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**NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS AND THE VALUE OF TIME**

January 1, 1994

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

Happy New Year! May God will for this to be a blessed year for the monastery, in which you may enjoy a good spiritual life and nourish your life with God, and may God heal anyone who might be sick.

***In the Beginning*::**

We will read a section from the Gospel according to St. John, chapter one:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it*.[[1]](#footnote-2)

This section reminds us of the beginning of the Holy Bible, in Genesis, where it says,

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day*.[[2]](#footnote-3)

St. John began his Gospel with this same phrase: “*In the beginning*.” St. John wrote, “*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it*,” and in Genesis it says, “*Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters*.” Here St. John wrote, “*In Him was life*.”

***Let There Be Light*:**

In Genesis it says, “*Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness*,” and St. John writes, “*And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it*.”

God divided light and darkness. The Son of God is the one who revealed the light of the Father to us, and He is the one who “granted us the true knowledge of the Holy Spirit.”[[3]](#footnote-4) This is why there is a parallel between Genesis, which says, “*God said, ‘let there be light*,’” and the Gospel of St. John, which says, that He “*was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world*.”[[4]](#footnote-5) This is an amazing relationship between Christ, the Word of God, and the light. What is this light? The Lord Christ said, “*I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life*.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

Christ is the Word of God, God’s revelation of Himself, the image of the invisible God, therefore, if God is light, then let whoever seeks to know God see the Light. This is why St. John said, “*We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*.”[[6]](#footnote-7) The Liturgy according to St. Gregory also says, “[You] have manifested to us the Light of the Father.”[[7]](#footnote-8) This is a light — “*The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light*,”[[8]](#footnote-9) a light that shed its rays on humanity, a light shone and dispersed the darkness of ignorance and sin. The minds were enlightened in knowing Him, after the devil had disseminated darkness throughout the world. He “*was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world*.”[[9]](#footnote-10) Knowing Christ enlightens people’s lives, scattering all feelings of darkness, hatred, resentment, or sin. This is why it says, “*God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day*.” When He separated light and darkness, the light shone; this is why St. Peter said, “*A light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*.”[[10]](#footnote-11)

**Children of the Light:**

As children of the light, we begin a new year by asking God to fill our lives with light. Every day in the Psalmody you say, “Arise O children of the light, let us praise the Lord of Hosts.”[[11]](#footnote-12) The lives of the saints are luminous; the lives of the wicked are dark. The Word of God, Christ, is the One who illuminates our minds and makes us love the light and come to the light. This is why He said, “*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God*.”[[12]](#footnote-13)

It is impossible for a person to love the Lord Christ and live in darkness. Snakes, critters, concealed unconfessed sins, sinful sensations, enmity, and hatred all live in darkness. That is why confessing our sins makes snakes “take to flight,”[[13]](#footnote-14) as St. Isidore told St. Moses. As long as a person is hiding snakes inside his urn, unrevealed thoughts continue to dwell within, but once one removes the lid, the snakes inside instantly flee as soon as they find themselves exposed. As the Bible says, “*Whatever makes manifest is light*.”[[14]](#footnote-15) One tells the Lord who “*will search Jerusalem with lamps*,”[[15]](#footnote-16) “*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*!”[[16]](#footnote-17) Sit to perform a self-examination and see if you are walking in the light. Say, “Lord, You who search Jerusalem with lamps, search the inner stores of my heart. Reveal to me any hidden foreign substance that does not agree with Your goodness. Lord, Your coming to the world was to send light into human lives, to illuminate their lives.”

When our teacher St. Paul spoke to the Philippians, he said, “*Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*.”[[17]](#footnote-18) What will happen if you attain harmlessness and purity of heart in your inner life? He says you will “*shine as lights in the world*.” This is a luminous life, full of light. Who could praise God, except the one whose heart and life are full of light? This is why we say, “Arise O children of the light, let us praise the Lord of Hosts.”[[18]](#footnote-19) In one whose mouth is full of praise, who is able to rejoice the hearts of God and the angels, whose life is luminous, the devil has no dwelling place.

The Holy Bible says, “*In the beginning… God said, ‘Let there be light’… God saw the light, that it was good*,” therefore, let us say, “God, with the beginning of a new year, please say, ‘Let there be light.’ Lord, You send the light into our lives, and thenceforth, You will be the One to rejoice in it. Lord, I long to delight Your heart, so, if You send the light of life into me, You will find something good in me in which to delight.” A person could entreat God saying, “If not for me, then let it be for Your sake. I want to please You.” This intent could be often found in the Psalms. Entreat God to work in your life, in order to be a cause of joy and delight to God.

***You are the Light of the World*:**

The Holy Bible says, “*God said, ‘Let there be light’... And God saw the light, that it was good*” — God delighted in the light when He created it. You might be puzzled, since God is Himself light,[[19]](#footnote-20) dwelling in light,[[20]](#footnote-21) wrapped in light, and covered with light as with a garment.[[21]](#footnote-22) Yes, certainly He is the true light and the source of light, yet He still delights to see the light in creation; therefore, the Holy Scripture says that Jesus Christ is the true light. Why is He called the true light? He is the source of light for creation, but the light within us is a gift from God, or a reflection of the true light. He said, “*I am the light of the world*,”[[22]](#footnote-23) and also, “*You are the light of the world*.”[[23]](#footnote-24) What is the difference?

Similarly He said, “*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser*,”[[24]](#footnote-25) meanwhile we sometimes call St. Mary “the true vine.” Some might ask how this is possible. We say, “You are the true vine that carries the fruit of life,”[[25]](#footnote-26) because she gave birth to the cluster of life, Christ, Who is also the true vine, yet He is the true vine in one meaning, while she in another. He is the vine and we are the branches, as members in His holy body; she is the vine as the one who bore the true cluster of life. Each bears a different meaning. Likewise, when He says, “*I am the light of the world*,” or “*You are the light of the world*,” we understand the intended meaning. He says, “*Among whom you shine as lights in the world*,”[[26]](#footnote-27) but He is the light of the world.

When God saw that the light was good, He delighted in it, as the Psalm says, “*What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your truth?... You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, to the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent*.”[[27]](#footnote-28) Lord, what will be the benefit if I go to hell? There is no benefit. But, if You work in my life and make me good, I will fill the world with praises, prayers, and singing. I will refresh your angels and saints, as the Bible says: “*The hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother*.”[[28]](#footnote-29)

“*God saw the light, that it was good*” — God rejoices in good things. Our Lord rejoices to see a saint. St. Paul says of the Lord Christ: “*Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame*.”[[29]](#footnote-30) By simply glancing to the church, His beloved bride full of hosts of saints, full of light, glory, and radiance, He said, “For the sake of these I am willing to do anything. I am willing to endure shame, disgrace, and pain.”

“*God saw the light, that it was good*” — He longs to see this light in us, as He said, “*Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*.”[[30]](#footnote-31) Otherwise, why do they draw the saints in the icons surrounded by halos of light?

“*God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light*.” Tell Him, “Lord, in the beginning of this new year, we want You to say this word. You who called the light to shine out of darkness, You who command and it becomes. Lord, not by our strength can we make this light shine, but by Your word, because ‘*In the beginning was the word, and in Him was life, and the life was the light of men*.’ As our teacher St. Peter said, ‘*Until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*.’[[31]](#footnote-32) Lord, when will the day dawn in our hearts? And, when will the morning star rise?” This issue needs prayers and asking, as He says, “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*.”[[32]](#footnote-33)

***Remember Now Your Creator in the Days of Your Youth*:**

At the start of a new year, examine yourself: “What persistent mistakes in my life do I need to eliminate for my life to be luminous?” You cannot allow these mistakes to last. Until when will you allow them to remain? Say, “Lord, here goes by yet another year after another. Where is the end?” To overcome your persistent sins you need first to note them. The Bible says:

*Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, “I have no pleasure in them”:while the sun and the light, the moon and the stars, are not darkened, and the clouds do not return after the rain…When the doors are shut in the streets, and the sound of grinding is low; when one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of music are brought low… For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets. Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the well. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it*.[[33]](#footnote-34)

“*Before the silver cord is loosed*” means before the spirit parts from the body. A person must eliminate these persistent sins. How long will they persist? You must take a firm stand with your old sins, not giving them a chance to continue. Do not permit all to blend together, but determine which sins are ephemeral, and which sins are persistent. A person might have passing sins that occur once or twice, while other sins persist. For example, one sin might be pride or the constant loss of temper, while the other sin might be some dishonesty in conversation or even lying. This second sin might not repeat often. It occurred, you repented, confessed, and it came to an end; it is not a fixed characteristic. The problem is in the sins that continually accompany a person. When will you eliminate them? This could be especially dangerous to your life and your relationship with God if it becomes a part of your nature.

 You might be able to dispense with it in the days of your youth before the evil days come, or before the future years come when you are unable to struggle. From where can you guarantee that you will be able to keep watch and pray for this issue? From where can you guarantee that you will have an opportunity for fasts, prostrations, and labor? From where can you guarantee that you will be present with power like today? (Those who are advanced in age should not feel sorry, because they may have fulfilled this while they were still young, or perhaps they are still youthful despite their advanced age). What I want to say is that a person should think of the present life and ask, “How much life do I guarantee to be left?” As the psalm says, “*How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me*?”[[34]](#footnote-35) How long do I really have left, that I continue living in this abjectness? The devils who degrade my life are certainly prime among those who persecute me. Even if you are still a youth, can you guarantee how long you will live? When will you become a tune on David’s harp to delight God? When will you be an instrument for God? When will your life be as a chant that brings joy to the angels and refreshes the hearts of the saints? When will your vessel be full of oil, akin to those of the five wise virgins? “*When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?*” The unending opposition from the devils comes in different shapes and colors. “*They almost made an end of me on earth*.”[[35]](#footnote-36) They caused me to fall and beat me until they almost finished me off—a daily beating. “*How long will my enemy be exalted over me... those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved*.”[[36]](#footnote-37)

 This is why, at the beginning of a New Year, a person needs to tell God, “I need for You to evict these stubborn sins in my life. I do not want each year to pass by without any changes.” This is a terrifying standard: stagnancy or lack of growth. Will a person mature suddenly? Will a life void of virtues suddenly be full of spiritual virtues ten minutes before dying? I believe this does not agree with the parable of the five wise virgins who took oil in their vessels with their lamps.[[37]](#footnote-38)

**Gifts of the Holy Spirit:**

 This is why it is not enough for you to only think of the negative points in your life at the start of a new year; you must also think of the positive points. Tell Him, “Lord, I wish I could delight Your heart, through the fruits of the Holy Spirit.” The Lord Christ said, “*He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much*.”[[38]](#footnote-39) If I am faithful over my thoughts while I am awake, my Lord will give me holy thoughts while asleep. If you are faithful over your senses, our Lord will give you holy emotions. If you are faithful over the emotions, our Lord will give you pure thoughts. If you pray with emotions, are faithful in your prayers, and you pray from your heart and mind, our Lord will grant you to pray in the spirit. As you pray with your mind, He will gift you prayer with your spirit. As long as you are doing everything possible in the struggle with our Lord, our Lord looks to this faithfulness and grants you what is superior. If you possess the fruits of the Holy Spirit, our Lord grants you the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

 What are the fruits of the Holy Spirit? They are: “*Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*.”[[39]](#footnote-40) What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Among them is knowledge of divine mysteries, such as the gift of prophecy.[[40]](#footnote-41) During the apostolic era, there was another gift – speaking in tongues – for missionary work to the Gentiles, but it is no longer needed, and so it ended. The remaining gifts of the Holy Spirit continue. We hear and see in the lives of the saints that they possess the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

 First, and more important than the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are the fruits of the Holy Spirit in your life. If a person receives gifts without having fruits, this could be very destructive. One who has the gift of healing, but is far from our Lord, might end up saying, “‘*Have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then* [He] *will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*’”[[41]](#footnote-42) If you receive these gifts, it is for a divine purpose, for the edification of the church, or to comfort a sick person. The fruits must precede the gifts.

 Among the gifts of the Holy Spirit are knowledge and wisdom. Is this textbook knowledge? No. The Holy Spirit gives. As we say in the Liturgy of St. Gregory, “You have given to me the learning of Your knowledge”[[42]](#footnote-43) – knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, the saints witnessed heavenly glories, observed spiritual gifts, and visibly beheld the mysteries. This is not the intended purpose, and if a person reaches this point without being prepared spiritually, it could be harmful rather than beneficial. This is an issue of a person who is growing spiritually in the relationship with our Lord. The natural progression of this growth is for a person, after receiving the fruits of the Holy Spirit, to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. After one savors internal peace and spiritual joy (one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit), a true fruit, one could take pleasure in revelations of the kingdom of heaven. This is natural growth. If one reaches this prematurely, or by deliberate means, it would be detrimental rather than beneficial. Our Lord lifts up people who progress in the life of fellowship with Him above the level of the visible world to supernatural gifts. At times, these gifts are given for the edification of the church and for spreading the faith, as in the apostolic era. At other times, they are given so that the soul feels the splendor of life with our Lord, the magnificence of standing before God, a surety of the kingdom of heaven. Fellowship with our Lord is surety of the kingdom. How else could a person enter the kingdom without knowing anything about it or having tasted the kingdom of heaven? The one who will enter the kingdom is the one who has savored the sweetness of the kingdom.

**Do Not Waste Your Time:**

 My advice to you at the beginning of a new year is to not waste your time. Do not allow things to preoccupy you from the main purpose for which you left the world, left for monasticism. Do not allow work, for example, to become the goal inside monasticism. If it becomes the goal, then the monasticism is lost. Let the fruits of the Holy Spirit be your goal, the fruits of the life of the way. Work is only a means to help a person continue on the way without living a life of laziness or sluggishness. Not even hymns, in and of themselves, should be the intended goal. You should not be preoccupied with anything but our Lord. As our teacher St. Paul says, “*Why do you boast*,”[[43]](#footnote-44) not even in religious or spiritual matters will I boast:

*If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.* [St. Paul, from the religious perspective, you have excelled exceedingly!] *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death*.[[44]](#footnote-45)

He says, “I want nothing, not even the image of religiousness. I am a Pharisee, a Hebrew, an Israelite, and blameless according to the law, but where is Christ? This is what is important.” “Many have drowned in the harbor of monasticism.”[[45]](#footnote-46) Why? They set any other goal but Christ. Do not occupy yourselves with any goal, whatever it may be; do not take only the image of monasticism. The goal of one monastic is perhaps to be a hesychast of whom they title: “Our father (or mother) the anchorite.” Do not allow anything, as St. Paul says, “*I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish*.” Do you think he was speaking of money (as most people might think)? He was not speaking of money at all here; he was speaking of his religious position, his condition regarding the righteousness that is in the law. He says, “Although I have built great glory in the way of the lawful Pharisee worship and gained formal status, yet this is all nothing if my delight is in Christ, because, ‘*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain... for in Him we live and move and have our being*.’”[[46]](#footnote-47) Even in Christ, what does St. Paul say of himself:

*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead… Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind*.[[47]](#footnote-48)

He turned it into a *rule*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead­—life with Christ. Does it mean forgetting sins? Perhaps, yet St. Paul did not mean this here; he meant to forget any good he did and any spiritual level he had reached, because he says, “*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected*,” no matter what I do, in my own eyes, I am nothing. What I want to say is, it is a pity for you to preoccupy yourself or to waste your time in anything. Set all issues as a secondary goal to complete joy in the Lord, as St. Paul says, “*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*”[[48]](#footnote-49)

**Christ is the Only Goal:**

 Do not allow anything to preoccupy you. If you burned the lentils, do not worry about them. Quickly end the issue; once you go into the cell, ask yourself, “What lentils? Did we come here to seek lentils?” At the door of the cell, these issues are dusted away. You enter because your cell is the paradise in which you meet with Christ. “What about my reputation in the monastery?” Not important. “*What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ*.” If you have ruined everything, then be an uninformed confused monastic – no problem. This is good. “What if they yell at me for making a mess?” Good, this is more beneficial than becoming upset and turning it into a fight. He says, “*For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ*.”[[49]](#footnote-50) He is ecstatic. Why? Because the goal is clear before his eyes — the goal is Christ only.

 If you are able to discover this truth and lay it before your eyes continually, your lifeboat will cruise on the monastic route until it reaches the safe haven. Dismiss events that occur in the monastery with “as long as Christ is in my life, what more do I need?” “*That I may gain Christ and be found in Him… that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death*.”[[50]](#footnote-51) I am already dead to praise, honor, the world, and people. As St. Barsanuphius says, “We are strangers brethren, therefore let us be complete strangers… Christ’s love has estranged me to humans and humanity.”[[51]](#footnote-52)

 Do you need to frown at people to prove that you are estranged? Not at all. On the contrary, Christ who is within you fills the world with joy, peace, and love, yet internally nothing reaches into the deep, because Christ elates your heart and satisfies you. There is no time to waste; this is the truth you must discover. Press on, as he says, “*I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me… let us, as many as are mature, have this mind*.” You might say that you are not mature, and so this does not apply to you, but the Lord Christ also says, “*You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect*.”[[52]](#footnote-53) This is a commandment. What is monasticism, if not the way of perfection? Therefore, “*Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead… I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me*.” I have nothing else to seek. Will I seek to waste my life for anything? I pity those days eaten by the locusts, the long gone years in issues that should not occupy a person.

 When will the image of Christ continually be before your eyes? When will your emotions not part with the scenes of the cross, the resurrection, and the heavenly throne, instead of the pot of lentils and the tricot work? When will these images preoccupy your heart? Even if the tricot comes out yellow instead of green, it does not matter. If one of you makes a mistake because she is digressing into heavenly things, I will personally defend her. When will your mind be continually preoccupied with our Lord, and heavenly issues? “*Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things*,”[[53]](#footnote-54) and everything else is locked out. You become preoccupied with our Lord and heaven, and the more you become occupied with our Lord the more your heart is inflamed with His love. You become unable to endure, as one who is estranged in the body, and so you say, if it were my choice, I have “*a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*.”[[54]](#footnote-55) This is something that is preoccupying St. Paul, something that is taking over his heart and mind. He says, “‘*Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you*.’[[55]](#footnote-56) Do not worry, I will remain a bit longer for your sake,” though he longs to depart and be with Christ. It would be a pity for you to waste your life in anything else but being filled with the Holy Spirit, “*fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*,”[[56]](#footnote-57) and prepared for the revelation of the kingdom of heaven. Every moment that passes has its value, and it would be a pity for you to waste your time in vain issues; the following poetry would apply:

Your time is wasted and vanished

You hid your treasure in the dirt

From lack of oil your lantern has extinguished

And you remain in the dark.[[57]](#footnote-58)

 Therefore, St. Paul tells the Corinthians, “*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God… For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s*.”[[58]](#footnote-59) Do not allow your fast to become a stumbling block or offense to you or to another person. Do not allow your spiritual exercises to become a problem in the monastery. “*Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*.”[[59]](#footnote-60)

**Luminaries:**

 Visitors come to the monastery eager to see joyous luminous saints. They imagine that people who spend their lives in prayer and worship, night and day, are filled within with spiritual transparency and light.[[60]](#footnote-61) They want to see the joy and peace that they are unable to find in the world. You might object, “Will we display our lives for people to gaze at us or benefit from us?” They see you either way. So, it is better that they see you in a life of grace and blessing, rather than seeing you in a state of depression and despondency; otherwise, when leaving, they will puzzle, saying to themselves, “Guess we were deceived in our impression of life with our Lord.” You do not see them intentionally; it comes by circumstances, so do not allow anything to become a problem; be a simple person.

 Those who belong to our Lord are usually easy-going people because Christ is always present in their lives; therefore, there are never any complications. Take all issues with simplicity, having no conflicts with anyone. It is true that you are fighting against the devils in the spiritual warfare, but the humans around you are companions along the way; you could say, “May our Lord aid us and them.” This is why I say to not allow even fasts, spiritual exercises, or canons to become a problem in your relationships with each other. These are all issues that could pass with love, as the Holy Bible says, “*Let all that you do be done with love*.”[[61]](#footnote-62) We have no time to waste being bothered because we have a more excellent spiritual goal.

 St. Paul also said, “*Let all things be done decently and in order*.”[[62]](#footnote-63) Therefore, in simplicity we could organize all matters, as St. Paul also said, “*The rest I will set in order when I come*.”[[63]](#footnote-64) Whatever needs organization, we can set in order.

**I Do Not Know:**

 If someone asks you a question and you know the answer, but you say, “I do not know,” is this considered lying? This is not right. You could change the question into an inquiry. You could say, “I do not try to meddle in these issues,” or you could generalize the issue. One time the chief priests asked our Lord:

*By what authority are You doing these things? ...you tell Me… The baptism of John -- where was it from? From heaven or from men? And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.” So they answered Jesus and said, “We do not know.” And He said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things*.”[[64]](#footnote-65)

He wanted to embarrass them before the people. He is saying, “If you say you do not know who sent John, to whom all the people confessed, then you do not deserve for me to tell you who sent me.” This is one incident.

 In another incident they asked Him, “*Shall we pay [taxes], or shall we not pay*?”[[65]](#footnote-66) Had He told them to pay, they would have claimed that He was encouraging the imperialists rob the funds of the nation, because the tax went to the imperialists and not to the national ruler. Had He said not to give, they would have claimed that He was encouraging the people against the imperialism, causing an insurrection, and thus, fall into the hands of the Romans. He said, “*Bring Me a denarius*.”[[66]](#footnote-67) The denarius was foreign currency and not national currency, since the land was colonized. They showed him a denarius, and Caesar was on it. He asked them, “‘*Whose image and inscription is this?’ They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s*.’”[[67]](#footnote-68) He did not tell them whether to pay the tax or not. Someone might have had national currency (not having Caesar’s image), perhaps one who had gold coins before Caesar came to power, and another might have sheep but not have money. He neither told them to give or not to give; He said, “*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s*.” Whatever comes out to Caesar is Caesar’s and whatever comes out to God is God’s, He neither coerced them to pay or not to pay. What role does wisdom play here! This is what is called for: how He answered wisely when they tried to trap Him with one word, and were unable.

 When Abba Joseph was questioned, he responded that he did not know, and they said to him, “‘Indeed, Abba Joseph has found the way, for he has said: ‘I do not know.’”[[68]](#footnote-69) This “I do not know” does not bear the same intent as the other “I do not know.” Saying “I do not know” specific news is considered lying, if I do know them. But his answer means “I do not know,” in the sense that, to teach amid the fathers, to speak among the elders, my knowledge is less than those present. They were not asking him about the news, they were asking him for spiritual benefit, a meditation, a word, or a solution to a theological issue. He wanted to say, “What is my knowledge compared to you?” One to whom they asked, “How could a person be filled by the Holy Spirit,” answered, “I do not know. Whatever I say will be nothing compared to St. Anthony. What St. Anthony might say would fill those present with the Holy Spirit, but what I would say would not move them an inch.” “I do not know” here is not denying the knowledge of some news, or a certain event, but that he does not know how to explain by the same degree that the elders present could. He does not know how to say a beneficial word. He means, “The elders present could do this, but what is my experience that I should offer a beneficial word?”

*All glory and honor is due to our God forevermore. Amen.*

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1. (The New King James Version 1982), Jn 1:1-5. All Biblical References are from the New King James Version (NKJV), unless otherwise stated. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Gen 1:1-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. (H and H 2007), 267. This is taken from the Anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of Saint Gregory. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Jn 1:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Jn 8:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Jn 1:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. (H and H 2007), 267. This is taken from the Anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of Saint Gregory. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Mt 4:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Jn 1:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. 2 Pt 1:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. (The Holy Psalmody 1990), 2. This is taken from the Beginning of the Midnight Praises. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Jn 3:19-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Saint Isidore (Budge 2008),Vol. II, 143 {560}; cf. (Ward, Wisdom 1997), 7-8 {32}; (Beni-Suef Publication Committee 1977), 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Eph 5:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Zeph 1:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. **Invalid source specified.**, Ps 139:23-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Phil 2:14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. (The Holy Psalmody 1990), 2. This is taken from the Beginning of the Midnight Praises. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. 1 Jn 1:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. 1 Tim 6:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Ps 104:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Jn 8:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Mt 5:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Jn 15:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. (Agpia: The prayer book of the seven canonical hours 1997), Third Hour Triparia, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Phil 2:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Ps 30:9, 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Phile 1:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Heb 12:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Mt 13:43. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. 2 Pt 1:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Mt 7:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Ecc 12:1-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Ps 119:84. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Ps 119:87. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Ps 13:2, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Mt 25:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Lk 16:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Gal 5:22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Rom 12:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Mt 7:22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. (H and H 2007), 272. This is taken from the Trisagion of the Divine Liturgy of Saint Gregory. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. 1 Cor 4:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Phil 3:4-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. John Climacus, cf. (Payne 1982), 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Phil 1:21, Act 17:28. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Phil 3:12-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Phil 4:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. 2 Cor 1:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Phil 3:8-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Saint Barsanuphius (Beni-Suef Publication Committee 1977), 160, 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Mt 5:48. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Phil 4:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. Phil 1:23. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. Phil 1:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Rom 12:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. (Bek 1972), 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. 1 Cor 10:31, 6:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. Phil 2:14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. Here, transparency means a person’s spirit supersedes the body, such that one’s spirit is able to see through into the other person’s spirit. For light, again, it is an enlightenment of the mind and whole being. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. 1 Cor 16:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. 1 Cor 14:40. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. 1 Cor 11:34. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. Mt 21:23-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. Mk 12:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. Mk 12:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. Mk 12:16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. Abba Joseph (Ward, Sayings 1984), 4 {17}. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)