their disciplines, and will pour forth on them the gift of His grace. He will crown them with a crown of light and the effulgence of His divinity. He will cover them with the glory of His eternal Kingdom and illumine them with light as they rejoice in the joy of being with Christ in unending happiness and delight.

7:7 Awestruck wonder will fall upon all nature at the great change which, in the twinkling of an eye, will come to pass. The nature of men will receive perfect, undeficient, unwaning renewal. By the general resurrection they will be awakened as though from sleep, the righteous shining like the sun (Cf. Matthew 13:43), the moon, and noetic stars.

7:8 As here there is no knowledge of the new world or language [that can speak of it], so yonder the language of this world will be no more, but stillness and deep silence will reign over all in awe and ineffable glory. For those who have awaited the Bridegroom Christ throughout all generations will be inebriated by His love.

7:11 The act of God's giving men the gift of eternal life will be continuous. If His gift were held back, the everlastingness of their lives would cease. Therefore His gift will not be withdrawn, and their life will not diminish, since they will not be ones who labor, but ones who are spiritual.

7:13 Let us not run after many diverse things whose mystical meaning is hidden and concealed, and let us not slip away from the truth, but let our Faith suffice for the truth. The true knowledge concerning the mystery of the Holy Trinity is known in beginninglessness, begottenness, and procession. The Trinity becomes plain to the naked intellect when in word and spirit we become fully convinced of (or *we affirm*) the paltriness and feebleness of our nature. As long as we accept the truths of the holy Church about that which has no likeness, then, being gloriously raised on high, we shall attain to true knowledge of the reality (Literally; *the prototype*).

7:14 Likewise, the glorious mysteries of the spiritual world cannot be expressed by the tongue's fabrications, and they cannot be depicted in a carnal intellect. It is impossible

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for a representation of the simple Spirit to be revealed to an intellect which has become complex through complex methods.

7:15 Only through the light of faith can the soul receive what knowledge about these mysteries she has received from the holy Scriptures. For not even the Scriptures are able to transmit to us knowledge that we do not accept concerning these mysteries; and without [the light of faith] they will remain alien to our knowledge.

7:16 By taking material from precious things which we esteem to be glorious and desirable, the Scriptures stimulate our childish disposition. And by taking material from things which alarm and terrify us, the Scriptures terrify the grossness of our thinking.

7:17 When the noetic sun of meekness and humility dawns in the heart and the darkness of the delusion of conceit is dispelled, the soul will never again be in need of the methods of knowledge so as to seek out the truth by their intermediary.

7:18 The silence of the intellect emanates from the operation of grace. This does not greatly differ from the sweetness of sleep, when the soul is not deprived of consciousness

that operates unconsciously (or, more literally; *of knowledge that operates unknowingly*).

7:20 O man, you who are diligent to preserve the peace of your heart, do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of the good and evil of those who journey with you. Do not investigate the inner nature of their deeds, and you will not lose your heart's peace. But if you begin to scrutinize the deeds of your neighbor, do not murmur when you find yourself agitated.

7:23 If a monk desires to see our Lord within himself through the Spirit, as He promised in His Gospel (*Vide* John 14:17-20), but his will inclines to accept in place of this vision the spectacle, the depiction, and the figment of phantasy, he will not be deemed worthy of entering the spiritual bridal chamber which is within.

7:27 Each day a monk is like a man who gives food and drink to his body and cares for his health. For he goes into his inner man, gives it to drink and cares for its health.

Through continual prayers he presents it to Jesus, the Physician of our souls. And every night before sleeping he brings it into the tribunal, reckons up its account, repays what it owed, and asks for mercy and repentance.

7:30 The monk who is rich in prayer is rich in boldness before God. The more frequent and assiduous the labors of prayer, the more grace is poured out and the mind becomes luminous.

7:33 The mind is transformed and renewed during prayer by mourning or by joy. Prayers and sighs well up in accord with discipline, reading, the revolving of thoughts, rumination, and occurrences.

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7:36 If a ship, though it be laden with gold and precious stones, loses its way in the abyss of the great and spacious sea, and has no hope of attaining a calm harbor, it will bring no profit. Likewise, if a soul, though laden with education, knowledge, keen wits, profound opinions, and fountains of insight, should have no hope of attaining purity, *limpidity*, gentleness, peace, goodness, and gladness, she will have no profit.

7:37 A man will never receive the revelation of the truth and taste the sweetness of God from the instruction of words, spoken or written, unless his spirit partakes of the Spirit of Jesus and, through the Spirit's operation, his soul acquires His meekness, humility, forbearance of the infirmities of others, and overcomes evil with good.

7:38 When the well-spring of the heart is cleansed of the filth of the passions, and when peace and light reign, the heart does not growl at the recollection of the failings of persons afar off, nor does it become excited by wrath and zeal during encounters with sinners. Rather, in both recollection and encounters with good and evil men, a man's mind is gentle and kind, and he is filled with love, much tranquility and graciousness, like Jesus the Saviour of all, Who did not grow weary of our failings, nor turn away in disgust from our running sores.

7:39 When by grace the intellect is deemed worthy to graze in the meadow of the Scriptures, created beings, God's tender care, the wisdom of His creation, and the many acts of His providence, then it is so swallowed up by the sweetness of these things that it does not perceive either the good or evil lives of a man's companions on his journey.

7:40 When the intellect is accounted worthy to enter the plain of *limpid purity*, it grazes in those lands of peace, where there are no cliffs or high places, because envy, wrath, willfulness, malice, and hypocrisy have been utterly cast down. If we encounter incidents, the intellect accepts them as rightfully belonging to it without being disturbed by them (*Literally; without undergoing examination by them*).

7:42 If you have found the truth within yourself, do not allow yourself to be disturbed by the great diversity of methods employed for virtue. When the air of the firmament of a man's heart is radiant, tranquil, and still, he will know how he has passed from death into life.

7:44 The monk whose recollection is immersed in Christ, whose mind is immersed in light, truth, and life, will not see anything else.

7:46 O man who takes pains to calm the motions of your soul and to cleanse the mirror of your heart from the dust of the passions: while you concern yourself with your interior affairs, also block up the windows of your external senses which import filth and make turbid your soul's *limpid purity*.

7:49 As long as the winnowing-fan of the tongue has power over your heart's treasures,

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such that it can embarrass you and put your soul to shame, keep your spiritual riches gathered up within yourself.

7:54 When at first a seed of the passions or the virtues falls into the field of the heart, it is much smaller and meaner than a seed which falls into a field of earth. It dies and perishes, or grows, becomes strong, and produces fruit in accord with the farmer who tends it, either causing it to grow or to wither.

7:58 Woe to the man who is not fervent in his discipline, as were the blessed apostles, whom men reviled in that they were accounted worthy of the new wine and became drunk (*Vide* Acts 2:13). But blessed and twice blessed is the man who after the first fervor is accounted worthy of a second fervor, who receives peace and tranquility, and who produces the fruits enumerated by the blessed Paul!, (*Vide* Galatians 5:22).

7:59 Just as it is useless for a man to be rich in bodily labors when his mind is blind to any comprehension of the word of light (i.e. Scripture), so, in the same manner, a man will never prosper whose mind hovers around the thoughts of the intellect's phantasy and incorporeal ideas (or *illusions, imaginations*) and who is devoid of the works of repentance. Therefore our Lord commanded equally to 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's' (Matthew 22:21).

7:60 O discerning monk, who captures the words of prayer and sets them free again to fly into the air, gaze within yourself, and with insight comprehend the sayings [of Scripture] composed by the Spirit. Marvel at the strength of their interior composition and not at the sweetness of your melodies.

7:61 O monk, who fashions the words of prayer from wandering thoughts concerning the natures and things of creation, collect your thought from its wandering by reading and progress in spiritual matters. Inscribe the words of your prayer in the book of your heart where Christ, the true Light, dwells.

7:64 The monk who gazes into his heart and imprints the words of his prayer upon its tablet will be freed from distraction and accounted worthy of the illumination of the mind and awesome vision.

7:65 By rubbing wood against wood fire is kindled, and by the prayerful words of rumination within the heart the fire of love is ignited. Through ardent yearning for Christ it bursts into flame.

7:66 It is easier to quell the wild desire of fornication than it is to quell the blazing fire of desire for divine things. A man is reviled and does not know it, glorified and does not perceive it, hungers and thirsts and thinks nothing of it.

7:67 When we are found in the region of *limpid purity*, the passions do not dare to

assail

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us by force, nor even to employ their devices, unless we voluntarily consent with them. In just the same way, when we are found in the region of the passions, it is not right to attempt by force to enter the region of *limpid purity* unless we have thrust away from ourselves the pleasure of the passions and have applied ourselves to tearful prayer.

7:73 O man whose conscience is polluted and wavering, and yet you are filled with zeal and demand that justice be exacted from others: when your brethren seem to you to be doing wrong, do not immediately become upset and disturbed, do not castigate them because of your foolish zeal. Rather, look within yourself and understand that the mirror of your conscience is befouled with the unseemly filth of envy and malice, and that your intellect has begun to see pure things as unclean. Understand that the bad things which you see in others are a shadow of the impure images that are imprinted inwardly on the mirror of your heart, and they become outwardly manifest as imposed on the good actions of your brethren. Thus pure things seem to you to be impure. Do not find fault with exterior things, but interior, that is, with your unstable and polluted conscience.

7:74 It often occurs that due to conceit, or from hearsay, and so on, a man becomes inflamed with a godly zeal, yet 'not according to knowledge', as the blessed Paul wrote (Romans 10:2); thus he falls into trials. If a man cannot see his neighbor as he is except by his neighbor's own hidden eye, which thing is impossible to do, then it is evident that every man sees his neighbor as he is himself and not as his neighbor really is. When you see the failings of others, enter within yourself and trace out your own failings.

Understand with discretion that if the cause is not this, but due to something else, you will never be liberated and find peace. When certain men see likenesses of flies before their eyes, physicians do not consider the eyes to be unhealthy, but rather the stomach, which lies within. Therefore by a purging draught given interiorly they heal the eyes, and not by drugs applied exteriorly.

7:75 When by a gift of God's mercy the disciplines and actions of all men seem to you to be equally good and beautiful, understand that through grace the mirror of your conscience is limpid and pure of the passions of wickedness (or *malice*), and that this is not a virtue of your own, but comes from divine help. Give glory to God that your soul has begun to yield the fruits of the Spirit. A man, the eye of whose conscience is pure, does not see the evil of his neighbor. A man, the eye of whose heart is impure, does not see the good of his neighbor; rather his mind is continually agitated, distressed, and growls at whatever it sees, hears, or remembers. Such is the life of the belabored soul who esteems his own opinions, who scorns, disdains, and holds in contempt his weaker neighbor. He demands that justice be exacted from others and does not wish to pass over into the sublime

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life of grace, the same to which he has called himself from the time he abandoned the world and cleaved to Christ in faith, hope, and love, through free repentance and not with the justice of the Law (Cf. Matthew 6:21).

7:78 Just as figures and colors adorn paintings and depictions, so the counsels of elders and the initiates of the truth adorn rational beings and turn them toward excellent ways, customs, and practices. The soul is adorned by continual prayers, reflection on things divine, reading the Scriptures, and watchfulness. The man who inquires into, investigates,

and learns many things, but does and practices only those things which he knows and finds pleasure in, resembles the unclean demons. As sunlight is of no use to a blind man, so the advice, instruction, and knowledge of the elders is of no use to a soul that is bereft of the works of a stable discipline and is blinded by the passions.

7:80 O man who has become God's dwelling-place through steadfast ascetical practices, do not rely on yourself, and do not undervalue the works of your discipline! Do not despise, either inwardly or outwardly, the man whose heart is crushed by his own failings and suffers from diverse feverish passions. But fear passions and your own failings until you reach the harbor of the tomb, for you do not know when you will slip into the very same failings as those for which you despised others, or if grace will abandon you and you will fall like lightning (Cf. Luke 10:18) from the lofty summit of your discipline, though you were a director for many.

7:81 Our Lord has laid up great blessedness for the man who comforts someone whose heart is broken by asceticism, who is voluntarily impoverished, and who despises himself. But blessedness upon blessedness is reserved for the man who experiences profound co-suffering with someone brought low by pains, illnesses, and other personal sorrows, and who co-suffers with one who leads a toilsome, unprosperous life, who is scorned, despised, and repudiated, whose heart is crushed in the presence of his comrades, and who is put to shame by others and by himself as well. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy', our Lord said (Matthew 5:7). But woe to the man who stabs the ulcers within the hearts of feeble men and mocks them! He resembles the thief on the [Lord's] left who mocked (*Vide* Luke 23:39).

7:82 The monk who strives and labors to heal over the open wounds of his soul, but judges and condemns as slothful and lazy those who are crushed and ill with passions, will never see the luminous star which dawns in the hearts of those who know the truth. A monk who acknowledges his own failings, and with love and pity caresses and consoles his smaller and weaker brethren, will be deemed worthy by Christ the Lord to be a temple for the radiance which proceeds from the Father. Amen, so be it! It is written that the consolation of a fool is bruises and wounds for other men, but the crown of a wise man is the triumph of his neighbor.

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7:84 The prayer of the sinner, whose heart is broken and humbled by remorse at the memory of his faults and failings, is better than the prayer of a boasting righteous man who is puffed up by conceit, who rides the horse of pride, and who conducts himself haughtily because he [seems to] stand firmly on the spiritual level. When a sinner becomes aware of his failings and begins to repent, he is righteous. When a righteous man becomes aware of his righteousness and his conscience is persuaded of it, he is a sinner.

7:87 The boastful righteous man who is wise in his own eyes is like the bitter and briny sea, whose waves are lifted high, but whose mariners perish from thirst.

7:88 The righteous man who with senseless deeds makes a feeble beginning, who then becomes filled with repulsion, who becomes acrid and austere, and who voluntarily swallows the hardships and severities of poverty, who suffers and is oppressed, who is tried by scorching heat and bitter cold, who is tormented by temptations of every sort, will in the end be filled with sweetness through his forbearance and the peace he receives from on high. He will become initiated into the sweetness of the knowledge of the truth. But scarcely will a man be found who is released from the struggle until his last day.

Thus, as it is said in Scripture, the fruit of a man's spiritual knowledge will be sweet for eating, but the leaves of his asceticism required for healing will be repugnant (Cf. Genesis 3:6).

7:92 Shallow knowledge, which consists of acute thoughts and intellections, which is yoked to the passions and far removed from the steady practices and labors of repentance and asceticism (which things break, torment, and humble the heart and, by their vehemence, cause a man to search into the words of Scripture and to meditate upon the mercies of God and the glorious mysteries of the new world) has slain many and begotten many sons for Gehenna.

7:93 A truly righteous man, who perceives the tender care shown by God's mercies toward all, and the renewal which our nature will receive at the end, pours forth his mercy especially upon sinful and feeble men so as to bring them to repentance. He understands from his own experience that although all the members of his body are in need of care, still he must give special attention to a member that is ill or in pain or broken. He must bandage it, apply remedies, and care for its healing even if it is one of the body's less honorable members (Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:23). Now the Head of the entire body of the holy Church is Jesus Christ (Cf. Colossians 1:18), and each one of us is a member of Christ (Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:27) in the body of the Church, whether he is good or bad.

7:94 At the beginning of his prayer a righteous man magnifies and gives glory to God, but he denounces himself. He begins his words by praying for the peace of the world and the kings and rulers. At the beginning of his entreaty he supplicates for the tranquility of

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the Church, Her children, and Her leaders. At the beginning of his supplication he begs for sinners, the fallen, and the feeble. And when he begins to weep and to groan, he makes entreaty for those who repent, who suffer oppression, the afflicted, the buffeted, and the distressed. Thereafter, taking refuge in their prayers, he proceeds to ask compassion, mercy, and forgiveness for himself.

7:95 A man who truly repents, who has been baptized in water and the Spirit (Cf. John 3:5), who has been absolved of his sins through grace, cannot be persuaded to be negligent. Rather, he strives and labors at repentance by keeping the commandments, so that he can also be cleansed of the passions, actively receive renewal in his mind, secretly perceive the earnest of the Spirit (Cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22) which he received from holy baptism, and mystically delight within himself with joy and spiritual consolation.

7:96 When truthful men fervently and undoubtingly embrace simple faith in Christ and they hear the promises of the Spirit that 'in My name shall those who believe in Me cast out demons, they shall take up serpents, and they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover' (Cf. Mark 16:17-18), and so on, they easily accomplish with their own hands signs and miracles through the simplicity of their faith. But faith that comes through the divine vision of knowledge searches out and explores the mysteries of the Faith. Now either faith is impeded, when conceit intervenes, and it hesitates at the fork in the road, or, because of painstaking labors, a steady discipline, and mournful tears, it is helped by grace: then [in a second case] it discovers the light of the true knowledge of the new, noetic world. Faith is the eye of the soul, hope is her vision, and love is living, noetic light. The soul cannot be filled with joy and secret consolation except by the operation of grace.

7:97 So long as honor and dishonor, loss and profit, good things and evil come upon us

through the senses and trouble us, our soul suffers loss and she has need of labor, training, ascetical discipline, stillness, and the absence of all intercourse. In short, until there is uprooted from our heart the school which cultivates the knowledge of the good and evil of our neighbor, that such a one is good and such a one is bad, that this man is righteous and that man is a sinner, and so forth, and until there is rooted within us the school of grace, which cultivates love, mercifulness, forgiveness of senseless deeds, of sinners, and of the feeble, and we indiscriminately pour forth grace upon good and evil men equally (in the likeness of Jesus, the Saviour of all): until such a time we should not expect the fruits of the Spirit, enumerated by the blessed Paul (*Vide* Galatians 5:22) to flourish within us.

7:98 Every man who toils within himself and receives in himself material from the Scriptures and from nature, and so on, adorns himself and satisfies his hunger. A youth, however, receives material from the Scriptures and from created natures, and then runs to

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satisfy the hunger of many others, so perishing from hunger himself. I earnestly beseech you to forgive me this very folly. Let all who read or hear [this book] say with groans, 'O God, have pity on this sinner!'

7:100 For us and for spiritual beings our Lord has reserved perfection free of aberration as the manner of life of the new world. Here, however, according to the word of the divine Paul, 'God hath enclosed all in aberration that yonder all might be in need of mercy', both the righteous and sinners (Cf. Romans 11:32). The Lord teaches us in the Gospel of life to cleave each day to repentance, and that if we are negligent in works and do not possess daily repentance, we should not resort to the greatness of knowledge, faith, and mercy. Unto Him be glory, and may He make us wise in His truth unto the ages. Amen.

Let every man who comes upon this book pray.
And let every man who reads it pray.
And let every man who owns it pray.
And for him who prays let us all together pray, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen. Amen.

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Part II – *An Epistle to Abba Symeon of Caesarea.*

(The Greek printed text addresses this epistle to Symeon the Wonderworker, while the Greek manuscripts have Abba Symeon of Caesarea. Judging merely by the content of the epistle it seems most unlikely that it was written to Saint Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain (Near Antioch) who is also called the Wonderworker).

Your Epistle, O Holy Man, is not simply written words, but as in a mirror you have depicted therein and made manifest your love for us. As you think us to be, so have you written; and you have shown by your very actions that you love us exceedingly, so that on account of your great love, you forget our measure. For that which it were meet for us to write to your holiness and to ask, so as to learn the truth from you (if we were solicitous over our own salvation), this you have anticipated and written to us by reason of the magnitude of your love. But probably you did this with the art of [[divine]] philosophy, so that by means of the subtle and spiritual questions you ask me, my soul

might be aroused from the state of carelessness wherein she has become deeply mired. Howbeit, by reason of that same divine love because of which you have forgotten our measure, I now also forget my insufficiency, and so I give heed not to my ability but to what your prayer is powerful to do. For though I forget my measure, you will obtain from God by your prayers the fulfillment of your request and you will certainly receive from Him that which you have sought in prayer, as being His true servant.

And so the first question in your epistle is the following: Must all the Lord's commandments be observed, and is there not a way of salvation for the man who does not keep them?

It seems to me that there is no need even to ask concerning this. Although there are

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many commandments, one must keep them, for otherwise there would have been no reason for the Saviour to give them. I think indeed, that our Master said or did nothing superfluous, unreasonable, or needless. For the purpose of His coming was to cleanse from the soul the evil of the first transgression (Syriac; *to cleanse the soul from wickedness*) and to bring her back to her primal state. He gave us His life-giving commandments as purifying remedies of the soul's passionate condition. For what medicines are to a diseased body, that the commandments are to the passionate soul. It is clear that the commandments were given to oppose the passions and for the healing of the sinful soul, even as the Lord said plainly to His disciples, 'He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode in him' (John 14:21, 23). And again, 'By this shall the world know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another' (John 13:35). It is evident that a man can acquire love only after he has received health of soul, and that the soul is not in good health unless she keeps the commandments.

The keeping of the commandments is, however, still inferior to spiritual love. And because there are many who keep the commandments out of fear or on account of future reward but not for love's sake, the Lord often admonishes us to observe out of love the commandments which give light to the soul. And furthermore, 'So that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in the heavens' (Matthew 5:16); but it is not possible to see in the soul the good works which the Lord taught, unless a man keep the commandments. And showing that the commandments are not burdensome for the lovers of the truth, the Lord said: 'Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For My yoke is good and My burden is light' (Matthew 11:28, 30). And so that we should carefully keep all the commandments, He also decreed this, saying, 'Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of the Heavens' (Matthew 5:19). After all these things ordained for our salvation, I cannot say that there is no necessity to keep all the commandments. Nor is the soul capable of purifying herself if she does not keep the commandments which the Lord gave as medicines for the purging of passions and sins.

You know that evil entered into us through the transgression of the commandments. Hence it is obvious that by keeping them, evil departs from us. But without the doing of the commandments we should not even aspire or hope for purity of soul, because (Greek; *when*) at the very outset we do not walk on the path that leads us to purity of soul. Do not say that God can give us the grace of purity of soul even without

our keeping the commandments.

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All things of this sort are the judgments of God, and the Church does not direct us to ask for such a thing. The Jews, at the time of their return from Babylon to Jerusalem, came by the road trodden by nature, and in this manner they reached their holy city and beheld the wondrous deeds of the Lord. But Ezekiel was caught away supranaturally by the action of revelation and he came to Jerusalem; and in a divine revelation he was a beholder of the renewal that was to come (*Vide* Ezekiel 40:1). It is likewise with purity of soul. Some, going by the well-trodden road of the law through the keeping of the commandments in a life of many labors, enter into purity of soul by sweat and blood; and there are others who are vouchsafed purity of soul by the gift of grace. It is a marvelous thing that we are not permitted to ask in prayer for the purity that is granted us by grace and so to reject the active and laborious manner of life. For the Lord said clearly to the rich man who asked how he could inherit eternal life, 'Keep the commandments.' And when the rich man asked, 'What commandments?' He answered, 'At the beginning shun evil works', so reminding him of the natural commandments. But when he sought to learn more, the Lord said to him, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, take up thy cross and follow Me' (Cf. Matthew 19:21). This means, die to all your possessions and thus live in Me; depart from the old world of the passions and so enter into the new world of the spirit. Take up your cross and strip yourself of the knowledge of methods and craftiness and so put on the simple knowledge of the truth. For by saying, 'Take up thy cross' (Matthew 16:24), the Lord taught him to die to all things in the world. When a man has killed the old man in himself, that is, his passions, He then says to him: 'Follow Me.' The old man cannot go the way of Christ, as the blessed Paul says, 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 15:50), nor can corruption inherit incorruption; and again, 'Put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the likeness of his Creator' (Cf. Ephesians 4:22, 24); and again, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. So then they that are in the flesh, mind the things of the flesh and cannot please God by being spiritually minded' (Cf. Romans 8:7, 5, 8). But, O holy man, if you love purity of heart and the spiritual mind of which you have spoken, cleave to the Master's commandments', even as our Master said, 'If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments' (Matthew 19:17), for the sake of love for Him Who decreed them, but not on account of fear or the recompense of wages. For it is not when we practice righteousness that we taste the sweetness concealed within it, but rather when longing for righteousness consumes our heart. And it is not when we commit sin that we are sinners, but when we do not hate sin and we do not repent of it. I should say that there has

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never been a man, either of the ancients or of those most recent, who has not kept the commandments and still has reached purity of heart and been deemed worthy of the divine vision of the spirit. And as it seems to me, whosoever has not kept the commandments and has not gone in the footsteps of the blessed apostles, is not worthy to be called holy.

The blessed Basil and the blessed Gregories, of whom you said that they were lovers of the wilderness, pillars and lights of the Church, and praisers of stillness, did not

enter stillness having failed to practice the commandments. Rather, they first lived in peace and kept those commandments which must be kept by men dwelling with many others, and thus they reached purity of soul, and were deemed worthy of the divine vision of the spirit. I truly believe that when they lived in cities they received strangers, visited the sick, clothed the naked, washed the feet of the weary, and if anyone compelled them to go one mile, they went two. When they had kept the commandments which must needs be kept in the company of men and their intellect began to perceive its primal motionlessness and the mysteries of divine *theoria* (Greek; *mystic and divine theorias*), then they hastened to go out into the stillness of the desert. From thenceforth they abode with their inner man so as to become continual beholders of divine visions, and they remained in the divine vision of the spirit until grace summoned them to be shepherds of the Church of Christ.

But you say that Basil the Great sometimes praises dwelling with many men, sometimes withdrawal from men, concerning which I reply that truly zealous men find profit in two ways, each man according to his strength, his discernment, and the goal which he has set for himself. Sometimes the strong are profited by dwelling with many men, sometimes the weak also; and it is the same in the desert. The man who stands firmly in good health of soul, whose intellect is united with the Spirit and who is dead to the life of mankind, the same suffers no harm from habitation with many men, if he is very vigilant in his affairs. Such a man dwells with others not to receive profit, but to profit others, since God has called him to this as He did [[the Apostles and]] the other holy Fathers. But it is also profitable for a weak man, who still needs the milk of the commandments in order to grow, to dwell with many men, until he be exercised, perfected, and buffeted in trials, and he fall and rise up again together with the rest and so achieve health of soul. No infant is nurtured without the streams of milk, no monk without the milk of the commandments is tutored, progresses, vanquishes the passions, and receives purity. And, as we have said, the same holds true for the desert. Sometimes the desert is profitable for those who flee, sometimes for the strong: for the former, so that there be no fuel that could increase their passions; for the latter, so that by being unencompassed by matter, they can confront the onslaughts of the evil one.

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In very truth, as you said, the desert puts the passions to sleep. But not this alone is requisite—for a man to put his passions to sleep—but he must also uproot them, that is, conquer them when they obstinately contend against him. For sleeping passions awake as soon as they meet with a cause which moves them to their activity. But so as to learn that not only the desert puts the passions to sleep, as you say, understand how in the time of sickness and great weakness they do not war vehemently against us. Indeed, the passions themselves often put each other to sleep when they give place to one another. The passion of vainglory often puts to sleep the passion of fornication, and again, the passion of fornication puts to sleep the craving for glory. Let us not, therefore, desire to hasten into the wilderness because it merely puts the passions to sleep, but because by the absence of sensory objects and the withdrawal from all men we become wise in the desert, and our inner, spiritual man is renewed in Christ. And further because at all times we see ourselves, and our intellect becomes wakeful and guards itself at every moment, lest perhaps the memory of its hope be stolen from it. These things, I think, will suffice to answer your first question, if indeed you required them.

Now your second question is this: Is it good to flee from all that excites the

passions in us; and is such flight to be considered a victory, or is flight from warfare and the choosing of peace to be considered a defeat of the soul?

On this matter we shall speak briefly. With intelligence the monk should flee whatever excites evil passions in him, and he should especially sever from himself both the causes of the passions and the fuel whereby they operate and increase, though they be insignificant. But if it is a time for resisting and waging war with them, he should do the following also, not rashly, but with much skill: when snares are laid for him in the vision of his spirit, he should always turn his mind away from the passions toward the natural good which the Creator placed in our nature, even though the devil perniciously perverts the truth for a cunning trial of men. And if permissible, I should also say that he should not only flee from outward vexations, but from his own senses as well, if possible. He should dwell with his inner man and there abide, toiling solely in the continual husbandry of the vineyard of his heart. How, indeed, can the name monasticism be fulfilled by works alone (Greek; *until he corresponds in (his) works with the name monasticism*. With the addition of a *lamedh* before *name* the Syriac might also mean this), since it is applied to him both inwardly and outwardly to the same degree? For by continually abiding with our inner man we shall become one through the completeness of the knowledge of the hope of Christ Who dwells in us. As long as the intellect abides here, it will not wage war with the passions, but grace herself [will do this]. That is to say, the passions will remain inactive.

The third *Question*: If a man does something for the sake of the purity of his soul,

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but others, not understanding his spiritual discipline, are scandalized with him, should he desist from his divine discipline because of the scandal, or should he do that which profits him, even though onlookers suffer harm?

We say to this: if, while purifying his intellect, a man does something that he has received from the Fathers who came before him, and the goal he has set for himself is to attain to purity, but others, not convinced of his goal, are scandalized, then the guilt is not his own but their own. He does not devote himself to abstinence, fast, strictly seclude himself, and do those things which help him to attain his goal so as to scandalize others, but to render his intellect pure. They, not knowing his aim, find fault with him. They are, however, confuted by the truth, because they are unable (due to their own negligence) to perceive the spiritual goal which he spiritually set for himself, that is, to attain to purity of soul. The blessed Paul wrote of such men, 'The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness' (1 Corinthians 1:18). What then? Should Paul have ceased from the 'kerygma' because the preaching of the Cross was considered foolishness by those who were perishing and did not perceive the Cross's power? Even until this day the subject of the Cross is a stumblingblock and a scandal for the Jews and the heathen. Should we then be silent about the truth, lest they be scandalized? But not merely did Paul not cease from speaking, but he cried out loudly and said, 'Far be it that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!' (Galatians 6:14). He did not, indeed, exclaim his boasting in the Cross so as to scandalize others, but to preach the Cross's great power. Therefore you also, O holy man, should accomplish your discipline with the goal that you have fixed for yourself before God, and in this your conscience will not condemn you. You should judge your discipline by means of the holy Scriptures and by that which you have received from the holy Fathers. If you are not censured by these things, have no fear when others are scandalized. No one is able to please all men alike, and likewise to labor

for God in his hidden self.

Blessed is the monk, O blessed man, who in very truth runs in pursuit of the purity of his soul with all his strength, and journeys toward it on the lawful path which our Fathers traveled, who skillfully ascends to it gradually by its own steps, enduring the tribulation of afflictions, but not employing the foreign steps of his own devisings. Purity of soul is the primordial gift of our nature. Without purity from the passions the soul cannot be healed from the illnesses of sin and possess that glory which she lost by transgressing the commandment. If in reality and actively a man is deemed worthy of purity of soul (which is the soul's good health), his intellect will receive joy through spiritual perception, for he has become a son of God and a brother of Christ, and his intellect becomes oblivious to the good and evil things that befall him.

Further you write in your epistle that a monk who wishes to love God must above all

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have concern for the purity of his soul. You have spoken well, if indeed you have strength sufficient for this. You also say that the soul which has not yet vanquished the passions has no boldness in prayer, but these two statements seem to me to contradict one another, though I am an ignorant fellow. For if a man has not conquered the passions, how will he have concern for purity? The just law of spirituality does not permit the soul which has not conquered her passions to seek that which is above her. For it is not known that a man loves from what he desires, but it is known that he desires from what he loves, since love naturally precedes desire. If a man did not love, he would not desire. The passions are a door closed in the face of purity. Unless a man opens this closed door, he will not enter into the unsullied and clear realm of purity of soul. When you wrote that the soul does not possess boldness in the hour of prayer (i.e. When the soul has not conquered the passions), you said the truth. For boldness is not only above the passions, it is even above purity. This is the order of succession as I see it: patience through self-compulsion does battle with the passions for the sake of purity; if the passions are conquered, the soul acquires purity; and true purity endows the intellect with boldness in the hour of prayer.

Could we, perhaps, be blamed for asking in prayer for that which we are calling purity of soul, or could it be a petition coming from pride and conceit to ask God for that which the divine Scripture and our Fathers command, though it is this very thing which a monk pursues when he withdraws from the world? But I think, O holy man, that just as a son has confidence in his father and does not beseech him 'Teach me such a craft', or, 'Give me such a thing': so a monk ought not to differentiate in his supplication to God and say, 'Give me this', 'Give me that', for he knows that what a father provides for his son is transcended by God's providence for us. We should, therefore, humble ourselves and mourn over the faults and the stumblings which we have involuntarily committed, whether in our thoughts or our actions. We should say with a contrite heart what the Publican said, 'God, be gracious unto me a sinner' (Luke 18:13); and we should do both openly and hiddenly that which the Lord taught, saying, 'Overcome evil with good' (Romans 12:21); and when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which we ought to have done' (Luke 17:10). In this manner your conscience will bear witness to you that you are a sinner and have need of mercy. And you yourself know, O holy man, that works and disciplines do not open the door closed within your heart, but a contrite heart and

humility of soul, when you have overcome the passions by humility and not by scorning them. For the man who is sick straightway humbles himself, being concerned to heal his maladies; afterward he seeks to be a king. Verily, purity and health of soul are the kingdom of the soul. As a sickly prince does not say to his father,

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'Make me king', but first cares to regain his health, and after he is completely healthy he receives his father's kingdom; so the sinner, after he repents and receives the health of his soul, enters with his Father into the realm of his nature's purity and reigns in his Father's glory.

We bring to mind how the holy apostle Paul recounts his transgressions and puts his soul in the last and nethermost place, saying: 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first He might show forth all His long-suffering. For in the beginning I was a persecutor, a reviler and a blasphemer, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief' (1 Timothy 1:15, 16, 13). When and at what time did he say this? After great struggles, after mighty works, after the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, which he preached throughout the whole world, after continual deaths and manifold tribulations which he suffered from the Jews and from the heathen. He saw himself as still making a beginning, and not merely was he of the opinion that he had not yet attained to purity of soul, but he would not even number himself among the disciples of Christ, as was meet. For he said, 'I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God' (1 Corinthians 15:9). And when more than all men he had gained victory over the passions, he said, 'I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway' (1 Corinthians 9:27). But if you were to object, saying that at times he also recounts great things about himself, let him persuade you himself about this. For he says that he did not do this voluntarily, nor for his own sake, but for the preaching of the Gospel. And when he relates these great things for the profit of the faithful, he presents himself as being deprived of all sense because he boasts in such a manner, and he cries out and says, 'Ye have compelled me' (2 Corinthians 12:11); and again, 'That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting' (2 Corinthians 11:17). Behold the righteous and upright rule which Saint Paul has laid down for us! Let us, then, observe it and be zealous in its behalf. Let us cease from entreating God for lofty things when He does not bestow them or give them to us by His grace, for God knows the chosen vessels of His service. And the blessed Paul, even after such things, did not ask for the kingdom of the soul, but said, 'I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ' (Romans 9:3). How, then, even before the time known to God, could we dare to ask for the kingdom of the soul, we who have not kept His commandments, nor overcome the passions, nor repaid our debt?

Therefore I am admonishing you, O holy man, lest such a thing should enter your mind. Above all things acquire patience in what befalls you. In great humility and contri-

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tion of heart with respect to our thoughts and whatever pertains to us let us ask God for the forgiveness of our sins and for humility of soul.

One of the saints wrote that, 'If a man does not count himself a sinner, his prayer is not accepted by the Lord.' But if you say that some of the Fathers wrote on what are

purity of soul, health of soul, dispassion, and the soul's divine vision, know that they did not do this so that we should seek these things prematurely, in expectancy, for it is written, 'The Kingdom of God cometh not with the observation of expectancy' (Cf. Luke 17:20). Those in whom such an intention is found have gained for themselves pride and downfall. But for our part, let us put in good order the realm of our heart by deeds of repentance and disciplines well-pleasing to God, and things which are of God will come by themselves, if the place of the heart is pure and undefiled. But to seek 'with observation' these lofty things which are of God, is rejected by the Church of God; and those who have so received them have rather gained for themselves pride and downfall. This is not a sign that a man loves God, but that his soul is sick. How can we seek the lofty things of God, when Paul boasts in afflictions and reckons the lofty things of God to be sharing in the sufferings of Christ?

Further on in your epistle you wrote that your soul has come to love the love for God, but that although you have much desire to love God, you have not attained to a real love of Him, and therefore you yearn to withdraw into the desert. By this you showed that purity of heart has made a beginning in you and the memory of God is aflame and burns strongly in your heart. And if these things are true, they are indeed great; but I should not have wished you to write this, since not one of these things is in its proper place. But if you had told me this by way of a question, a question would require a different form. For how could he who says that his soul still does not have boldness in prayer because he has not conquered the passions, dare to say that his soul has come to love the love for God? Divine love, in pursuit of which you mystically run by withdrawal into the desert, can in no wise be kindled in the soul which has not overcome the passions. You say, however, that your soul has not conquered the passions and that she has come to love the love for God, which is out of place. For the man who says that he has not conquered the passions and that he loves to love God is unintelligible to me.

But you would reply that, 'I did not say that I love, but that I love to love.' Nor does this stand if your soul does not possess purity. But if you wished to say this simply in a manner of speaking, know that you are not alone in saying this, but that everyone says he would like to love God; and indeed, not only the Christians say this, but even those who do not worship God aright. This thing each man repeats as being his own, but such words are pronounced by the tongue alone and the soul does not feel what is said. There are

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many who are sick and do not even know it. Vice is a sickness of the soul and delusion is a loss of truth. Most men who are sick with the disease of vice and delusion proclaim health and are lauded by men. Unless the soul is cured from vice and is found in her natural state of health (with which she was created) so that she can be reborn by health of spirit, it is impossible for a man to desire the supernatural things of the Spirit. For so long as the soul is sick with passions, her senses have no perception of what is spiritual, and she does not even know how to desire it, saving only from the hearing of the ears and from writings. Rightly, therefore, I wrote above that those who desire perfection must keep all the commandments, since the working of the commandments heals the powers of the soul. The practice of the commandments is not accomplished simply and by chance, for it is written that, 'There is no remission without the shedding of blood' (Hebrews 9:22). Our nature first received renewal through the incarnation of Christ, and it participated in His passion and death; and then, after the renewal of the shedding of

blood, our nature was renewed and sanctified and became able to receive His new and perfect commandments. For if the new commandments had been given to men before the shedding of the Lord's blood, before our nature was renewed and sanctified, then it is perhaps possible that even the new commandments, like those of old, would have merely cut off vice from the soul, but would have been unable completely to pluck out the very root of vice from her. But now it is not so; now there is a secret labor that accompanies the new, spiritual commandments. When the soul keeps these through the circumspection of the fear of God, they renew her, sanctify her, and secretly heal all her members. For it is obvious which passion is quietly cured in the soul by each commandment. The operation of the commandments is perceived only by the healer and the healed, after the likeness of the woman who had an issue of blood.

You know, beloved, that if the passionate part of the soul is not healed, renewed, secretly sanctified, and held in bonds by spiritual discipline, the soul will not acquire health nor be freed from being troubled by what she encounters in created nature. Sometimes the healing of the passionate part of the soul is brought about by grace, as in the case of the blessed apostles, because through faith they were made perfect in love of Christ. And sometimes the soul receives health in conformity with the law (Literally; *lawfully*; i.e. According to the established spiritual order of things). Be certain that the man who has conquered the passions by the doing of the commandments and the harsh labors of a genuine discipline, has gained health in conformity with the law. In this manner his intellect has also been weaned from the materiality of this world; his habitual subservience to his proclivities has been eradicated from him; he has been reborn, as though from the very beginning, into what is spiritual; he is seen to be by grace in the

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realm of the spirit through the thoughts of the inner man; and a new and simple world has received him.

When the intellect is renewed and the heart is sanctified, all the motions of desire (Greek; *the thoughts*) that move in the heart are set astir in accord with the nature of that world which a man enters. First there arises in him fervent love for things divine and he ardently yearns for communion with the angels and the revelations of the mysteries of spiritual knowledge. His intellect perceives the spiritual knowledge of created things, and the divine vision of the mysteries of the Holy Trinity together with the mysteries of the worshipful oeconomy on our behalf shines forth in him; then he becomes one through the completeness of (Greek; *becomes completely one with*. The Greek translators read *through the completeness of* as an adverb) the knowledge of the hope of future things.

Understand, therefore, your state from the very things which I have written you. If a soul confined in the realm of the passions could truly love God, she would have much need (The Greek adds a negative here and reads *not much need*) to ask questions and to learn the mysteries of the spiritual world. But it is clear that learning and knowledge bring no profit amid the passions, nor do they suffice to open the door closed in the face of purity. But if the passions are removed from the soul, the intellect is illumined, stands firmly in the pure region of its nature, and has no need of questioning, since it distinctly beholds the good things treasured in this region. Our outward senses do not perceive by learning and questioning the natures and the things that are kindred to them, but each sense naturally, and not by questioning, perceives what confronts it. Indeed, instruction does not mediate between the senses and things perceived. However much one may tell a blind man about the glorious light of the sun, the moon, and the choir of the stars, and the

luster of precious stones, he can grasp, judge, and conceive of their beauty only by their appellation, yet his knowledge and his discerning faculty remain divorced from the sweetness of their sight. In the same manner I conceive of the divine vision of the spirit. For if the intellect, which beholds hidden spiritual mysteries, is in its natural state of health, it distinctly beholds the glory of Christ. It does not question or receive instruction, but more than in the freedom of the will it delights in the sweetness of the mysteries of the new world according to the fervor of its faith and hope in Christ. Even so the blessed Paul wrote 'That which we see, why do we yet hope for? With patience we wait for it' (Cf. Romans 8:24, 25).

We ought, therefore, earnestly to wait and persevere in a solitary manner with simplicity with regard to our inner man, wherein there are no impressions of thoughts or sight of complex objects. For in relation to what the intellect sees, it receives patterns.

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When it looks toward the world, the intellect receives impressions and representations according to the diversity of the forms which it ponders. These stir up thoughts in the intellect in proportion to their multiplicity and the diversity of their variations. And when the thoughts are set in motion, they place their seal upon the intellect. But if the intellect looks steadfastly into the inner man, where there is nothing which could give rise to changing forms and no distinction of complex objects different from one another by their shapes, but Christ is all in all, it is clear that the intellect will enjoy simple divine vision. There is nothing which so makes the soul's depths fragrant and is wont to give her such boldness in the hour of prayer as this, for simple *theoria* is the nourishment of the soul. When the soul stands firmly in the realm of the knowledge of the truth, she has no need of questioning. For just as the eye of the body does not question when it sees the sun, so the eye of the soul does not first investigate and afterward behold spiritual knowledge. It is in this manner also, O holy man, that the mystical divine vision for which you yearn is revealed in the intellect after the soul has returned to health. But intellectual vision, which endeavors to learn such mysteries through investigation and inquiry, is [nothing but] folly of soul. The blessed Paul did not say that by instruction or in a material place he saw and heard mysteries and 'unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter', but in rapture he was caught up into the spiritual realm and beheld the revelation of mysteries (*Vide* 2 Corinthians 12:3, 4).

Therefore, O holy man, if you love purity, by love cut yourself off from all love that is poured out toward all things, and having entered, labor in the vineyard of your heart, pluck out the passions from your soul, and strive to be ignorant of human wickedness. Purity which sees God does not arise and blossom forth in the soul by searching for it, but by being ignorant of every man's wickedness. But if you wish your heart to be a dwelling-place of the mysteries of the new world, first become rich in the works of the spirit, soul, and body: fasting, vigil, liturgy, ascetical struggle, patience, purging of thoughts, and so forth. Fetter your intellect by reading the Scriptures and pondering upon them, inscribe the commandments before your eyes, and pay the debt of the passions when you are defeated and when you are victorious (i.e. We must pay the passions their due by being engaged in struggle with them). By the constant converse of prayer and supplication and by your rumination therein, uproot from your heart every image and every likeness which you have received aforetime. Accustom your intellect always to muse upon the mysteries of our Saviour's oeconomy; leave off your search for knowledge and divine vision, which, in their time and place, exceed all verbal

description; pursue the practice of the commandments and labors on behalf of purity; and beg the Lord in heartfelt prayer that the very same fire which He set into the hearts of the Apostles, the Martyrs, and the

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Fathers descend also into your heart in all matters and that you be granted the noetic discipline. The beginning, the middle, and the end of this discipline is the following: the cutting off of all things through union with Christ. If you yearn for the divine vision of mysteries, practice the commandments in yourself by actual deeds, and not merely by aspiring to know them. Spiritual divine vision operates in us in the realm of purity, where Christ dwells, the 'Author of our life' (Acts 3:15). First seek to learn how to enter the realm of the mysteries of the Spirit and in this manner begin.

Purity that is preceded by the practice of the commandments is called the realm of the mysteries. Divine vision is the spiritual vision of the intellect (Syriac; *mad'a*), that is, to be awestruck and to have understanding of what is, what has come to be, and what will be. Divine vision is the sight of the intellect (Syriac; *hauna*), that is, to be awed by God's oeconomy from generation to generation, and to understand the glories of God and the terrifying things of the new world. By these things the heart is made contrite and is renewed, and like an infant in Christ the intellect is nourished on the milk of new and spiritual commandments; it becomes free of wickedness and is accustomed to the mysteries of the Spirit and the revelations of knowledge; it is raised from knowledge to knowledge, from divine vision to divine vision, from insight to insight, and mystically it learns and is strengthened, until it is uplifted by love, united by hope, and joy resides in its innermost recesses. Thus it is exalted by God and crowned with the natural glory of its own formation, wherewith it was created.

The intellect ascends into these spiritual abodes by the revelations of knowledge; it falls and stands up, defeats and is defeated, is fried (immolated) in the furnace of the monk's cell, and in this manner is purified, receives mercy, and in reality is accounted worthy of the divine vision of the Holy Trinity, the very thing which you yearn for. The divine visions of natures whereby the intellect is exalted, becomes active, and exercises itself, are three in number: two are of the natures of created things, rational and irrational, spiritual and bodily; the other is of the Holy Trinity. At first it enters into creation, and the intellect passes throughout all created things by the revelation of knowledge. But for those things which do not naturally fall under the senses, divine vision is noetic. The intellect also has a divine vision so as to behold itself. With this the pagan philosophers distracted (Greek; this means to raise upward and roam about) their minds dwelling upon the appearances of created things.

The divine vision of the sons of the mystery of faith is conjoined with faith and grazes in the meadow of the Scriptures. It gathers the intellect from all outward distraction and binds it fast by union with Christ, in the likeness of Basil and Gregory, and the intellect's divine vision is upon the mystical words found in Scripture. Then words which

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knowledge cannot comprehend are received by us through faith, and we gain knowledge of them in that divine vision which we enjoy after purification. For the sake of the mysteries of the Spirit, which are above knowledge and cannot be apprehended by the senses of the body or by the reasoning power of the intellect, God has given us faith,

whereby we know only that these mysteries exist. But this faith gives birth in us to hope for them. By faith we profess that God is the Lord, Master, Creator, and Fashioner of all things. By knowledge we determine that we must keep His commandments and understand that fear keeps the old commandments, but love keeps the life-giving commandments of Christ, as He Himself said, 'I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love' (John 15:10). It is evident that the Son does not keep the commandments of His Father from fear, but from love. For this reason He admonishes us that we should also keep His commandments out of love when He says: 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I will entreat the Father and He shall give another Comforter' (John 14:15, 16). By the coming of the Comforter He indicates the gifts of the revelation of the mysteries of the Spirit, since it was by the reception of the Spirit that the apostles received the perfection of spiritual knowledge. The Lord promised to ask His Father to give the Comforter to them, to abide with them unto the ages, after the doing of the commandments and purification. Do you see that by the keeping of the commandments the intellect is accounted worthy of the gift of mystical divine vision and the revelations of spiritual knowledge? Indeed, it is not as your wisdom supposed, namely, that the work of keeping the commandments is a hindrance to the divine vision of the divine mysteries which are accomplished in stillness.

Therefore I entreat you, if you perceive in your soul that you have reached the realm of love, keep the new commandments of love for Him Who decreed them, and not from fear, even as the blessed Paul said when he was aflame with divine love: 'Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or prison, or persecution', and the rest. Furthermore he adds, 'For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord' (Cf. Romans 8:35, 38). And so that no man should think that he yearned for great recompense, or honor, or superabundant bestowal of spiritual gifts, as your holiness desires, he said, 'I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ' (Romans 9:3), that those estranged might become His friends. And so that you know that he did not pursue mystical divine vision enjoyed in solitude (like your fatherliness) or desire that which often certain unworthy men have received by grace, hear what he says in another place: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not love,

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I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing' (1 Corinthians 13:1, 2). Do you see that the lawful door to these things is love? If we acquire love, she will bring us into them. But if we should be granted them by grace, without love, there will certainly come a time when we shall have to give them up. For the acquisition and the guardian of the more lofty holy gifts [[of the saints]] and their divine disciplines is love. Immediately when a monk loses possession of love, his heart loses peace (which is God's tabernacle) and the door of grace is shut within him, that same door whereby the Lord goes in and out, as He says, 'I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall live and find pasture' (John 10:9), for the nourishment of his spiritual life. Here he is not bridled by vice or by delusion, but like men free in Christ, by divine love he goes in and out of every ascent of the revelations of knowledge and mystical divine visions. And so that you know the truth of this, learn from the blessed apostle Paul that in reality the spiritual life

of the intellect is divine *theoria*, for he cries: I take no pleasure in divine vision without love. If I should not enter through the lawful gate of love into divine vision, I should not desire it at all. And if it were given me by the free gift of grace, when I had not yet acquired love, I should not seek it, for I had not entered into it by the natural door, which is love. I wish, therefore, firstly to acquire love, which is the first divine vision of the Holy Trinity, and then naturally, even without a gift, the divine vision of spiritual things will be mine.

Understand the divine wisdom of the blessed Paul, how he forsook all the gifts which were transmitted to him by grace and he asked for the very substance of the gifts, which both receives all gifts and guards them, as someone has said. The gift of the divine vision of created things was also bestowed upon Moses, and many others were accounted worthy of the same; not, however, permanently, but in a revelation. I, he says, who am baptized in the Holy Spirit and filled with grace, desire to perceive in myself Christ who dwells within me. For Christ effected the renewal of our nature in His own Hypostasis, and by water and Spirit we have put Him on. In an ineffable mystery He united us to Himself and made us members of His body: here, in the manner of an earnest, but in the new world, He naturally imparts life to His members [[even as the head of the body imparts life to the rest of the members]]. Why, then, do you wish and seek for divine vision that is inferior to love? The divine Paul rejected it when it is bereft of love.

Your statement that 'the practice of the commandments hinders me from divine vision', shows that you have found fault with the love of your neighbor and have shown preference to divine vision, and you desire to behold it where it is not to be beheld. For

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the present, O wisest of men, we cannot behold divine vision, but divine vision herself shows herself to us in her own place. Just as with the increase of natural growth the soul receives a diversity of knowledge and apprehends the things of the world and exercises herself therein day by day; so in the things of the spirit a man receives spiritual divine vision and divine awareness and exercises himself therein to the extent that his intellect grows in the noetic discipline and makes further progress. When he reaches the realm of love, he beholds things spiritual in their own place; and no matter how much a man strives to force these things to come down to him, they will not be persuaded. If, however, he should audaciously undertake to behold and comprehend these things before the proper time, straightway his vision will be blinded and he will see illusions and figures instead of realities. As soon as you grasp this fully with your discerning intellect, you will not seek for divine vision when it is not the time. But if it seems to you that even now you see divine vision, know that this vision is an illusion of the imagination (or *phantasy*) and not divine vision; for there is a likeness and a figure of the imagination for every noetic thing, and again, there is also a true divine vision of it. For behold, in compound natures phantasy as well as true vision occurs. The eye sees true vision when its sight is sound, light is found before it, and what is beheld is close by (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek text has become somewhat confused here). But when the reverse is the case, the eye beholds a mirage instead of the truth, as when it sees water when there is no water, and buildings raised up and suspended in the air, though they stand upon the ground. Apply this explanation of physical things to the noetic as well.

If the sight of the intellect is not purified by the practice of the commandments and by the works of the disciplines of stillness, and if it does not perfectly gain the light of love and grow in the stature of renewal in Christ, and by the different quality of its

knowledge draw near to the spiritual natures in the order wherein it seeks the angelic discipline of the spirit, it cannot become a true seer of divine *theoria*. However many likenesses of spiritual things the intellect may conceive, they can only be called phantasy and not reality. The cause of the intellect beholding one thing in the place of another is that it is not pure. For the nature of reality always remains unchanged; it is never changed into similitudes. But the cause of the illusion of images is the infirmity, not the purity, of the intellect.

This also befell the profane philosophers, because they regarded as spiritual that concerning which they had received no true teaching from God. Because of the grip and the activity of their rational faculty and the conceptions of their thoughts, they esteemed themselves in their conceit to be something. And further, they deliberated on how they existed, so that they would be able to possess the discovery (i.e. The understanding) both of their genesis and the

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alterations of their forms. They discoursed concerning these things with unseemly presumption, divided the one God into many gods, and in the ruminations of their thoughts spoke and fabricated things which do not exist. In the train of their deliberations they disputed and argued over the spiritual natures and their activities, and called this insane phantasy of their thoughts the divine vision of natures.

The true divine vision of perceptible and imperceptible natures, and of the Holy Trinity Himself, is given in the revelation of Christ. He taught this and showed it to men when at the first, in His own Hypostasis, He accomplished the renewal of man's entire nature, restored and gave it its original freedom, and in Himself He beat down the path for us so that we can journey to the truth through His life-giving commandments; then our nature became capable of beholding true, not illusory, divine vision. When man has shed the old man of the passions by patiently enduring sufferings, by labor, and by affliction, then even as a new-born babe sheds the membrane of its mother's womb, the intellect is capable of being born in a spiritual manner, of seeing in the world of the spirit and of receiving the divine vision of its homeland.

Although the divine vision (Perhaps something like *speculation* is meant here) of created things is very sweet, still it is a shadow of knowledge, and its sweetness is not distinct from the dreams of phantasy. But the divine vision of the new world in the Spirit of revelation, wherein the intellect delights spiritually, is the operation of grace, not a shadow of knowledge. The sweetness of this divine vision is not distinct from that of which the Apostle wrote: 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto the saints by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God' (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10). This divine vision is food for the intellect until it becomes able to receive a divine vision higher than the first. For divine vision conveys the intellect to another divine vision until it is brought into the realm of perfect love. For love is the place of spiritual things and it dwells in purity of soul. When the intellect is established in the realm of love, grace is active, and the mind receives spiritual divine vision and becomes a beholder of hidden things.

There are two modes, as I have said already, whereby the gift of the revelations of divine vision is given to the intellect. Sometimes it is given by grace because of the fervor of faith, and sometimes because of purity and the practice of the commandments. By grace, as it was given to the blessed apostles, who purified their intellects not by the

observing of the commandments but by fervent faith, and so were accounted worthy of the revelation of divine vision; for they believed on Christ in simplicity, and followed Him unquestioningly with hearts aflame. And when Christ completed His worshipful oeconomy,

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He sent them the comforting Spirit, He purified and perfected their intellect, actively put to death in them the old man of the passions, actively brought to life in them the new man of the spirit, and thus they became conscious both of the new and old man. So too, the blessed Paul was first mystically renewed, then he received the divine vision of the revelation of mysteries; he was not, however, made confident by this. He actively and freely received grace, but throughout his whole life he ran his course, that he might, in so far as possible, make recompense for that grace which he received when the Lord conversed with him in the way as with His own servant, and sent him to Damascus. Is it not written that Jesus conversed with him openly? But Scripture says that Ananias also spoke thus to him, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 9:17). And when he baptized him, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and perceived the mysteries of the revelations of hidden things, even as this was accomplished in the holy apostles when Jesus was with them and said: 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth and He will declare unto you things to come' (John 16:12, 13).

It is evident that it was only when the blessed Paul received the Holy Spirit and was renewed by Him, that he was granted the revelation of mysteries, that he beheld by the Spirit of revelations, that he delighted in divine *theoria*, heard ineffable words, beheld divine vision more lofty than nature, enjoyed divine visions proper to the celestial hosts and the spiritual orders, and therein he exulted. Let no one say, as the heretics known as the Euchites (or, Messalians) deliriously affirm, that Paul achieved these heights by his own desire (since indeed the intellect is wholly incapable of ascending thither)! On the contrary, he was caught up in rapture by the Spirit of revelations, as he himself wrote in his Epistle to the Corinthians (*Vide* 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4), in contradiction to these vain men, who likened themselves to the holy apostles, but professed the phantasies of their thoughts and called them spiritual divine visions. This error can be found in many of the heretics, I mean Origen, Valentinus, Bardaisan, Marcion, Manes, and many other ancient originators of the wicked heresies which began from the apostolic times and even until this day are found in certain places.

So because some, seduced by the phantasies of the demons, wished to corrupt the teaching of the blessed apostles, the divine Apostle was compelled to disperse the boast of the heretics (who boasted in the illusions of the activity of the demons which appeared to them) by narrating his own divine *theoria* with humility and much fear. This he did in the person of another, saying: 'I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth); how

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he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter' (2 Corinthians 12:2, 4). He does not say, therefore, that he voluntarily ascended in intellect through divine vision into the third heaven, but that he was caught

up by rapture. Indeed, he wrote that he saw divine visions and said that he heard words, but he was unable to describe what those words were or the figures of those divine visions. For when the intellect in the Spirit of revelation sees these things in their own place, it does not receive permission to utter them in a place which is not their own. And even if it should wish, it could not speak of them, because it did not see them with the bodily senses. Whatever the intellect receives through the senses of the body, this it can express in the physical realm. But whatever the intellect perceptibly beholds, hears or apprehends within itself in the realm of the spirit, it has no power to express when it turns again toward the body. It merely remembers that it saw them, but how it saw them, it knows not to express with clarity.

This convicts the false Scriptures called 'revelations', which, being composed by the originators of the corrupt heresies under the influence of demonic phantasies, describe the celestial abodes in the firmament—whither they voluntarily betook their intellects for instruction—the intellect's pathways into Heaven, the places set apart by the Judgment, the manifold figures of the celestial hosts, and their diverse activities. But all these things are shadows of an intellect inebriated by conceit and deranged by the working of demons. For this very reason the blessed Paul by one word closed the door upon all [[divine]] *theoria* and he conveyed it and enclosed it in silence, where even if the intellect were able to disclose that which belongs to the realm of the spirit, it would not receive permission to do so. For he said that all divine visions which the tongue has power to disclose in the physical realm are phantasies of the soul's thoughts, not the working of grace. May your holiness, therefore, keeping these things in mind, beware of the phantasies of profound thoughts. This warfare especially assaults monks who are keen-witted, who inquire into empty opinions, yearn for novelties, and are superficial.

There was a certain man named Malpas, who was the first to worship the devil and it was called Meliton by the multitude, for so is the interpretation of Malpas (This man is also known as Adelphios). He was a native of Edessa and, at a time when he practiced a very lofty discipline, persevering in excessive labors and tribulations, he invented the heresy of the Messalians. It is said that he was a disciple of the blessed Julian, surnamed Sabbas, for a short time and that he accompanied him to Sinai and Egypt and beheld the great Fathers of that time. He saw the blessed Anthony and heard mystical sayings from him on purity and the salvation of souls, and subtle questions on the passions. Hereby Anthony explained how the intellect, after

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its purification, possesses divine vision concerning the mysteries of the Spirit, and that the soul can receive dispassion through grace, when by the practice of the commandments she sheds the passions of the old man and stands firmly in the soundness of her primal nature. When Malpas heard these words in the prime of his youth, his thoughts were inflamed as though by fire and he returned to his own city; and when the passion of love of glory waxed hot within him, he chose for himself a secluded dwelling and gave himself over to austere works and afflictions and unceasing prayer. There burned within him the passion of vainglory (which indeed was the substance of his hope to attain to the sublime things of which he had heard) but he did not learn the art of opposing the enemies of the truth. He did not understand the snares and wiles and machinations of the adversary, whereby the evil one snatches away the strong and powerful into perdition, but he placed his confidence only in works, affliction, non-possessiveness, asceticism, and abstinence. He did not acquire self-abasement, humility,

and a contrite heart, which are an invincible weapon against the assaults of the evil one, nor did he bring to mind the words of Scripture which say: 'When ye shall have accomplished works, kept the commandments, and endured afflictions, reckon yourselves as unprofitable servants' (Cf. Luke 17:10). But on the contrary he was aflame with a lofty self-esteem arising from the labor of his disciplines, and consumed by the desire of the exalted things he had heard. After the passage of much time, when the devil saw him devoid of the work of humility and having the single desire of apprehending the divine vision of the mysteries of which he had heard, he manifested himself to him in infinite light, saying, 'I am the Comforter and was sent by the Father to you in order to vouchsafe you on account of your works the divine vision you desire to receive, and to give you dispassion and repose from further toils.' In return for these things the treacherous one asked that poor wretch to worship him. And that fool, because he did not perceive the devil's warfare, straightway received him with joy and worshiped him and immediately fell under his power. Instead of divine *theoria*, the evil one filled him with demonic phantasy and made him cease from his works for the sake of the truth. He raised him up and mocked him with a vain hope of dispassion, saying, 'Now you have no need of works and of buffeting the body and struggle against the passions and lusts'; and he made him the originator of the heresy of the Messalians. When his followers multiplied, his unholy and spurious teaching became known and the bishop of that time banished them.

Again, there was another man in Edessa by the name of Jason, or Asimas, the composer of many triads (A kind of hymn composed of verses three words in length. The Syriac reads here *madrashé*) chanted even to this day, who practiced a very lofty discipline and bound himself imprudently with very severe labors, until he was glorified [by men]. The devil deluded him, led him out of his cell, placed him on the summit of a mountain called

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Storios, made a pact with him, and showed him the forms of chariots and charioteers, saying to him, 'God has sent me to take you into Paradise like Elias.' In his childishness he was deceived and he sat in the chariot. Then the whole phantasy vanished, he fell from a great height to the earth, and died a death worthy of ridicule.

I have not said these things pointlessly, but so that we should learn the treachery of the demons who thirst for the perdition of the saints, and so that, when it is not the proper time, we should not yearn after the lofty things of the noetic discipline, lest we be made a laughing-stock by our cunning adversary. For I see also nowadays that youths filled with passions babble and fearlessly expound doctrines concerning the mysteries of dispassion.

One of the saints wrote that men who are still filled with passions and indiscriminately converse about both physical and non-physical things, do not differ from men who, though weighed down by illness, give explanations of health. And when the blessed Paul perceived that certain disciples despised the commandments, not having defeated the passions, and moreover they aspired to the blessedness of the divine vision of mysteries, which is possible only after purification, he said to them: First put off the old man of the passions, then aspire to put on the new man, which is renewed after the likeness of Christ its Creator by the knowledge of mysteries. Do not yearn for that divine vision which is allotted to me and the other apostles, which is made active through grace. For God 'hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth' (Romans 9:18). Who shall stand before His face or against His will?

At times God gives freely; at other times He requires works and purification, and only then bestows a gift; and sometimes even after works and purification He does not give [the gift] here, but He withholds so as to bestow it in its proper place. We find that God acts thus also with regard to a lesser gift, namely the forgiveness of sins. For, behold, baptism forgives freely and requires nothing save faith. By repentance after baptism, however, God does not forgive sins freely. He demands labors, afflictions, sorrows of contrition, tears, and weeping over a long period of time, and only then does He bestow remission. The Lord forgave the thief freely, for the mere word of his confession on the cross, and promised him the Kingdom of the Heavens. But from the sinful woman He required faith and tears, and from the martyrs and confessors He required tribulations, torments, straitness, combs of iron, punishments and manifold deaths combined with heartfelt faith and the confession of their mouths.*

*(The doctrine expressed here that 'God does not forgive sins freely', is not a teaching accepted by the Church. Works are not demanded by God as reparation for sin. Saint Mark the Ascetic writes, 'However great our virtuous actions of today, they do not requite but condemn our past negligence' (*Against Those Who Think to be Justified by Works*) 44); 'Every virtue that is performed even to the

[page 448; continuation of footnote bottom of page 447]

point of death is nothing other than refraining from sin. Now to refrain from sin is a work within our natural powers, but not something that buys us the Kingdom' (ibid. 25). Works therefore are nothing but remedies for our passionate state, tools that aid us in amending ourselves. God does not withhold remission until works are offered in payment. Rather, works help repair the vessel of the soul, making it capable again of holding divine grace. Saint Isaac says, 'Christ demands not the doing of the commandments, but the soul's amendment, because of which He gave His commandments'. Thus even the various *epitimia* prescribed by the Church are given to us, not that we may thereby placate God, nor because He demands satisfaction for wrongs committed by us; rather, they are provided as therapies to help us heal our weaknesses, as weapons to help us combat our passions. For this reason, Saint John Climacus writes in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* that fasting is used to cure unclean thoughts and overcome gluttony; stillness cures vainglory, almsgiving heals us of avarice, and so on.)

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When your holiness has been persuaded by these things, pay heed to the men of old and to those of recent times, and do not seek for divine vision when it is not time for divine vision. As long as you are incarcerated in the confines of the body, be zealous in the works of repentance, warlike against the passions, and patient in the practice of the commandments. Beware of the treachery of the demons and of those who preach that immutable perfection [can be attained] in this passionate and aberrant world. For this perfection is not even possessed by the angels, the ministers of the Father and the Spirit, since they await the renewal of the middle state (i.e. The human state) so as to be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption by the freedom of the children of God' (Romans 8:21). Can perfection be found here, where the sun rises and sets amid the clouds? Where there is sometimes fair weather, sometimes drought? Where at times there is joy, at times, dejection? What is opposed to these things is the portion of wolves, as one of the saints said (see Homily 69; page 337; 'Furthermore he says that because a man according to his own set intention does not wish to journey in the way, and desires

instead to go in his own path, not one trodden by the Fathers, he turns aside from these things and becomes prey for the wolves', and so on). But may God make firm the steps of our discipline with true certainty and His holy teaching, for to Him is due glory, dominion, and majesty both now and unto the endless ages of ages. Amen.

[449] (illustration).

[450] (illustration; Saint Makarios The Great).

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APPENDIX C – *The First Syriac Epistle of Saint Makarios of Egypt.*

(Translated from the Syriac text edition by W. Strothmann in *Die syrische Überlieferung der Schriften des Makarios 1* (Wiesbaden, 1981) pp. 74-84).

Abba Makarios writes to all his beloved sons, exhorting and greeting them before all else. When a man wishes to know himself, to seek God, and to repent of what he has done in the time when he was heedless, God by His grace gives him sorrow over his former deeds.

Hereafter God, in His tender mercy, gives him bodily hardship through fasting and vigil, through a multitude of many prayers and renunciation of the world. And he grants him to bear abuse, to despise bodily comforts, and to love weeping more than laughter.

After this a man is given mourning, weeping, humility of heart and of body, and the ability not to see another man's failings, but only his own. Further he is granted to recollect the day of his departure from this world and how he must needs come before God, to have always before his eyes the torments to come, and to have depicted before his heart the glory and honor which those who love God will receive.

But though God delights him with these things, He also puts him once more to the test, whether he will abstain from his own wishes and will stand up against things that make war with his heart, the same which formerly defeated him. Then he will be given the ability to vanquish the pleasure of diverse foods which make the heart impotent, such that he cannot complete his brief fast. The demons place before a man's eyes the weakness of his body and the length of the time, saying: 'How long can you endure this labor? Your body is weak, and great labor is required of a man to have God dwelling in him, and especially in you, who have committed many sins. How many of these will God forgive you?'

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But if they surmise that his heart has not accepted their words, they come again to the man under various pretexts of righteousness, saying, 'Although you have sinned, you repented of your sins.' Then they cause him to remember certain men who sinned and did not repent, thus sowing vainglory in his soul.

Not only this do they do, but they also cause men to give him empty honor. They advise him to undertake works that surpass his strength to bear, sowing in his heart thoughts of asceticism, vigil, and of many other things that are outside due order, which I am unable to enumerate, and they represent to him that they are easily accomplished. This they do hoping to be able by these things to turn him aside, as it is said in the Proverbs, 'Turn not aside, neither to the right hand nor to the left' (Proverbs 4:27).

Now if the good God sees that a man's heart has not inclined to any of these things (as David said, indicating the same, 'Thou hast proved my heart, Thou hast visited it in the night, Thou hast tried me by fire, and unrighteousness was not found in me' (Psalms 16:3)), then God will help him and deliver him. Why does he say 'in the night' and not 'in the day'? Because the enemy's deceptions are a night, as Paul also said, 'We are not children of the night but children of the day' (Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:5), since the Son of God is the Day, but Satan is night.

But if the heart traverses these warfares, the demons begin to war against him with fornication and lust for men. By these conflicts the heart is weakened, such that the work of preserving chastity seems extremely difficult to him and he thinks that he will be unable to do it. They beset him with the length of time and the toil of this virtue, saying, 'There is much work in preserving this', and they bring bodily infirmity upon him.

If the heart is frightened by these things, and is enfeebled by these warfares, then the merciful God sends to him a holy power and steadies his heart. God gives him weeping, consolation, and repose of heart, such that he becomes stronger than his enemies and they dare not afflict him, being afraid of the power that dwells in him (Cf. Homily 39; 'On the Second Method of the Devil's Warfare'). This also Paul says, 'Strive, and ye shall receive power.' This is the power concerning which Peter spoke, saying, 'An inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith' (1 Peter 1:4-5).

Afterward, when the good God sees that a man's heart has been strengthened against the enemy, He takes away the [aforesaid] power from time to time. He permits that enemies be loosed upon him to strive with him through licentiousness, the pleasures of the eyes, vainglory, and pride. Thus a man becomes like a ship without a rudder drifting and striking hither and thither.

Now when the heart is weakened and enervated by these things, the good God once again cares for His creation and sends him again that holy power. Thus he braces his

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heart, soul, body, and the rest of his members under the yoke of the Comforter, as our Lord said, 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart' (Matthew 11:29).

Then the good God begins to open the eyes of a man's heart to enable him to know that He is the man's Helper (Literally; *Supporter*). Hereafter the man knows to render honor unto God with much humility and with a contrite spirit, as David says, 'A sacrifice unto God is a humble spirit' (Psalms 50 (51):17 in the Peshitta). For it is by the labors of these warfares that the heart acquires humility and contrition.

Then this power begins to reveal heavenly things before the heart, and how one should chant hymns, and what future honors are to be received by those who have persevered. It reveals to him that however many labors a man accomplishes, they are small in comparison with that which God will bestow on him, as the Apostle says in Scripture, 'The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us' (Romans 8:18). Further this power begins to reveal the torments of those who are tormented and many other things whereof I cannot now speak, because it is not the time to speak of them all.

Then the Comforter sets rules (or *boundaries*) for the heart of the pure soul, such that a man places himself beneath all creation, such that he does not look at the iniquities of men, that he gazes straight ahead with his eyes, that he keeps guard over his tongue,

that he stretches out his foot straight before him and applies his hands to righteousness, that he abides continually in prayer, that he is humble of body, and that he is persistent in vigil. These he places in a man with measure and discernment; not with confusion, but with good order.

If, however, the mind despises these commandments and rules of the Spirit, the [holy] power forsakes the man. Then the heart will undergo warfare and confusion, and the passions of the body will trouble him through the motions sown by his enemies.

But if the heart turns back and lays hold of the commandments of the Spirit given in a man's behalf, then he will know that constant abidance with God is itself his rest, even as David said, 'I cried unto Thee, and Thou hast healed me' (Psalms 29:2).

It is, however, my opinion that unless a man acquires great humility in his heart and his body, reckons himself as nothing, sets reproach at naught, constrains himself, holds death before his eyes day in and day out, and renounces all fleshly things, he cannot lay hold of the commandments of the Spirit.

[[Understanding cannot enter you unless you practice stillness. Stillness gives birth to

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offspring amid afflictions. Afflictions beget diligence. Diligence begets weeping. Weeping begets fear. Fear begets humility. Humility begets a man's vision of God. Vision begets love. And love begets health of soul. Whoever wishes to enter into these good things must pray without ceasing, prepare his soul for death, weep and mourn, determine what separates him from God and desist from it, and must hate the world and all that is in it. Then God's grace will gladly receive him]], (The passage in double brackets is found only in two Syriac MSS and is lacking in the Greek).

The First Syriac Epistle of Saint Makarios of Alexandria On the Christian Discipline.

(Translated from the Syriac text edition by W. Strothmann in *Die syrische Überlieferung der Schriften des Makarios* 1, pp. 132-152. In the MSS this epistle bears different titles, one of which is 'The Twelfth Syriac Epistle of Saint Makarios of Egypt').

The Christian should estrange himself from the sin aroused in any of his members and be joined to all the members of righteousness. If a man's eye and his vision are sound, but his foot or hand is injured, then two of his members will be healthy, but illness will be present in the others. Such a man does not enjoy the perfect health of his entire body. Therefore the Christian should gain health in all his members.

A Christian's secret, his knowledge, and his discipline are alien to this world, and for this reason most men do not know them. Christianity is something alien to the artisans, the builders, the merchants, and the philosophers which one sees in the world. Now suppose there was a great city all of whose inhabitants were from the same great lineage, all princes or all rich men, but it happened that each of them was dispersed into a different province. The inhabitants of those regions would consider them barbarians, whereas they alone would be able to recognize each other on sight and to know that they spoke the same language and were citizens of the same city. In like manner Christians are citizens of a city which is alien to this world. They are citizens of a different age, their wisdom is different, the Spirit which dwells in them is lofty, their lineage is heavenly, their riches permanent, their worth everlasting. Their will is concordant with their Lord's.

Their intellect is that of Christ (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:16). They are sons of light, sons of the bridal chamber, sons of rest, sons of the new testament.

The new language of things that are everlasting and imperishable is very different. Take a king or a philosopher of this world: will he be conversant with faith through

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the language of life, will he partake of the true wisdom which is more lofty than heaven and earth? Who of such men could truly know in word and deed that all visible things in this world are mirages which delude the eyes? For a man cannot turn away from the world and enter into true life until he has journeyed through rugged passages.

As mist weighs down upon the air, so the power of sin filled Adam's heart. It also lies like smoke upon our will. Although the lovers of truth wage war against this smoke, they do not become partakers of the good part immediately, but only through much exercise and sweat. They are superior to those who do not struggle at all. When, however, they receive a little rest, they become puffed up with pride and suppose that they have reached freedom and perfection, not perceiving that they have been deluded.

Nothing is so destructive to a Christian as pride. Through pride the serpent found the occasion to beguile Adam with the promise that he would become a god (*Vide* Genesis 3:5). Even 'God resisteth the proud' (James 4:6). But the true sign of a Christian is the following: to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, to endure hunger and thirst, to be poor in spirit, humble and contemptible in one's own eyes, and for a man to beseech God both day and night that he might stand firmly in the truth. But if it should seem to someone that he is satiated, wealthy, and in need of nothing, he partakes of the portion of delusion. The Apostle censures men of this sort when he says, 'Now ye are full, now ye are rich' (1 Corinthians 4:8), and again, 'Woe unto you that are rich' (Luke 6:24), and unto all who think themselves to be something (Cf. Galatians 2:6).

Changes occur in every man even as they do in the atmosphere. One moment there is cold, and soon after, burning heat, and then perhaps hail, and after a little, fair weather. This is the manner in which we are trained: now there is warfare, now grace comes to our aid. Sometimes a man's soul is found in a tempest and violent waves rise up against her. And sometimes a change occurs and she is helped by grace, she is filled with joy of heart, peace of God, and chaste and peaceful thoughts. If it should happen that after these things grievous occurrences should press upon us, we should not be sorrowful; and likewise, at a time of grace-given rest we should not boast. But in a time of joy let us expect affliction, and in a time of affliction let us expect help. In this manner our path is made smooth. But the man who deviates from it will be prey for wolves.

Do not marvel, O sagacious man, if you suffer affliction from persons who dwell with you, for you know that this is the work of the demons. Caiaphas, who crucified our Lord, sat on the seat of Moses, the seat which our Lord greatly honored (*Vide* Matthew 23:2). And the prophets were also persecuted by members of their own race. The high priesthood of Moses passed over to our Lord and from Him to the chief of the apostles, and from Peter to the Church of God, since the true priesthood belongs to the Church. Now the Church

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bestows the baptism of fire and Spirit (*Vide* Matthew 3:11), and the circumcision of the heart (*Vide* Romans 2:29), whereupon the heavenly Spirit rests, and He dwells in the mind.

As long as we are in this body, we should not be without struggle (like a man who has no cares), because our faculty of free will is in subjection to fear until we reach our eternal city. There we shall be without labor and temptation, for yonder there is no need to be anxious and there is no affliction; there is no old age and no Satan; there is no warfare and no fear, but only rest, joy, and peace. Our Lord is called Redeemer because He gave Himself over to death in behalf of the rational nature of men and redeemed us all from captivity. He is also called Healer, because He healed us with a heavenly remedy and cured the passions of our souls. Jesus Christ is our King and God, but Satan is a tyrant and the ruler of all our evils.

God and His angels call us toward life, but the evil one and his hosts desire our perdition. Lo, the soul stands between the two camps, and she becomes the possession of the side to which her will inclines. Now a father, who is about to send his son to a city by a road whereon he will encounter wild beasts, provides his son with potions that will kill the beasts which attack him. So it is in our case as well. Let us, then, take pains to receive the heavenly potion which heals us, gives us life, kills the passions, and drives away evil spirits. It is not an easy thing for a man to acquire a pure heart. This can be done only by struggle and much toil, which cleanse the heart, give a man a good conscience, and completely uproot evils from him.

Grace supports the heart. But if a man becomes proud, he falls, for he does not know that as long as he is in this body, the smoke of sin is with him. Therefore all the righteous have pleased God by journeying the strait and narrow path (Cf. Matthew 7:14). Abraham was rich before men and before God, yet he called himself 'dust and ashes' (Genesis 18:27). And David said, 'I am a reproach of men, the outcast of the people, a worm and not a man' (Psalms 21:6). The prophets and the apostles endured reproaches and tribulations. And our Lord Himself, Who is the 'way' (Cf. John 14:6), did not come in His own behalf, but for our sake, that we might have a pattern in Him. The King and the Son of the King, God and the Son of God, humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7), being God, and He gave us a healing remedy and healed our wounds.

The Jews despised Him when they saw Him in a humble aspect resembling our own, and it is painful for me to consider the moment when they cried out 'Crucify Him' (Luke 23:21), as the raving people was assembled. The Lord of majesty was humiliated and repudiated by all. Like a malefactor He was condemned to death by the judge and was abominated

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by the entire people. He heard ridicule from every quarter, from the Pharisees and from all men. It is painful for the heart to consider how they spit in His face, crowned Him with a crown of thorns, and smote His cheeks, as it is written, 'I gave My back to scourges, and I turned not My face away from the shame of spitting and My cheeks from buffeting' (Isaiah 50:6). Now if God willed to accept and to lower Himself to such sufferings, dishonors, and humiliations, then no matter how much you humble yourself, you whose nature is mud and subject to death, you will never resemble your Lord [in this]. God for your sake humbled Himself, but you, for your own sake, do not humble yourself. You are proud and puffed up. God came and took up your burden to give you His rest, but you do not wish to endure labors and suffering. By your labors your wounds are healed.

Not every man can discern precious stones. Many owners of pearls, being devoid

of discernment, do not know how great a treasure they possess. Prudent and wise men, however, know how to distinguish the value of both gold coins and counterfeit coins. Likewise among the brethren there are some whom grace accompanies although they do not know that the beckoning of grace is at work, and do not perceive from whence they are moved toward the good in their virtuous deeds, for they are not in harmony with, and do not see, what they have.

Wise men do not only pray at the time of prayer, but at all times they are diligent in prayer. For the warfare with evil is unremitting, the smoke of sin continually rises up, and like water from a spring, so thoughts well up in the soul. Be prepared to resist thoughts not only when you pray, but also during every work that you do, and even when you are sleeping. If you see a rich man in the world, immediately a thought whispers to you that he is very illustrious. But you should contradict it, saying, 'He is a corruptible being', and then show him (or *it*, i.e. The thought) that your concern is for eternal and imperishable riches. And if, again, a thought should point out to you a beautiful woman and instill in you lust for her, say to it: 'This is defilement which leads to destruction! Lo, the tombs are filled with the bones of the dead!' And if you see glorious things in the world, buildings and cities, you should [reflect to] build up your soul at all times, and your mind and will should be vigilant to contradict the sin that dwells within you.

Pray to God, saying, 'I beseech Thee, my Lord, have mercy on me!' Do this unceasingly when you are walking and when you are eating. When the good dwells in a man, prayer never ceases, because the Spirit prays continuously in him, this, however, is the stage of great and perfect men, namely, that when they are walking and when they are speaking, their prayer to God is unceasing.

The tempter wishes to tempt (or *test*) a man and to know what he is going to do. He

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makes trial of him because he does not know whether or not a man listens to him until the soul surrenders her will to him. Nor do we say of Satan that he knows all the thoughts of the heart. Suppose there is a tree with many branches. A man can only grasp two or three branches, but the rest escape him. In the same manner the soul has many members like branches, that is, thoughts and reflections. A few of these Satan can know, but the rest he does not even perceive.

In one matter sin is stronger than we are, when evil thoughts well up in us. But in another we are helped by God through our asceticism and our prayer, if with fervent love we cry out to our Lord, that He deem us worthy of bearing the fruit of love, of belief in our Lord's Gospel, of seeking Him, and of drawing nigh Him. In the visible world a farmer tills the soil; but if rain from on high does not water it, the farmer's tillage will produce no profit from the ground. It is the same also with spiritual cultivation. Therefore a man should till the soil of his heart by toiling with his whole will, for God is pleased by a man's labors and his fruits. If, however, celestial clouds from above do not give rain and the showers of grace, a man's entire labor will be of no profit.

It is proper for a Christian even when he has done all he is commanded to do, all righteousness, to consider that he has done nothing (Cf. Luke 17:10). When he fasts strenuously, he should think that he does not fast; when he prays, that he is like a man who does not pray; and when he perseveres in prayer, that he is like a man who does not do so. He should fix in his soul the thought that he is only just beginning his labor and that he is not righteous before God, as a man who makes a new beginning each day.

Though he despises himself, his heart is filled with hope, joy, and expectation of that Kingdom and of salvation, reflecting that, 'If today I am not redeemed due to my sins, I shall be redeemed by grace tomorrow.' The man who plants a vineyard first reckons in his mind the harvest, the tribute he will give to the king, and the expenses he must pay from his household, then he undertakes the work. So it is also in our case. We endure the afflictions of the narrow way in hope of our salvation and that we shall be accounted worthy of eternal life. For without hope and joy the burden of labor and the hardship of tribulation and patience would weigh heavily upon us.

As a burning stick cannot escape from the fire, so the soul cannot escape from death except by labor. Satan is especially wont to delude us under the guise of good thoughts, and he assures us that by such things [as he suggests] we shall please God. Thus he deceives us and prevents us from being aware of our deception, and he catches us in his snare of destruction. It is expedient for the ascetic athlete, who strives in the contest, to enter into the thoughts of his heart and there valiantly to wage war with the devil's deception to test the passions which Satan incites in him, to renounce even his own soul, to be

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wroth with and to rebuke the lusts which afflict his heart, to stand up and war against his thoughts, and to wrestle with himself.

If in physical matters you preserve your body from corruption and from outward fornication, but inwardly you commit adultery and before God's eyes you fornicate by means of your thoughts, the virginity of your body will be of no profit to you. When a virgin is cajoled and loses her virginity, she is repudiated by her bridegroom. So it is also with the soul. If in her thoughts she commits fornication with the serpent, she is repudiated by Christ, her Bridegroom. 'Every one that looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery in his heart' (Matthew 5:28). Therefore if the mind agrees with any evil thought, the will accomplishes it. The fornication of the body is manifest, for it is wrought with women. The fornication of the soul is hidden, for the soul commits adultery with Satan through all the sinful passions. According to her own will the soul is a sister of God and His angels or of Satan and his hosts. If through the passions she commits fornication with the demons, she will be estranged from the heavenly Bridegroom.

Therefore let us compel our mind to take refuge in converse with Christ. A place of stillness is like the beauty of summer. I know many men who attained to the working of miracles and were caught up in the courts of Heaven; but like ones who luxuriate in the riches of grace, they set prayer at naught, and so fell to the nethermost parts of the earth and into the abyss of sin. This befell them firstly because they separated themselves from the brotherhood; secondly because they became puffed up, filled with pride, and imagined that they had become perfect; and thirdly because they were stubborn in the ways of their own will. Then they set prayer at naught, dared to be teachers [of others], presumed in their own minds to have attained to something, and imagined that they alone were perfect. But when, at last, the tempest rose up against them, they were swallowed up by great waves. The man who has laid hold of the truth is truly humble. He does not judge other men, the sinner, the pagan, or the Jew, but he is vigilant in his mind's understanding, lest he become enmeshed in their works, knowing that they are cripples. Now the truth reigns in the Church, and unto Her belongs the priesthood.

[460] (illustration; Joy-Making Mourning).

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APPENDIX D – Mar John the Solitary.

An Epistle on Stillness.

(Translated from the Syriac text ed. by L. Rignell in *Drei Traktate von Johannes dem Einsiedler* (Lund, 1960) pp. 3-12).

The perfection of the truth that is fulfilled in the knowledge of the Divinity is understood by knowledge through the perception of perfect wisdom. This is the 'full stature' (Cf. Ephesians 4:13) and the 'light of knowledge' (2 Corinthians 4:6): knowledge which is the vision of Him Who promised through prophecy that He would appear to those who love Him and keep His commandments (Cf. John 14:21). But concerning the blessedness of the riches of the vision of Him, it is too much to speak of. The truth is the knowledge of natures. And knowledge, indeed, is implanted in [human] nature. The nature of every man is known from his works, is revealed by the light, and is distinguished by its origin. The works of the truth are discerned by knowledge and are manifested by a discipline of lowliness. As it pleases, knowledge teaches lowliness, demonstrates and practices works.

The truth of knowledge dictates (Literally; *is*) that a man must first believe that knowledge exists and love it; only thereafter will he seek it. He should not, however, seek it as being outside himself, but within himself. Knowledge is found in him through an excellent way of life. And the beginning of an excellent way of life is this: for a man to go afar off from those near to him (or *neighbors, fellow men*) and his loved ones after the flesh, and thereafter to deprive himself of anything whereby the intellect is taken captive. This means not only possessions, but he should renounce even his own senses, sight, hearing, and the rest, for they are the bonds

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of that which is within and is unperceived. The soul, indeed, cannot even see herself without the stillness of the outer members. The soul is bound by their faculty of perception; she dies through them while they live through her. For this reason she is dragged along with all the perturbing impulses of the body.

Therefore, my brethren, let stillness be reckoned by you as greater than any other way of life. For by continual abiding in stillness the wandering thoughts are mortified along with empty recollections and deadly passions, since continual abiding within itself makes the intellect stronger than anything else. Thus it mightily defeats the thoughts, it destroys the memory of wrath, and it slays the passions through patience, whereas these very things are the ruin of the intellect and the death of the true man. There is nothing that destroys them like the weapon of stillness conjoined with the building up of instruction in the knowledge of the truth. For it is by knowledge that passions, sins, and vain thoughts (both those of the body and those of the soul) are separated from the soul. The passions of the body are as follows: the mouth's sense of taste, service of the belly, natural desire, the dissipation of pleasure and fornication, the laxity of sleep, and so forth. The passions of the intellect are: ignorance, forgetfulness (or *going astray*), conceit, and unbelief. The sins arising from the body of [those living] a lowly way of life are: envy, malice, hatred, wrath, boastfulness, vanity, pride, and insubmissiveness. These are

extinguished by fasting, emaciation, vigil, bodily afflictions, and patience conjoined with fear of God. But the passions of the intellect are mortified by keeping distant from all things, by stillness, by love, and by the nurturing of the knowledge of the truth together with the edification of the word (i.e. Verbal instruction).

The stillness of the body is the restriction of the body from wandering about. The stillness of knowledge is for a man to make himself distant from uninstructed (i.e. Men who are ignorant of spiritual matters. This word could also mean *strangers*) men and from the sight of many persons, and continually to abide in this knowledge alone. For such men continually drag us to an abased state, envelope us in dullness, and compel us to go forth from our intellects by their empty speech. They forcibly draw us toward their vain customs; they demand that we conform to their ways; and they enslave us to their laws. These things seem good to them, but they steal from us what is ours. It is impossible for us not to be enslaved to them as long as we are found in their proximity. Therefore withdrawal and stillness, more than anything else, are needed for our life.

This is not, however, so that we might give ourselves over to fasting beyond measure or to many unrestrained afflictions, but so that we might be assiduous in the building up of knowledge by means of persevering study of the word of light (i.e. Scripture), by insight into the mysteries of [created] natures, by the explanation of the [two] worlds, and by the narra-

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tions of the Godhead's revelations together with all that builds up to knowledge of the new world. These are the works of the truth which compose the discipline of knowledge. For with fasting, vigil, and the labors of the body, knowledge knows how to order itself with the rules of wisdom, everything in measure and moderation. But to put it concisely: the entire discipline of knowledge is accomplished through withdrawal and stillness. Without these two a man will not be able to see himself. Indeed, this is the true foundation of the entire edifice of the works of knowledge and of all good disciplines; by stillness all the virtues are accomplished. For by stillness the intellect is collected from its vain wandering, the passions (which take the intellect captive) are deadened, a man's shameful devices perish, and the passions that kill him are destroyed. For the eye is at rest from the sight of many men who are engaged at every hour in vain affairs. The ear is at rest from hearing and from fruitless speech which every moment compels it to pay attention (or *draws it toward conversation*). And by stillness the mind is set free from the vexation of the turmoil that continually assails it. A man becomes collected within himself and turns away from the distraction that lies outside of him. He returns from the captivity whereby he was forcibly carried off. Then little by little he begins to be enlightened and to perceive the good that lies in his own nature. Thus he is formed in the image of his Maker and he is made to resemble His beauty. The light of life dawns upon him; he sees his God; he discerns his Creator and rejoices over his Father. He is resurrected from the dead; he arises from the tomb; he returns from captivity; he is at rest from griefs; he is liberated from darkness and saved from the passions.

Now it is meet also that he be a partaker of faith, but by faith I mean the faith of knowledge, since faith has a distinction between inward and outward things. For a man to believe that God exists is not a great thing, because such faith is shared by all beings (Cf. James 2:19). By the faith that Christ has come we are born again (Cf. John 3:5). However, the faith of knowledge attains to God so as to ask and to seek from Him precious things that other men cannot even believe exist. Hereby a man becomes so firm

and strong that nothing can shake him, because he reflects that, 'Good is He in Whom I believe, and true is He for Whose promise I sorely yearn, and He cannot be wanting, for He is the Fountainhead of all riches!'

We do not desire something that is not in our own nature, but something that we are, which is implanted in and given to us by the Bestower of all. Wisdom is one of the man of God's great members, as it were. Indeed, it is not acquired or revealed to a man without the experience of struggles, and that, only when he has embraced stillness and the patient endurance of struggles and temptations. When a man is liberated from the passions, then all his members begin to come to life, and especially that member which is wisdom, whereby he searches. By means of stillness a man is brought near to himself. And

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he brings his intellect to life by the annihilation of the passions, those which are destroyed by patient endurance. Then wisdom grows and becomes strong, and it searches out hidden things. It praises all the glories of the Holy Trinity. Wisdom distinguishes and declares the distinctions and diverse orders found in creation. [In such a manner] it truly exists, is revealed, and possessed [by a man].

But if a man considers only the struggles and the endurance of their afflictions, his thoughts will make the span of his endurance to seem very protracted to him, they will cause his struggle to appear very lengthy and to be immeasurable. This, however, belongs to the ignorance of those who have no experience of the discipline of stillness. For when the body passes some time in meager living and changes its custom of taking much food, it is afflicted by the lack of those things which it had previously long enjoyed; but little by little it subdues and prevails upon its habit of eating much food. In just the same way a man who undertakes to perfect his soul in the knowledge of the truth by means of a glorious way of life will not be oppressed by his labors for long; but the longer he perseveres in stillness, the more his passions weaken; and the more his passions weaken, the more he becomes strong, recovers his health, and finds peace. Our Lord, indeed, plainly said the same thing with the words, 'A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the former anguish for the joy that a man is born into the world' (John 16:21). The passions are afflictions (In Syriac this is the same word as *anguish* employed in the Gospel quotation), for because a man is not free from the passions, the pains, illnesses and chastisements that are common to men befall him. But he is liberated from all these afflictions by deliverance from the passions which occurs in stillness through Christ's grace.

Continual stillness conjoined with the discipline of knowledge is not slow or tardy in bringing a man to rest in the harbor of life and joy. But the word of knowledge pertains to true nature and also belongs to truthful men (There are variant readings in the MSS for this sentence and many translations are possible). I mean that as long as we are of one mind as regards the knowledge of God, we are supporters and sources of rest for one another, there is none among us who causes a hindrance, and the quiet in our assembly is not disturbed. This is because we are all one body and men of one mind, and all the members of the body are in agreement with one another, inasmuch as all look to one goal. Since one member resembles the other members, they will together compose, as it were, one man (Cf. Romans 12:4) in their common mind as regards the knowledge of God. For when we see one another, we see ourselves, because our image and our mold (or *stamp*,

seal) are in each other; and we are supported by each other as we are supported by the knowledge of ourselves. Those,

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however, who are not men bearing our image and our likeness hinder us exceedingly in the knowledge of God. They do us much injury and cause us no little loss. They are not blameworthy, however, because they are ignorant. But we, who know what our wealth is, should depart into stillness so as to attend to our own lives. Albeit, if we prolong our association with the likes of these, our intellect will be enfeebled, our love will cool, our knowledge will be strangled, and we shall forget ourselves. Therefore it behooves us to know the path that befits our life and to journey in it without hindrance.

Now there is also another hateful thing that harms us and hinders us from attaining purity: the love of authority and power and of the praise of men. All these things are empty and vain, they are a deceitful hope and strong passions. They vex those especially who possess eloquence and a [venerable] appearance. It is not easy for us to find many men who have freed their will from these passions; it is a great thing, however, for a man to be liberated from them. Fornication, gluttony, sleep and all similar passions are readily suppressed by means of stillness and the building up of knowledge. But the love of authority and honor and vainglory are strong fetters, because the entire man is encased in and shrouded by them, he is distracted beyond measure and endlessly divided up. These are not passions which act upon us for a short time. They are fetters loosed only with difficulty; they are appendages of lordly and powerful men and lovers of honor who are engaged with the world. They can, however, be destroyed by whoever has no communion with their way of thinking.

Let us, then, the sons of light, destroy these passions in ourselves and cleanse our souls from the vanity of this world and all meditation upon its nocturnal phantasy. Our dominion, our honor and our authority are reserved for us on high by Jesus Christ in the presence of the worshipful Father. When we comprehend this, we shall cleanse our souls from these passions.

More than other beautiful things it is fitting that the love of Christ should abound in us. For the love of Christ is a fire, in very truth, whereby the passions of the soul are consumed, even as brushwood is consumed by a fiery blaze. It extinguishes anger, it puts an end to hatred, it holds envy in contempt, and it withers lust. The love of Christ destroys avarice, it abhors the love of glory, it gathers together into one the sons of light, it unites and fastens together its adherents, causes them to have concord among themselves, and makes them into one body. The love of Christ fashions them into a single image and causes them to dwell in one another; the love, I mean, which has stirred up the worlds with the desire of the vision of Him, that vision which is more desirable than all things. For the man who is deemed worthy to see Him, there no longer exists any adversary who can craftily draw him away from his desire, even until his will be accomplished in Him Who in light is entirely perfect. Let us, then, with our knowledge seek the realm of life

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and joy, lest perchance when we are loosed from this world we shall be like blind men who do not know whither they are going.

Now I have testified to you concerning all these things. From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I behold upon my members the bonds of our Lord Jesus Christ, and

the world is dead to me (Cf. Galatians 6:17, 14). Unto Him and to His Father and to the Holy Spirit be glory, honor, dominion, and majesty from the celestial powers and the denizens of earth, now and at all times and unto ages of ages. Amen. Amen.

On Prayer.

(Translated by S. Brock in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1979) pp. 97-100).

Do not imagine, brother, that prayer consists solely of words, or that it can be learnt by means of words. No, the truth of the matter, you should understand, is that spiritual prayer does not reach fullness as a result of either learning or the repetition of words. For it is not to a man that you are praying, before whom you can repeat a well-composed speech: it is to Him who is Spirit that you are directing the movements of your prayer. You should pray therefore in spirit, seeing that He is Spirit.

No special place or vocal utterance is required for someone who prays in fullness to God. Our Lord said, 'The hour is coming when you will not be worshiping the Father in this mountain or in Jerusalem' (John 4:21); and again, to show that no special place was required, He also taught that those who worship the Father should 'worship Him in spirit and in truth' (John 4:23); and in the course of His instructing us why we should pray thus He said, 'For God is a Spirit' (John 4:24), and He should be praised spiritually, in the spirit. Paul too tells us about this spiritual prayer and psalmody which we should employ: 'What then shall I do?', he says, 'I will pray in spirit and in mind, then, that he says that one should pray and sing to God; he does not say anything at all about the tongue. The reason is that this spiritual prayer is more interior than the tongue, more deeply interiorized than anything on the lips, more interiorized than any words, and beyond vocal song. When someone prays this kind of prayer he has sunk deeper than all speech, and he stands where spiritual beings

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and angels are to be found; like them, he utters 'holy' without any words. But if he cease from this kind of prayer and re-commence the prayer of vocal song, then he is outside the region of the angels and he becomes an ordinary man again.

Whoever sings, using his tongue and body, and perseveres in this worship both night and day, such a person is one of the 'just'. But the person who has been held worthy to enter deeper than this, singing in intellect and spirit, such a person is 'spiritual'. A 'spiritual man' is more exalted than the 'just', but one becomes 'spiritual' after being 'just'. For until a man has worshiped for a considerable time in this exterior manner, employing fasting, using the voice for psalmody, with long periods on the knees, constant vigils, recitation of the psalms, arduous labors, supplication, abstinence, paucity of food, and all such things, his soul continuously being filled with the remembrance of God, full of due fear and trembling at His name, humble before all men, considering everyone better than himself even when he sees a man's actions: should he see a debauched person, or an adulterer, or someone grasping, or a drunkard, he still acts humbly before them and in his hidden innermost thoughts really considers them better than himself, not just making an outward pretense, but, seeing someone amidst all these evil things, he goes up to him and acts in a humble way before him, begging him, 'pray for me, for I am a sinner before God, I am guilty of many things, for not one of which have I paid the price'. Only when someone achieves all this—and greater things than those I have mentioned—will he arrive at singing to God in the psalmody wherewith spiritual beings praise Him.

For God is silence, and in silence is He sung by means of that psalmody which is worthy of Him. I am not speaking of the silence of the tongue, for if someone merely keeps his tongue silent, without knowing how to sing in intellect and spirit, then he is simply unoccupied and becomes filled with evil thoughts: he is just keeping an exterior silence and he does not know how to sing in an interior way, seeing that the tongue of his 'hidden man' has not yet learnt to move correctly even so as to stammer. You should look on the spiritual infant that is within you in the same way as you do on an ordinary child or infant: just as the tongue placed in an infant's mouth is still because it does not yet know speech or the right movements for speaking, so it is with that interior tongue of the intellect; it will be still from all speech and from all thought: it will simply be placed there, ready to learn the first stammerings of spiritual utterance.

Thus there is a silence of the tongue, there is a silence of the whole body, there is the silence of the soul, there is the silence of the intellect, and there is the silence of the spirit. The silence of the tongue is merely when it is not incited to evil speech; the silence of the entire body is when all its senses are inactive; the silence of the soul is when there are no ugly thoughts bursting forth within it; the silence of the intellect is when it is not reflecting on any harmful knowledge or wisdom; the silence of the spirit is when the

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intellect ceases even from stirrings caused by created spiritual beings and all its movements are stirred solely by the Existent One, at the wondrous awe of the silence which surrounds Him.

These are the degrees and measures to be found in speech and silence. But if you have not reached these and find yourself still far away from them, remain where you are and sing to God using the voice and the tongue in love and awe. Sing with application, toil in your service until you arrive at love. Stand in awe of God, as is only right, and thus you will be held worthy to love Him with a natural love—Him who was given to us at our renewal.

And when you recite the words of the prayer that I have written for you, be careful not just to repeat them, but let your very self *become* these words. For there is no advantage in the reciting unless the word actually becomes embodied in you and becomes a deed, with the result that you are seen in the world to be a man of God—to Whom glory, honor and exaltation is fitting, for eternal ages. Amen.

[469] (illustration; Christ on the Cross).

[470] (illustration; Saint Ephraim The Syrian).

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Our Father Among the Saints Mar Ephraim the Syrian.

A Homily on the Solitaries, Desert-dwellers and Monks, and on Those Who Dwell in the Mountains, Dens, Caves, and Clefts of the Earth, and on Those Who Have Stripped Themselves of All Things Earthly.

(Translated from the Syriac text edition by E. Beck in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers, Sermones 4*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Volume 334 (Louvain, 1973) pp. 16-28).

The man who loves the things Hereafter is not submerged in things visible, lest because of Mammon he be consumed by fire together with the tares.

The prudent have despised all things and reckoned the world as naught, and they wander through deserts and wastelands, that they be not soiled with sin.

These men are much wiser than the covetous who seek riches; to the covetous they leave their riches, because their treasure is in Heaven.

All things have they hated which deflect them from their labors for perfection; and the Lord of all have they loved, since He it is Who bestows all things.

Because they have loved no possession, they climb up bodily into Heaven, so that prudent men might be struck with envy, and forsake every unenduring thing.

Those who bodily ascend on high, divesting themselves of all, to whom covetousness is an abhorrent thing, mortify their bodies upon the earth, that they be not stained with sin.

Upon the scales of truth justice set the two assemblies: the covetous lay fettered to the earth, but the poor by choice took wing to Heaven's heights.

That race which lived in Noe's days was dissolute and a friend of Mammon; with wrath the flood destroyed it,

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because it had angered God (*Vide* Genesis 6:5 ff).

Yet Enoch, since he pleased the Lord, was caught away to Paradise (*Vide* Genesis 5:24).

Ahaab, who loved possessions, was devoured by dogs, as it is written (*Vide* 3 Kings 22:38).

Elias, who wandered through the deserts, on a chariot ascended into Heaven (*Vide* 4 Kings 2:11).

Herod, who was a lover of riches, saw his riches annulled in death.

But John, who dwelt in the wilderness, is great in the Kingdom of the Heavens (Cf. Matthew 11:11).

The prudent gaze upon these men and they choose what is most excellent, the mode of life which allows its comrade to fly up into very Heaven.

They see how they can gain their lives, and to the world they become dead, so that having died to the lust thereof, they might receive from God the life to come.

They are for us an excellent exemplar whereby we might follow them, so that on the wings of willing poverty we might fly up to reach them.

These are verily men beclothed with flesh as we; but by reason of their love for God, like beasts they are gone out into the wilds.

They possess kindred and family, houses, wealth and property, but they deemed it all as naught, so as to gain the Kingdom above.

They wander throughout the deserts, that they be not defiled by sin; and like beasts they roam, that they be found worthy of the wedding feast of joy.

They, instead of delicacies, feed on grasses and wild roots; and instead of lofty dwellings, they live in lowly caves.

They climb aloft like birds and are perched upon the cliffs; and concerning them has the prophet spoken, 'From the mountain-tops shall they cry out' (Isaiah 42:11).

Instead of lying upon a bed, they stretch out upon the ground of lowliness; and instead of gentle cushions, they rest their heads upon a stone.

Instead of a table at the hour of taking food, they place upon their knees the herbs

whereof they make their meal.

Their drink is not that of wine, but of water only.

And instead of unctions and salves, dirt lies upon their bodies; yea, their bodies are blackish for love of the Anointed One.

Instead of silken garments, in burlap are they clad, or live bereft of clothing; and instead of costly sandals, with barefootedness they are shod.

Instead of mankind they see

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naught but savage beasts.

And in place of kindred, whom they forsook, angels come down to visit them.

Their bodies are temples of the Spirit, and churches are their minds.

Their prayer is a pure censer, and their tears are fragrant incense.

Their sighs are an offering, their psalmsinging is a festival, their lamentations are pearls, and their chastity is like beryl.

When their tears pour forth, they drive away injury from the earth; and when their supplication rises up, it fills the world with benefactions.

None among them thinks upon his sustenance, since at every moment they reside in hope.

And none among them thinks upon his raiment, since their raiment is the Faith.

None among them thinks upon Mammon, since their treasure is in Heaven.

Among them is no thought of possessions, since their hope is only Paradise.

None among them goes to court with his fellow, since they possess nothing in this world.

None strives with his neighbor, since love dwells in their midst.

None among them hates his companion, since perfect concord reigns amongst them.

And none is envious of another, since they have no greed for riches.

None among them is wroth with his neighbor, since they do not strive for fleeting things.

None is angry with his brother, since they give no thought to things of earth.

Like spiritual beings are they, although found amid the corporeal; and like angels in Heaven are they, although found amid the earthly; they do not lay upon their bodies the burden of love for the world and its possessions; and they do not permit their will to be choked by Mammon.

They reckon gold as dung and riches as naught at all.

They have banished all their lusts, and to fasting yoke their bodies.

They trampled upon Satan's head, and he caught them not in his nets.

They brake the yoke of sin, because it had no dominion in their bodies.

By them was Satan slain, because he could not slay them with his [weapons].

They bound him and flew away, because they were not entangled in his trammels.

Under their tortures he cried out, because they evaded his snares.

He howled under their combs of iron, because they tore him by their labors.

He was tormented by them at every hour, because they hindered him by their

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nightly vigils.

They enfeebled him and grew strong, and by their prayers was he scourged.

The desert, dreadful by reason of its desolation, became for them a city of asylum.
Herein they loudly play their harps, herein they are preserved from harm.
Desolation abandoned the desert, since therein the children of the Kingdom dwell.
It became in truth a great city, through the sound of the psalmsinging of their mouths.

Wherever one of them resorts, peace prevails round about him, for to each one who loves God, a band of angels comes down.

Though he lives alone, in this time of the body's seeing, yet in his heart he is secretly joined to the assemblies of the sons of the Most High.

But often two of them dwell together: here, then, reigns great love.

And although they are two, yet their will is one.

And many times there are three: here, then, concord abides, for there are no divisions, no slyness, but only love and peace.

And elsewhere there are four: with them the Holy Spirit dwells.

For they are but one single body, a single, pure temple of God.

Among them the commandment finds its fulfillment, the same which our Lord taught in His Gospel, 'Whosoever shall seek to find his soul shall lose it here' (Cf. Luke 17:33) amid afflictions.

Greatly they afflict their bodies, not as though they loved them not, but because they wish to bring them in glory into Eden.

In wintertime the cold and frost, in summertime the fiery heat.

One resolves in himself to seek no place of shelter, and unto every climatic harshness he surrenders himself with valor.

Another makes a vow never to see a man, and he flees into the desert waste so as there to be with himself alone.

With prudent judgment they make their way, so as to be preserved from all.

And for this very reason they love to be alone, alone in the wilds; for when they are all alone, they remain protected from every evil.

Nor is it possible that there would be a man who could wound one of them even by his word.

Their mouth is weaned from mockeries, and at every hour filled with praise.

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Weaned are they from ironic speech, and unceasingly they recite the Psalms.

Weaned are they from calumny, and in its stead they are full of glorifications.

Weaned are they from harmful things and nigh unto things beneficial.

They carry only the burden of their hair and their raiment's weight.

Some are clad in burlap, others in woven straw.

Blood flows from their feet, because barefoot they walk all the day.

Their bodies are oppressed by the squalor which overlies them.

In every place whither one of them goes, there he sets up his cross, and low, there is a church.

And wherever sunset overtakes him, there is the temple of his rest.

His table stands before him at each place where he lays it; for when it is time for his meal, he picks his herbs and chews them.

Of every herb he picks he tastes of it with faith; and the rest which afterward remain he leaves behind and goes his way.

For he has heard that saying, 'Take ye no thought for the morrow' (Matthew 6:34).

They are not afraid of illness, for they thirst for tribulations.
They tremble not at death, for death is repose from labors.
And because they here were dead in their lives, there they will live in God.
They bring to mind the saying which the angel spoke to Daniel, 'But go thou to thine end and rest' (Cf. Daniel 12:13) from thy toil; so they are confident that death is a mercy.
And because temporal death is a mercy for the righteous, death they therefore despise, since it is subjugated to them like a slave.
In what manner did death harm Eliseus, who descended into Hades?
For whilst he was in the pit of death, he snatched a dead man from its mouth (*Vide* 4 Kings 13:21).
Because they entrust both body and spirit unto God, they do not become downcast in the face of bodily afflictions.
Whenever the solitary falls ill, he has no companions who might visit him; and because he has commended himself to God, the power of the Most High visits him.
And because there is no one there to prepare his food, or who might care for him in his illness, by the Holy Spirit he is refreshed, and receives both power and steadfastness.
But when his end draws nigh

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and the day of his death comes upon him, then, since he did not trust in things terrestrial, he is enshrouded by the angels.

And wheresoever his end occurs, there also is his grave.
And like a seed in the furrow, he abides, kept for the day of resurrection.
And if, perchance, in a cave by death he is overtaken, then that cave becomes his tomb, and it reverences the treasure of his relics.
And if in the cleft of a rock his end does come, then there his relics will be preserved, and an angel will descend at every hour to honor the treasury of his bones.
And because they are all alone, far off from one another, divine succors abound in number, there where one of them dies alone from all the rest.
One in a grotto is overtaken by his last day, and therein takes place for him the wedding feast of joy, which endures until the resurrection.
And another of them completes his life upon the ledge of a cliff, and there his bones are preserved like unto gleaming jewels.
And another attains his last while standing in prayer and so he falls asleep, and with a sigh within his heart his soul takes wing to Heaven.
Another's end arrives and overtakes him at the hour of his liturgy, and with his mouth filled with praises he departs to rest from his labors.
Another is overtaken by his end whilst eating, and he falls asleep, and from that table of herbs he is invited to partake of the table of life.
And another's end arrives and overtakes him whilst he leans upon a support, and there his lifeless body remains until the resurrection.
And again another completes his life somewhere journeying along a byway, and there he finds his rest and deliverance from the suffering of afflictions.
They were preserved by reason of their hope, since in hope they performed their labors.
There is no man to close their eyes and give burial to their bodies.

One sleeps the sleep of [eternal] rest, inclining his head upon a stone.
Another lays his head between his knees and to that land his soul departs.
No weeping can be heard in their environs, no lament upon their place.
The hymns of angels of the Most High surround them from every side.
And at their death there is no sorrow, and no mourning at their departure, for their death is a great victory whereby they have discomfited the foe.

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There is no grief when they are ill, no sorrow when they are afflicted, for then sickness gives them strength, and affliction, increased experience.
They are not adorned with costly raiment, for their raiment is the Faith.
And no man knows their graves, for in Paradise do they recline.
They are not born with honor upon a bier, for contemptible dust is their apparel.
The place where one of their number dies, the same is for him a bier.
As soon as the soul of one of them is translated from the body's members, straightway she is carried off to the storehouse of life and kept there until the resurrection, whilst their bones remain in that desolate place and become an encampment for the angels.
Wherever there is found a portion of their relics, in that place the angels minister.
For bands of angels are sent unto their tombs to perform their liturgy before their bones, that with hymns of victory they might be crowned.
These men saw that the world is like unto a sea that tosses wildly the ship of every man.
Out of it they fled, so that by its waves they be not drowned.
They flew across that sea with prudence, and in the haven their ships cast anchor (Though, indeed, in the desert there are also winds which whip up stormy billows).
Because the world ensnares through riches, they renounced the world entire.
Because they were stifled by Mammon, the same they despised, degraded, and derided.
Gold is a hidden pitfall, but nimbly they sprang thereover and away.
Because possessions lead astray the witless, they acquired none at all.
Because the covetous usurp domains, their own they forsook and went forth.
Against every injurious thing they took up the weapon of the truth; and against every evil they procured the Faith.
Because they saw that the world rejoices, they made sadness their love.
And because they saw delicacies in the world, they nourished themselves on roots, so as through their transitory tribulation to be deemed worthy of eternal goods.
Because they saw ostentation in the world, they made humility their love, that through their humility they might be worthy of unending exaltation.
And because they saw lust in the world, they laid hold of pure fasting, so that through fasting they might acquire wings,

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whereby to soar to Heaven.

And because they saw lewdness in the world, they laid hold of chastity, so that the chastity of their bodies should permit them to inherit the Kingdom.

And because they saw turmoil in the world, they made their love silent rest, lest the evil one even by a word should bring to naught their labors.

In the world they saw vile deceit, and lo, they laid hold of open truthfulness, so that truth should permit them to inherit boldness at the resurrection.

In the world they saw lies and falsehood, and so they loved integrity, that their integrity might bring them nigh to a lofty rank in Heaven.

And because they saw artifice in the world, they chose simplicity, and in them was fulfilled the word of the Lord, since they were like children, as it is written (*Vide* Matthew 18:3).

They heard the word of the Apostle, which impassioned he spake of himself, 'I am crucified unto the world, and the world with its pleasures is crucified unto me' (Cf. Galatians 6:14).

Therefore they crucified their bodies in opposing all the world's desires; and through tribulation of every kind, their bodies they tormented daily.

They learned moreover from their predecessors where they would have honor and where they would be reviled, and hereby they gained understanding.

They saw that in the desert no evil befell Elias; but as soon as he set foot in inhabited regions, the frenzied Jezebel pursued him (*Vide* 3 Kings 19:2 ff).

And whilst John abode in the wilderness, crowds came out to greet him (*Vide* Matthew 3:5); yet scarcely had he entered inhabited lands, when Herod cut off his head (*Vide* Matthew 14:10).

Wherefore they abandoned the world so full of perils, and they took flight, and in the desert was their sojourn until they received their reward.

Two advantages did they find in the wasteland whither they withdrew: they remained preserved from falls and from the disgrace of men.

There they are shielded from injustice and from covetousness which causes ruin.

There they are shielded from guile, from mockery and from envy; there from pre-eminence,

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and there from abominable pride.

They are become companions of celestial angels, and they emulate them in very deed.

The angels in Heaven have no possessions, and do naught but sing God's praises.

Likewise Mammon does not restrain those men from the hour of their liturgy, nor do cares hinder them from the hour of their prayer.

They are not slothful, since their minds are illumined.

And despondency draws not nigh them, since they are zealous for what is needful.

They have made their members to die unto the world, and it causes them no harm.

They have set their trust upon Heaven, and there does their whole heart linger.

Thither gaze their eyes, thither they stretch out their hands, thither they send their labors, and thither are their steps directed.

Therefore, lo, they shall dwell with the apostles in Heaven's heights.

When they prostrate themselves in prayer, the earth they moisten with their tears; and when their sighs ascend on high, Heaven's angels are made glad.

One chooses never to lie down, and thus nobly he keeps vigil.

Another chooses never to sit, and thus he stands erect in purity.

A third chooses never to allow any jesting word to proceed from his mouth.

Another's will is only to speak words which are from Scripture.

They tarry long in their liturgy of prayer, and for their liturgy they rise early.

Throughout the day and all the night their work is naught but liturgy.
Instead of incense, for they have none, their purity is a reconciliation; and instead of the edifice of a church they themselves have become temples of the Holy Spirit.
In the stead of an altar they have their minds, whereupon as a sacrifice they offer up unto the Godhead their supplication, which at every hour is found well-pleasing.
Though all men dread the desert, it is become for them a mighty refuge.
And from their relics now flow forth succor for all creation.
The inhabited lands, where injustice rules, is by their prayers upheld.
And the world, buried in sin, is by their prayers preserved.
And the earth, which is shaken by controversies, by their prayers is supported.
And the land, which is troubled by vain inquiries (This refers to the notions of the heretics), the vigils of these men fill with calm.
Blessed is the man who is accounted worthy to be a companion of these champions!

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Blessed is the man who loves them and has imprinted in himself their modes of life!
Blessed is the man who in their company began, and completed his course in their labors!
Blessed is the man who has not been lured away from the example of their lives!
Blessed is the man who will not be parted from them when they inherit their promises!
Blessed is the man who accomplishes and completes his course courageously like unto them!
But as for us, O my Lord, who love those who love to keep company with Thee, separate us not from their ranks when they will stand up in Thy Kingdom!
And because through love we have recounted their labors, so that their victory should be proclaimed, deem us worthy to attain with them to those unwaning joys!
And may our whole assembly, which delights in this tale concerning the children of the light, find mercy in the day of judgment by their prayer! Yea, Amen.

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GLOSSARY OF VARIOUS MEANINGS DEFINED.

Excerpt from Translator's Introduction (pp. cviii ff);

Before discussing the terminology used in the Ascetical Homilies, we quote the perceptive words of the German translator, Gustav Bickell:

Further, we must ask special indulgence for this translation, not only because Isaac of Nineveh is one of the most difficult Syriac authors, but also because of the many psychological and mystical terms which are extremely difficult to translate into German, since German often has no equivalent term, or only one which would not be understood by most readers (*Bibliothek der Kirchenväter*, fasc. 204, p. 290).

Saint Isaac employed a terminology which he inherited from Syriac spiritual writers who preceded him and from Syriac translations of Greek ascetical and theological works. His terminology, therefore, is not original, but it is used, for the most part, with precision. Some of these terms are unique to Syriac, some are common to both Syriac and Greek. We have explained a number of these within the context of the text, but some will be mentioned here:

—*limpid purity*; Syriac; *shapyutha*, which means *clearness*, *limpidity*, *transparency*, *serenity*. A clear sky is also serene. Some say that this term is equivalent to the Greek *dispassion*. For Saint Isaac, the soul's primordial state is one of *limpid purity*, and resembles Adam's state before he tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Worldly knowledge and passions cause one to lose the *limpidity* that is both natural and proper to the soul. Later East Syrian ascetical writers used the term *shapyutha* in a more technical sense, referring to a stage in spiritual life.

—*temptation*; the basic sense of the word is *a trial*; it will be sometimes translated in this way according to the context. The Latin equivalent is *tentatio*, *an attack*, also *a trial*: hence the English *temptation*.

Saint Isaac employs four Syriac terms to distinguish the soul's mental and spiritual faculties. These terms are translated into Greek by three, which is not unjustified, because one of the Greek terms is translated into Syriac by two. The terms are: *intellect*, *understanding*, *mind*, and *thinking*.

The English translation of these terms is, by necessity, arbitrary because English-speaking people are unfamiliar with the precise epistemological and psychological definitions of the ancient world. For the distinction of *intellect* and *mind* we have followed the usage in the new English translation of the *Philokalia* (see G.E.H. Palmer, *The Philokalia, the Complete Text I* (London, 1979) pp. 361, 363). We have used *understanding* to translate the Syriac *mad'a* when the latter occurs together with *hauna*; otherwise we have translated both by *intellect*. With some reluctance we have frequently employed the word *thinking* to translate *tar'itha*.

It is necessary to explain to the English-speaking reader how to conceive of the difference between these terms. First is *intellect*. In Homily 66, Saint Isaac gives his most clear explanation of what one might call his spiritual epistemology. He writes "The intellect *mad'a* is spiritual perception that is conditioned to receive the faculty of *divine vision*, even as the pupils of the bodily eyes into which sensible light is poured". He proceeds to say that divine grace is like the sun which provides light for the intellect; purity is *translucence of the noetic air* through which the rays of grace penetrate into the intellect; and passions are, on the contrary *a hard substance* which obstruct the light of grace from reaching the intellect. Elsewhere he defines the intellect *mad'a* as the *spiritual nature* of a man. The intellect *hauna* is also an active faculty which *beholds spiritual things*, is engaged in pure prayer, and stands still when struck by awe in divine vision. Its purification *comes to pass by the revelation of mysteries*, it is the *steward of the senses and the thoughts* and the powers of the soul. From these passages we may also form an idea of the difference between *mad'a* and *hauna*. Etymologically *mad'a* seems to mean the knowing faculty (from *id*, *to know*—for which reason we have sometimes used *the*

understanding to translate it); it is the pupils of the spiritual eyes, whereas the power that employs these pupils to see is the *hauna*. If we unite these two powers into one, or say that they are two aspects of the same thing, we have a Greek word *vous*. Although Saint Isaac thus distinguishes between these two terms, he will occasionally use *mad'a* where one would expect to find *hauna* and vice-versa. Therefore we feel that it is not greatly misleading to translate both by *intellect*.

The difference between the intellect *mad'a*; *hauna*; *vous* and the mind *re'yana* is much clearer. The *mind* is one's faculty of conscious thinking and cogitation which is employed continuously in deliberating and reflecting. In the following passages we find *mind* and *intellect* contrasted:

—The intellect, *hauna*, the ruler of the senses, and the mind, that swift-winged and most shameless bird (Homily 23);

—As soon as the passions begin to arise, the mind is suddenly ravished away from them by a certain insight that penetrates into the intellect, *hauna* (Homily 71);

—Those, however, who have chosen to withdraw from the world in body and in mind so that they might establish their intellect, *hauna*, in solitary prayer (Homily 21);

—The intellect, *hauna*, is made fervent by the constant and prolonged rumination of the mind (Homily 68);

—Does wandering in your mind take place at the hour of your prayer?...Is your intellect, *hauna*, without willing it, continually being rapt away to perceptions of incorporeal things?, (Homily 68);

Such, then, is the clear distinction which Saint Isaac makes between the two terms.

—thinking: The term *thinking*, *tar'itha*, is very difficult to define. It seems to mean what is going on in the *mind*, or the cast of one's thoughts (one's *mentality* in modern English), or a sort of reservoir of these things. An example of its use is the following: 'Purity of soul is freedom from the secret passions concentrated in one's thinking' (Homily 43). Although this vague term can safely be translated in different ways according to the context, we have usually kept to *thinking*. To conclude we shall quote the only passage where all the four mental faculties are used together:

For night vigil is the light of the thinking; and by it the understanding is exalted, the mind is collected, and the intellect takes flight and gazes at spiritual things and by prayer is rejuvenated and shines brilliantly (Homily 75).

—*theoria*: If one finds these distinctions difficult, one will be more puzzled by the term *theoria*, or *divine vision*, because experience of this is the only unerring guide to understanding it. The Greek term *theoria* was simply translated in Syriac translations of Greek texts. Because of this, we find several places in the Homilies where Saint Isaac uses the technical term *theoria* and then, for the benefit of his readers, explains it as *vision of the spirit* (Homily 37), (sometimes Saint Isaac simply uses the word *vision*, *hezatha*, which the Greek translators usually rendered *theoria*). He also translates it as *divine vision*, defining the latter as 'a non-sensible revelation of the intellect, *hauna*, (Homily 22; this Homily is found only in Syriac); *theoria*, he says 'is the perception of divine mysteries' (Homily 2). Fortunately for us, Saint Isaac also gives a description of *theoria*:

Spiritual prayer is the mystery of the future state and life, for herein a man is raised on high and his nature remains inoperative and unmoved by any motion of memory of things present. The soul does not pray a prayer, but in awareness she perceives the spiritual things of that other age which transcend human conception; and the understanding of these is by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is noetic divine vision, not the movement and entreaty of prayer...And when the Holy Spirit overshadows them [i.e. Those who have reached the perfection of purity], He always finds them in prayer. He brings them forth from prayer into *theoria*, which means 'vision of the spirit' (Homily 37).

—*theoria*: We have translated Greek *theoria* by the words *divine vision*, *vision*, and *theoria*, but not by *contemplation*. Although the word *contemplation* has many of the senses of *theoria* when properly understood, it has now become synonymous with a quasi-spiritual exercise practiced in the West, and also in the Far East, which is opposed to true *theoria* and is regarded by the Fathers as a pathway to demonic delusion. *Theoria* does not signify the creation of images in the imagination, or reflections connected with certain events in the life of our Saviour, or academic theological speculations concerning the nature and attributes of God and created things. Rather, it is that working of the Holy Spirit in a man's intellect which gives him to understand and delve into the mysteries of God and creation hidden to the rational human mind. The knowledge which comes from *theoria* is supra-conceptual, it is revelation from on high. *Theoria* is not intellectual doing, but an operation (*energia*) of the Holy Spirit whereby the soul's spiritual eyes are opened and she beholds secret things;

Concerning the translation of *theoria*, I.V. Kireevsky makes the following lucid remarks in a letter to Starets Makariy of Optina: 'Allow me to express my opinion on two words in your translation: *sozertsaniye* (contemplation) and *dobroye* (good). Why do you prefer *contemplation* (*sozertsaniye*) to the word *vision*, *sight* (*videniye*, *zreniye*)? The first is newfangled, flavored by Western thinkers, and has more the sense of *inspection* [or *outwardly looking over*, *viewing*] (*razsmatrivaniye*) than *vision*. Therefore it is impossible to say, for instance, that the intellect is raised up from prayer to the *stage of contemplation*, just as it is also impossible to say that the intellect is raised up from prayer to the *stage of inspection*. If, in one instance, it is necessary to translate the Greek word *theoria* by *vision*, it would not be bad, so it seems, always to give one word one and the same sense.' (*Zhizneopisaniya Otechestvennykh Podvizhnikov Blagochestiya XVIII i XIX Vekov*, September, p. 486).

—*stillness*: There are also a few other terms that need to be discussed. We have rendered (*novxia/shelya*) by the word *stillness*, following the usage in the new English *Philokalia*. In both Greek and Syriac this term means *quietness of body and soul*, a connotation which *stillness* adequately conveys.

—*monk* (*solitary*): We have generally translated (*ihidaya*) by *monk*, occasionally by *solitary*. The Greek and Syriac words properly mean *one who lives alone*, *a solitary*, but they were extended to include all monastics. Although Saint Isaac wrote this book chiefly for solitaries, that is, monks who dwell not in a monastery but alone, we think that to use the word *solitary* throughout the text would overly restrict the Saint's meaning.

—discipline: Another term somewhat foreign to the ordinary English reader is *discipline*. This has been used to translate the difficult term (*dubara-dubare*), (We have not distinguished between the Syriac singular and plural forms, since even scholars hesitate to do so. There is, however, a subtle difference. *Dubara* probably refers to a *specific ascetical practice*, whereas *dubare* means *the sum of the same*, i.e. *an ascetical way of life*.) The Syriac word means *the guidance, course, or rule of one's actions, a mode of life, usually with ascetical connotations*. The Greek, in patristic usage, means essentially the same. Saint Isaac very often writes about the reading of *Scripture*. In English this word has come to mean the Bible and nothing else. In Greek and Syriac, however, this is not the case. We may recall Saint Peter's words, 'For prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21). For the Church, *Scripture* refers to the writings of all holy men who were moved by the Spirit: the Prophets, Apostles, and the holy Fathers. Therefore, by *Scripture* Saint Isaac means both the Bible and the writings of the holy Fathers. On a few occasions it is evident from the context that he can only be speaking of the writings of the Fathers; here, to avoid confusion, we have used *writings* (e.g. Homily 10).

It remains to be said that the Greek translators have sometimes employed Greek words in an uncommon way. Although the translation is not incorrect, the Greek reader misses the intended sense. We have, therefore, in such cases returned to the meaning of the Syriac. The Greek translators often employed (*xapic*) to translate the two Syriac words *grace* and *gift*, since, indeed (*xapic*) can mean both. But since English is not so fortunate, we have resorted to two words.

From Homily 3; (The Syriac term *shapyutha* means *clearness, limpidity, transparency, serenity*. A clear sky is also serene. Some say that this term is equivalent to the Greek; *dispassion*. For Saint Isaac, the soul's primordial state is one of *limpid purity*, and resembles Adam's state before he tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Worldly knowledge and passions cause a man to lose the *limpidity* that is both natural and proper to his soul. Later East Syrian ascetical writers used the term *shapyutha* in a more technical sense, referring to a stage in spiritual life.

From Homily 18; From activity that demands violence (i.e. fasting, vigil, prostrations, and the like) there is born fervor beyond measure, fired in the heart by glowing thoughts which newly rise to the surface of our mind. This work, and watchfulness, refine the intellect by their fervor and grant it vision. And this vision gives birth to glowing thoughts (those I have just mentioned) by means of the profundity of the soul's vision, which is called *theoria* (*divine vision*). But this same divine vision gives birth to fervor, and of this fervor that follows upon the grace of divine vision (Syriac; *the vision that is from grace*) there is born the flow of tears. At first only to a small degree: that is, repeatedly during the course of a single day tears come over a man, and then leave him again. But from this there comes weeping without cease, and from her unceasing tears the soul receives peace in her thoughts. And from peace of thoughts she is raised to *limpid purity* ((or *clearness*, see Homily 3, sub-titled; *On the Senses, and on Temptations Also*) of the intellect. And through this *limpidity* of the intellect a man comes to see the mysteries of God, because of the purity that is laid up in peace from warfare. But after these things, the intellect comes to behold that which in Ezekiel the Prophet is indicated by the apparition of the torrent, which depicts the figure of the three stages of soul that draw nigh to things divine, and beyond the third there is no passage (*Vide* Ezekiel 47:3-5.

The Greek reads here; 'to behold revelations and signs, like those Ezekiel the Prophet saw depicting the three stages in which the soul draws nigh to God'). The beginning of all these things is a good purpose directed toward God, the manifold labors of stillness, and the straightforwardness (*undeviousness, unpervertedness*) that is born of prolonged separation from the world (This is the Syriac reading. The Greek has numerous variants here). There is no great need to speak of the diverse kinds of labors since they are familiar to all. However, as stating them will do our readers no harm, but rather may be to their profit, we must not (as it seems to us, at least) shirk the task of setting them down.

From Homily 52; a footnote;

Question: Whom does the man resemble that has been deemed worthy to taste the sweetness of faith and who afterwards turns again to unspiritual knowledge?, (a lengthy footnote in Homily 72 is referenced here, to wit; (Greek; Literally; *pertainig to the soul, soulish*. It is translated by the word *natural* in the Authorized Version (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14). English has no suitable equivalent for this term. The sense, as it is used here, is given by the following quotations which explain Saint Paul's usage in First Corinthians: 'The man who is *psychikos* is he who lives according to the flesh and whose mind is not yet illumined by the Spirit; he possesses only that innate human insight which the Creator has placed in the souls of all men' (Saint Cyril of Alexandria *Commentary On First Corinthians* [PG 74.865b]). 'The Apostle calls *psychikos* the man who is satisfied with his own thoughts alone, who does not accept the teaching of the Spirit, and is not even able to understand it' (Theodore of Cyrus *Commentary on First Corinthians* [PG 82.245a]). In this sense *psychikos* can be translated: carnal, unspiritual, profane, material-minded).

Answer: He resembles the man who has found a pearl of great price and exchanges it for a copper obol, who has abandoned self-sufficient freedom and turned to a state of destitution, filled with fear and slavery.