



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ March 29, 2015 ✠

Fifth Sunday of Lent

St. Mary of Egypt

The Sixth and Final Week of Lent



Wed. April 1 6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy / Friday, April 3, 6:30pm Lazarus Presanctified

Holy Week 2015 Schedule

✠ Sat. April 4 10:00am Lazarus Saturday Divine Liturgy
> Parish Workday following Divine Liturgy



✠ Sat. April 4 6:00pm **Palm Sunday Vespers w/ Blessing of Palms**

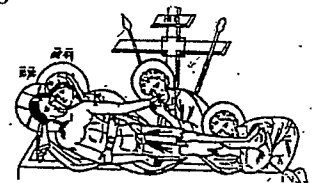
✠ Sun. April 5 **Palm Sunday Matins & Divine Liturgy (8:30am)**

✠ Palm Sunday Evening - 5:00pm ~ First Bridegroom Matins

✠ April 6/7 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins

✠ April 8 - Holy Wednesday 6:30pm Holy Unction

✠ April 9 - Holy Thursday 10:00am Mystical Supper Liturgy
6:30pm 12 Passion Gospels



✠ **Holy Friday Services** ✠ April 10 - 10:00am Royal Hours

4:00pm Vespers - Shroud to the Tomb / 7:00pm - Lamentations at the Tomb

✠ *Youth All Night Vigil at the Tomb* ✠

✠ Holy Saturday ~ April 11 ~ 10:00am Divine Liturgy - The Blessed Sabbath

✠ **Holy PASCCHA** ✠ **Begins Saturday, April 11 at 11:30pm**

✠ Pascha Sunday April 12 ~ 3:00pm Paschal Agape Vespers

✠ Bright Monday April 13 ~ 10:00am Divine Liturgy w/ Procession

On Thoughts: from The Exomologetarion (A Manual of Confession),

by St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain (1807)

Just as so-called diagnostic physicians not only know how to treat external and visible wounds of the body, but also, by measuring the pulse, they learn the internal and invisible maladies of the heart, of the bowels, and the other unseen workings of the human body, and are therefore able to treat them. Likewise, Spiritual Father, it is not enough for you only to know how to treat the external passions of the soul, those acts and deeds and effects of sin, but it is also necessary to know through the confession of the penitent the internal wounds of his soul, which are the hidden passions in his heart and the passionate and evil thoughts, and so treat them with great scrutiny and care. For this reason we thought it good to inform you a little about some general and vital matters concerning thoughts.

How many types of thoughts there are: {go to page 3}

This and That

All of the arguments regarding new definitions of marriage, aggressive reproductive technologies, gender re-definitions, etc., are made within a model that views any and all suffering as both tragic, needless and unacceptable if at all possible of alleviation. Such a line of reasoning was inevitably on a collision course with an ethic originally rooted in the Cross. The Christian view of personhood is an invitation to voluntary suffering and self-sacrifice. Nothing could be less modern.

The Church's sacramental life exists solely for the purpose of salvation. It does not exist to bless or facilitate the interests of the State (or of the ego). The sexual models that are finding approval within the culture (and by the State) are not in accordance with the path of personhood revealed in the Christian Tradition. There are and will be many varying models of Christianity that will agree to serve the self-defined interests of the State. But these represent "another gospel," a radical rejection and re-imagining of the Christian Tradition.

In public conversations, the traditional account of Christianity is going to come up short: the Modern promise of no suffering will always get more votes than the tragedy of the Cross. But the Cross must first be re-preached to the Christian people – they have listened long and well to Modern promises and have, to a large extent, modified their own understanding of the Gospel in its light.

The irony, of course, is that the Modern drive in the name of compassion and the alleviation of suffering, is something that was first taught by the Church. And now the Church will seem to be arguing against it. Of course, the supreme irony is the Cross itself, which has always seemed like foolishness and weakness, and will continue to be despised by the builders of our Brave New World.

– Fr. Stephen Freeman

This creation is no accident. It has order and meaning. It has structure and coherence. The world in which I wonder has such narrow parameters in its construction, that the slightest alteration would have rendered the whole thing nothing more than a boiling lump or, yet, nothing at all. Things only exist because they exist in precisely this manner.

– Fr. Stephen Freeman

We must also understand that we are saved "by grace." Thus our efforts are always "**grace-assisted**" efforts, for no matter what we ourselves do, it would not be enough.

– Fr. Stephen Freeman

The collapse of personal self-control...

...The nearest I have come to explaining the rise of drug-taking, minor incivility, psychological distress, etc., in our otherwise prosperous societies is the collapse of personal self-control, which is now not only regarded as unnecessary but actively harmful, insofar as it leads to frustration, and frustration supposedly leads to yet worse consequences. Why should self-control have collapsed, and the awareness of the necessity for it have evaporated? Perhaps this is the consequence of the virtual elimination from Western life of all forms of transcendent belief, leaving the satisfaction of current desires, as and when they arise, as the only purpose.

- Theodore Dalrymple

These are the new Dark Ages, and their darkness consists in large part of the belief that they are, in fact, an age of enlightenment, of progress. The mainstream Left and the mainstream Right are collaborating to bring this new world into being. They both see progress in what technology can do to liberate the individual will from any obligations beyond those he chooses. On the Left, it generally has to do with social norms and beliefs; on the Right, it has to do with market forces.

- Rod Dreher

Know then, Spiritual Father, that in general, **all thoughts are of three types: some thoughts are good, some thoughts are vain and idle, and some thoughts are bad.** Concerning good thoughts, it is not necessary to discuss here in detail how and from what aspects of the soul they arise, for we are satisfied that these are good and therefore beneficial and salvific to the soul. We say this only, Spiritual Father, that if someone says to you during confession that he has good thoughts, you should counsel him to take care to be humble and to never trust in himself and become prideful: 1) because a person on his own is not able to do a good work or say a good word or even think a good thought without the power and help of God: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5); 2) because the devil is so cunning and evil, that many times he brings evil from good and through good thoughts throws those who are not careful into self-esteem, and conceit, and haughtiness, from which is caused the destruction and death of the soul. So says Paul: "Sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good" (Rom. 7:13); 3) because man never remains in one state, but is so changing and so quickly alters that, with his thoughts, in one instant he is found in Paradise and in another instant he is in hell, as one Saint said. And St. Isaac says: "By the mind we improve, and by the mind we become unprofitable," hence the one who today has good thoughts may very well have evil ones tomorrow; and 4) tell him that the devil has greater envy and wages a fiercer battle against those who have good thoughts, so that he should have more fear and greater care over himself.

What vain thoughts are and how they are corrected

Those thoughts which are not profitable unto the purpose and aim of salvation, as much as to our own soul as to that of our neighbor, and do not look to the necessary requirements and constitution of our body, but to the superfluous and more-than-necessary things, even if they are good, I call vain and idle. According to the Shorter Rules of Basil the Great, vain and idle thoughts arise from the idleness of the intellect that is neither engaged in necessary things, nor believes that God is present and searches our hearts and thoughts: "Mental aberration comes from idleness of a mind not occupied in necessary things. For the mind is idle and careless from lack of belief in the presence of God Who tries the heart and reins... He who does this and what is like to it will never dare or have leisure to think of any of those things that do not conduce to the edification of faith, even if they

seem to be good." Concerning these vain and idle thoughts, I say, advise the penitent not to allow his intellect to meditate upon or ponder over them: 1) because just as we have to give an account for idle words on the day of judgment, as the Lord said: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Mt. 12:36), so likewise we have to give an account on the day of judgment for idle and vain thoughts, and indeed, if we willfully left our intellect to go after them. And it is thence apparent, because the Lord reproaches and condemns those servants who remain idle: "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" (Mt. 20:6); 2) because those vain thoughts deprive us from profitable and salvific thoughts, which we are able to have instead of them; and 3) because these idle thoughts are in themselves evil, as they are the cessation of good and become the beginning of evil, and as giving way and permission to the devil to sow in our idle intellect the tares of evil thoughts. Thus does Gregory the Theologian confirm this: "May evil and its original cause, the devil, be destroyed. For while we were idle, the evil one planted tares in us (cf. Mt. 13:25), in order that the neglect of good might become the beginning of evil, just as the beginning of darkness is the retreat of light."

The causes of bad thoughts

Know that, in general, bad thoughts derive from two causes, one external and the other internal. The external cause of bad thoughts is the sensible objects of the five senses, that is, those things seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched, like bad and indecent and theatrical sights, obscene words and lewd songs, scents and colognes and perfumes, luscious foods and pleasurable drinks, fine and soft clothes and comfortable mattresses. All these things cause passionate and hedonistic thoughts in the soul, and then sinful and death-bearing thoughts. Thus, the Prophet Jeremiah on one hand says: "Death has come up into our windows" (Jer. 21:9), the windows meaning the five senses. On the other hand, Gregory the Theologian rather interpreted this saying in broader terms: "And it is kept until the fifth day (that is, the sacrificed Paschal Lamb), perhaps because the Victim, of Whom I am speaking, purifies the five senses, from which comes falling into sin, and around which the war rages, inasmuch as they are open to the incitements to sin."

The internal causes of bad thoughts

1. The imagination, which is like a second sense and receives and records all of the images and perceptions which enter through the five senses, that is, of those things touched, tasted, smelled,

and especially of those things heard and seen, is called an internal sense, because it portrays the things sensed so grossly and clearly, just as the external senses. It is a common sense, according to Aristotle, because it receives commonly the experiences of all the senses; and this naturally, because just as lines are disconnected at the perimeter of a circle but converge at its center, so also the five senses, which are disconnected on the outside, converge in the imagination of the soul, but they converge without confusion. So then, from the imagination are born bad thoughts in the soul, making it sense them as really present and to noetically conceptualize through memory those things that it should not have outwardly seen or heard or smelled or tasted or touched, even though it is sensibly far from these things and is settled peaceably in a deserted place. For this reason, in his poetry, the Theologian said:

"A vision caught me, but was checked. I set up no idol of sin. Was an idol set up? The experience was avoided. These are the degrees of deceit of the adversary."

Do you hear? He says an idol of sin was set up and was not recorded in the imagination. The soul escaped the experience at once, that is, it escaped from consenting to the thoughts and from the committal of sin.

2. The passions are a cause of bad thoughts, which are generally two: love and hate, or pleasure and pain, for we are moved passionately either because we love something as pleasurable, or because we hate it as painful. Specifically, the passions are divided into the three aspects of the soul: the intelligent, the appetitive, and the incensive. The passions of the intelligent aspect, according to Gregory of Sinai, are unbelief, blasphemy, evilness, curiosity, double-mindedness, gossip, love of applause, pretension, pride, and others. The passions of the appetitive aspect are fornication, adultery, debauchery, greed, unchastity, incontinence, love of pleasure, self-love, and others. The passions of the incensive aspect are anger, bitterness, shouting, audacity, revenge, and others. From these passions of the soul, then, bad thoughts are generally and immediately born, these also being divided into three categories like the passions. From the passions of the intelligent aspect of the soul come bad thoughts, which are generally given the name blasphemous thoughts. From the passions of the appetitive aspect come the so-called obscene thoughts. From the passions of the incensive aspect come the so-called evil thoughts. For this reason the above-mentioned Gregory of Sinai said that: "The passions are the

causes of thoughts," and Abba Isaac also calls the passions assaults, because they attack within the soul and stir up passionate thoughts.

3. An internal and initial cause of bad thoughts is the demons, for those accursed ones, being light spirits and found superficially around the heart, speak there through internal suggestion and whisper softly from inside all the blasphemous thoughts, all the obscene thoughts, all the evil thoughts, and simply all the bad thoughts. They train the imagination with obscene and impure idols from the senses, as much as when a person is sleeping as when awake. From these passions in the three aspects of the soul are stirred up and make the wretched soul to be a cave of thieves and a slum of the passions. For this reason the above-mentioned Gregory of Sinai said: "Occasions give rise to thoughts, thoughts to imaginations, imaginations to the passions, and the passions give entry to the demons... but no one thing in the sequence is self-operative: each is prompted and activated by the demons. The imagination is not wrought into an image, passion is not energized, without unperceived hidden demonic impulsion," and in another place he says: "Thoughts are the promptings of the demons and precursors of the passions." In agreement with this, St. Isaac says, "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 senses (the interior ones, that is) cannot come to know evil or be incited by it without the mediation of the demons."

4. An internal cause of thoughts, however remote, is the passionate and corrupted condition of human nature which was brought about by the ancestral sin. This condition remains in our nature also after Baptism, not as ancestral sin as such (for this is removed through Baptism, according to Canon 120 of Carthage), but as a consequence of the ancestral sin, for the exertion and test of our free will, and in exchange for greater crowns and rewards, according to the theologians. For after the fall the intellect lost its innocent memory and thought which it had fixed formerly only on the good; but now when it wishes to remember and think upon the good, it is immediately dispersed and also thinks upon the bad. For this reason the divine Gregory of Sinai said: "The source and ground of our thoughts is the fragmented state of our memory. The memory was originally simple and one-pointed, but as a result of the fall its natural powers have been perverted: it has lost its recollectedness in God and has become compound instead of simple, diversified instead of one-pointed." ❖ ❖ ❖

Pornography, Beyond a Simple Prohibition

(Pravmir) - Pornography camouflages itself as something unreal, virtual, something that is one's private business, something that does not hurt anyone. Our culture tells us that we are free to do whatever we want, as long as it does not hurt anyone.

According to surveys, nearly one third of Orthodox Christian teens are unsure whether pornography is right or wrong.[1] This is approximately the same number as that of teens who are unsure whether premarital sex is right or wrong.[2] This is very telling in two ways. First, teens who are unsure about premarital sex are probably also unsure about pornography. And second, **while the Church makes its position very clear – premarital sex and pornography are wrong – it needs to do a better job of explaining why. In this short paper, I would like to step away from the words 'right' and 'wrong.' After all, Christ did not come to bring us laws and legislations. Sins are not right or wrong because someone issued a regulation. Instead, I would like to talk about things that are good for you or bad for you.**

The Church teaches us that sexual intimacy is an important part of the Sacrament of marriage: there, it has its rightful place; there, it helps the two become one; and there, it fulfills all of its functions – from the expression of love and commitment to the co-creation with God in continuing the human race. Marriage is a sacrament with the “principal and ultimate goal [of] the spiritual and moral perfection of the spouses.”[3] As with any sacrament, that which is sacramental, should not be used for profane purposes. Imagine that a priest throws a party in the holy altar, and then on Sunday, after having picked up the trash, he serves the Divine Liturgy there. Or, he uses the chalice to drink his coffee in the mornings, and then on Sunday he uses it for the Eucharist. Even on an intuitive level we understand that this would be blasphemy. And yet, it is the same with our bodies. The Apostle Paul teaches that “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19), and it belongs to your spouse for the fulfillment of the sacrament of marriage (7:4) whether we are married now or will one day be married. **Imagine your love for your spouse as a cup filled to the brim, and you want to give all of it, the fullness of it to your beloved. If you start bumping into strangers along the way or allowing them to take some of what you are carrying, then you will not be able to preserve the fullness of your love, and will hand to your beloved a cup half empty, if not altogether unworthy of a sacrament.**

All of this can be said about premarital sex in general, but what about pornography? Pornography is just as bad as premarital sex, but more dangerous. When a person engages in a sexual act with another person, both are aware that they are giving up a part of themselves; and the more partners a person has, the more fractured he or she becomes. But pornography camouflages itself as something unreal, virtual, something that is one's private business, something that does not hurt anyone. **Our culture tells us that we are free to do whatever we want, as long as it does not hurt anyone. Let us heed this advice and remember that 'anyone' means us as well. Let us make sure that whatever we do does not hurt us physically or spiritually.**

Christ said: “...every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). The reason Christ equates looking lustfully, the very definition of pornography, with adultery, a physical act, is because we are not some bags full of disconnected parts body, soul, mind, spirit, will, etc. but whole and interconnected beings. If we have a toothache, our mind may become irritable; and if our mind is anxious, our whole body may ache. This is why when we allow pornography to enter into our eyes and our mind, our entire being is affected. The “virtual” sin of pornography most often leads to very physical masturbation. And once something is seen, it cannot be unseen it imbeds itself in the mind, the memory, the subconscious. We would not want to share our spouse and our marriage bed with a bus load full of porn actors and actresses. But in reality, this is what we do when our minds are polluted with pornography and we enter into the sacrament of

marriage bringing all those "passengers" along. On second thought, porn 'actors' and 'actresses' perform sexual acts for money, and there is another term for that prostitution. The Apostle Paul says that "he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her" (1 Cor. 6:16). These are very powerful words. This means that when we commit adultery in the heart – watch pornography we become one with that prostitute, instead of our spouse. This is not only destructive to the sacrament of marriage, but also to our own souls: with how many prostitutes can one become one before the soul is completely broken, damaged, fractured, and polluted?

Ways to Fight Against Pornography

1. Avoid those television shows, movies, magazines, and websites that arouse sexual passion. It is much easier to fight against sin while it is still a little worm than to battle it once it becomes a fire breathing dragon.
2. Do not underestimate the brute power of sexual desire. People have killed and died under the influence of the sexual passion. Do not play with fire or you risk being burnt.
3. **Remember that demons, including those of lust, are best resisted through prayer and fasting. Pray often and ask God for help. Keep the real fast, not a vegan diet.**
4. Keep your eyes and your mind on our Savior and His Most Pure Mother. If you spend time on the computer or watch television place an icon next to the screen. If looking at what is on your screen and in the eyes of Christ at the same time makes you uncomfortable or ashamed, then something is wrong with what is on your screen. Do something about it! (There is an OFF button on every device.)
5. Seek healing in repentance. Once something is seen it cannot be unseen. But God can heal and restore the soul. Remember: repentance is not feeling bad about something. It is a firm decision to turn away from sin and turn to God. It is a decision to fight against sin, not merely feel bad about having committed it. It is a sacrament of reconciliation with God, not a formality of entering a guilty plea on a heavenly court docket.

[1] Purpura, J. Moral and Ethical Issues: Confronting Orthodox Christian Teens across North America, 2002, 57.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "The Mystery of Marriage in a Dogmatic Light." Bishop Artemy Rantosavlievich. Divine Ascent: A Journal of Orthodox Faith. (Vol. 1 Nos. 3/4), 48.

St. Porphyrios of Athens

"Don't struggle directly with temptations, don't pray for it to go away, don't say "Take it from me, O God!" For then you are acknowledging the strength of the temptation and it takes hold of you. Because, although you are saying "Take it from me, O God," basically you are bringing it to mind and fomenting it even more. Your desire to be free of the passion, will, of course, be there, but it will exist in a hidden and discreet way, without appearing outwardly...."

"Abandon all your weaknesses in a way that the evil one will not know that you are doing this. In doing this he will not have the opportunity to grab you, put you down and fill you with worry. Do not make any effort to free yourself from these things. You should struggle quietly and simply without struggle or sadness. Do not say: "I will now force myself; I will pray in order to acquire love so that I may become good etc." It is not good for you to force yourself and beat yourself up in order to become good. In doing this, you will get a worse reaction. All things are done quietly, unhurriedly and freely. Neither should you say: "My God, free me from this, from anger and sorrow." It is not good for us to pray or to think about a specific passion. When we do this something happens in our souls and we are in more turmoil. By throwing yourself with force in order to defeat the passions you will see how evil envelopes you, squeezes you, and your soul will be rendered helpless..."

Saint Mary of Egypt - from the Prologue

The biography of this wonderful Saint was written by St. Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Once, during the Honorable Fast [Great Lent], a certain priest-monk (Hieromonk), the Elder Zosimus, withdrew into the wilderness beyond the Jordan, a twenty-day trek. Suddenly, he caught sight of a human being with a withered and naked body whose hair was as white as snow and who began to flee from the sight of Zosimus. The elder ran for a long while until this person crouched down in a brook and cried out: "Abba Zosimus forgive me for the sake of the Lord. I cannot face you for I am a naked woman." Zosimus then tossed his outer garment to her which she wrapped around herself and then showed herself to him. The elder was frightened upon hearing his name spoken from the mouth of this woman he did not know.

Following his prolonged insistence, the woman related her life story. She was born in Egypt and at the age of twelve began to live a life of debauchery in Alexandria where she spent seventeen years in this perverted way of life. Driven by the adulterous flame of the flesh, one day she boarded a boat which was sailing for Jerusalem on a pilgrimage for the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (The entire Cross of the Lord was in the possession of the Church then, until subsequent invasions.).

Arriving at the Holy City, she wanted to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in order to venerate the Honorable Cross. However, some invisible force restrained her and prevented her from entering the church. In great fear, she gazed upon the icon of the All-Holy Mother of God in the vestibule and prayed that she be allowed to enter the church to venerate the Honorable Cross, all the while confessing her sinfulness and uncleanness and promising that she would go wherever the All-Pure One would direct her. She was then permitted to enter the church. Having venerated the Cross she again entered the vestibule and, before the icon, gave thanks to the Mother of God. At that very moment she heard a voice saying: "If you cross over Jordan you will find real peace!"

Immediately she purchased three loaves of bread and started out for the Jordan where she arrived that same evening. The next day she received Holy Communion in the Monastery of St. John and crossed over the Jordan River. She remained in the wilderness for forty-eight years in great torment, fear and struggle with *passionate thoughts* as though with wild beasts. She fed on the vegetation she could find. At one point, when St. Mary stood for prayer, Zosimus saw her levitate in the air. She begged him to bring her Holy Communion the following year on the shore of the Jordan where she would then come to receive it.

The following year, Zosimus arrived on the shore of the Jordan in the evening with Holy Communion. He wondered how the Saint would be able to cross the river. At that moment, in the light of the moon, he saw her as she approached the Jordan, made the sign of the Cross over it and walked upon the water as though upon dry land. After Zosimus administered Holy Communion to her, she begged him to come the following year to the same brook where they had first met. Zosimus came and discovered her lifeless body on that spot. Above her head in the sand was written: "Abba Zosimus, bury the body of the humble Mary on this site; render dust to dust. I died on April 1, the same night of the saving-suffering of Christ, after having received Communion of the Divine Mysteries."

From this inscription Zosimus first learned her name and the other and awesome miracle was that, she, on that same night the previous year, when she received Holy Communion, arrived at this brook which took him twenty days to travel. Thus, Zosimus buried the body of this wonderful Saint, Mary the Egyptian. When he returned to the monastery Zosimus related the entire history of her life and the miracles which he had personally witnessed. Thus, the Lord knows how to glorify penitent sinners. St. Mary is also commemorated on the Fifth Sunday in Lent. The Church holds her up as a great example of repentance to the faithful during these days of the Fast. She died about the year 530 A.D.

A Venerable Mother Mary, pray unto God for us!

PRAYER KNOCKS, FASTING OBTAINS, MERCY RECEIVES

St. Peter Chrysologus, Archbishop of Ravenna (450)

There are three things, my brethren, by which Faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting, and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy, and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other. Fasting is the soul of prayer; mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them; they cannot be separated. If you have only one of them or not all together, you have nothing. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others you open God's ear to yourself.

When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know that you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive, give. If you ask for yourself what you deny to others, your asking is a mockery. Let this be the pattern for all men when they practice mercy: show mercy to others in the same way, with the same generosity, with the same promptness, as you want others to show mercy to you.

Therefore, let prayer, mercy, and fasting be one single plea to God on our behalf, one speech in our defense, a threefold-united prayer in our favor.

Let us use fasting to make up for what we have lost by despising others. Let us offer our souls in sacrifice by means of fasting. There is nothing more pleasing that we can offer to God, as the Psalmist said in prophecy, "A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; God does not despise a bruised and humbled heart."

Offer your soul to God, make Him an offering of your fasting, so that your soul may be a pure offering, a holy sacrifice, a living victim, remaining your own and at the same time made over to God. Whoever fails to give this to God will not be excused, for if you are to give Him yourself you are never without the means of giving.

To make these acceptable, mercy must be added. Fasting bears no fruit unless it is watered by mercy. Fasting dries up when mercy dries up. Mercy is to fasting as rain is to the earth. However much you may cultivate your heart, clear the soil of your nature, root out vices, sow virtues; if you do not release the springs of mercy, your fasting will bear no fruit.

When you fast, if your mercy is thin your harvest will be thin; when you fast, what you pour out in mercy overflows into your barn. Therefore, do not lose by saving, but gather in by scattering. Give to the poor, and you give to yourself. You will not be allowed to keep what you have refused to give to others. ✕ ✕ ✕