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**THE LIFE OF FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN MONASTICISM**

March 11, 1994

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

**The First Longings for Monasticism:**

A person who leaves the world and chooses the way of monasticism has precisely chosen to find comfort and joy in being with God. This one has chosen retreat, the life of prayer and praising, and freedom from all worldly preoccupations as the source of true joy, chanting along: “*O God… my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory*.”[[1]](#footnote-2) One’s soul longs for God “*as the deer pants for the water brooks*.”[[2]](#footnote-3) You feel that the world detains and distracts you; you want nothing to deter you from being with God. You chose the way of monasticism as a means of drawing closer to God, fellowship with Him, and loving Him; in order to grow in the life of virtue; to grow in the life of being filled with the Holy Spirit; to intensify your longings for the kingdom of heaven, eternal life, and to taste a surety of the kingdom; in order to forget everything in the world and remember God only. Whenever you think of Him, God’s love inflames your heart even more.

**Fulfilling the Commandments:**

The way of monasticism is the way which assures within you the confidence that you are walking on the path leading to the kingdom of heaven; to you it is the way to fulfill the commandments of God – the perfection of fulfilling the commandments. You say: *“[Lord] Your testimonies are my meditation… Your law is my delight… Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path… Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You*.”[[3]](#footnote-4) You feel that sometimes the world weakens your ability to hear the voice of God, pressuring and detaining your departure on the way to fulfilling the commandments. God’s commandments are the desire of your heart, the source of your life, and a sign of your love, because the Lord Christ said: “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me*.”[[4]](#footnote-5) This person could never bear being put into a situation of having to break God’s commandments. This person left the world to more perfectly fulfill the commandments.

You did not leave the world because you wanted to become a monastic, to put on the monastic garb, or to join a monastic community, but rather you left the world in order to find God in the monastery, and to find the commandments of Christ active in your life. One says, “*[Lord] cursed [are those] who stray from Your commandments*.”[[5]](#footnote-6) “Who can stray from Your commandments? I am unable!” “*Blessed are the undefiled in the way*.”[[6]](#footnote-7) “I want to walk without fault so as to be found undefiled.” “*How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word*.”[[7]](#footnote-8) “How can I be undefiled unless I keep Your word, Your laws, and Your commandments.” “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me… I will love him and manifest Myself to him*.”[[8]](#footnote-9) Fellowship with God begins here.

How can you see God in your life, except by keeping God’s commandments? How could the Lord Christ manifest Himself to one who breaks His commandments? Asceticism? It cannot be a means leading to seeing the Lord Christ if it is practiced in a way that breaks the commandments. Many people thought asceticism is what could lead them to Christ, but they suffered and all their work was in vain. Take for example the people of Israel: they thought the literal law would lead the way, but St. Paul the Apostle lamented over them: “*Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*.”[[9]](#footnote-10) On the spiritual path, a person has to know that in order to see Christ, one has to fulfill His commandments: “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me… I will love him and manifest Myself to him*.”[[10]](#footnote-11)

**The Commandment to Love:**

One of God’s commandments is the commandment to love: “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*”[[11]](#footnote-12) — a love that “*bears all things… endures all things*.”[[12]](#footnote-13) A person who left the world and came to spend life in the monastery is expected to walk in the way of love and fulfill the commandments of God. This is a love that seeks the salvation of others; a love that… “*Does not seek its own*,”[[13]](#footnote-14) but also seeks that of others; and a love that “*suffers long and is kind*.”[[14]](#footnote-15) “*Love will cover a multitude of sins*.”[[15]](#footnote-16) This is why the person living in the monastery, in order to walk in the path of our Lord, must cover the sins of others, be patient with them, bear with their weaknesses, and accept self-blame before blaming others; because there is nothing better than for a person “always to accuse himself.”[[16]](#footnote-17) One sees others through the eyes of hope – a love that “*hopes all things*.”[[17]](#footnote-18) One who wants to live in fellowship with our Lord starts by fulfilling the commandments, thereafter, the Lord Christ begins to manifest Himself in your life, and you begin to be a radiating icon of the Lord Christ. If you sit in your cell, you are filled with the joy of the Spirit, because the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. If you walk in the commandment of love, you will be filled with joy, and your heart will overflow with the peace of God – “*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding*.”[[18]](#footnote-19)

**Eucharistic Fellowship:**

While you sit in the cell, you feel the joys of the heavenlies, befriend the angels, and the angels and saints rejoice at your praises, as the Bible says, “*The hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother*.”[[19]](#footnote-20) A tongue which God fills with praise is also a tongue which offers words of love, gentleness, and meekness, as the Song of Solomon says: “*Your lips, O my spouse, drip as the honeycomb*”[[20]](#footnote-21); a tongue which brings forth words like honeycomb brings joy to God’s heart and the saints’ hearts. People benefit from your words, lifestyle, and behavior. When you stand to pray before God, God says to this soul, “*Let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet*”; this is a person whose voice God loves to hear, and whose face He loves to see, “*Let me see your face*.”[[21]](#footnote-22)

In the cell, you feel the presence of God, who says: “*I will love him and manifest Myself to him… We will come to him and make Our home with him… I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me*.”[[22]](#footnote-23) What is this Dinner with Christ? What does it look like? For a person invited by Christ to dinner what is the main course? Primarily and foremost, the Eucharistic mystery – the Lord’s Supper, His Flesh and Blood – this is undoubtedly ultimate unity with Christ.

**The Groom’s Supper:**

One who lives the life of fulfilling the commandments by partaking of the Lord’s Flesh and Blood knows that this is the Supper of the Groom offered to the bride — “The living bread which came down from heaven,” the culmination of the Supper— but, besides this, the Lord Christ can have a continual presence in the cell, serving His Supper and satisfying the soul with His spiritual goods. He nourishes it with knowledge, not mental knowledge which ignites vanity and pride in the soul, but, as we say in the Liturgy: “You have given to me learning of Your knowledge. You have manifested to me the tree of life.”[[23]](#footnote-24) Those who eat of the tree of life do not die. He reveals His intentions, Economy, Divine Mysteries, and also His gifts: “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights*.”[[24]](#footnote-25) When He says, “*I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me*,”[[25]](#footnote-26) He is like one who prepares an appetizing banquet, asking, “What would you like today? Do you want to be comforted and experience the delight of praises and psalms? I will give them to you. Do you want to rejoice with the Psalmody (Midnight praises)? So be it. Do you want to feel the power of the words of the Holy Bible; to see God of the Old Testament and God of the New Testament; to hear His voice as He walks in Paradise just as Adam heard Him; and to see God walking through the two testaments proclaiming His intentions for man, as, ‘*The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham… and said to him, ‘Walk before Me and be blameless*’’”[[26]](#footnote-27)?

**An Open Door in Heaven:**

One relives God’s relationship with humans from beginning to end as if truly Abraham, Isaac, Jacob… Enoch, Elijah, James, John, and Peter; one relives all these personalities through our Lord who dealt with humans – a deep fellowship with an expanding maturing understanding, increasing in depth and strength over the years.

When St. John says in the Revelation, “*I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*,”[[27]](#footnote-28) one stands before this verse saying, “When John was in the Spirit he saw all this and dined at the Banquet which he saw.” He went to witness the mysteries of eternal life. Then, he continues: “*After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne*.”[[28]](#footnote-29) A door standing open in heaven: from the door of the cell to the door of heaven. One who wants to live in fellowship with our Lord will find many open doors, not necessarily through visions (as those who are attracted to such), but the heart itself reaches toward eternity, heavenly lights are poured into it, and our Lord comforts the person as a mother comforts her child. Your feeling that God is with you makes you carefree and unafraid of anything; your whole life is in the hand of God, as the Lord Christ said, “*Nothing shall by any means hurt you*.”[[29]](#footnote-30)

The life of fellowship with God does not come through wars and fights, but comes from the hand of God as a gift which one receives, and therefore chants: “*May He grant you according to your heart’s desire, and fulfill all your purpose*.”[[30]](#footnote-31) So, as long as you yearn for God, saying, “Lord my life is in Your hands, You guide it,” you take from God’s hand. But you must be faithful, because “*He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much*.”[[31]](#footnote-32) It does not come by grief, force, or struggle, but comes as a good gift coming down from above; you receive it from God’s hand.

**The Virgin as an Example of Fellowship with God:**

The Virgin was sitting in her room in peace and fellowship with God, and the angel came in saying to her, “*Hail, full of grace*,”[[32]](#footnote-33) and began to speak to her of the great gift God would give her. She lived her whole life being led by God’s voice, God’s Spirit, and God’s angel, saying, “*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word*,”[[33]](#footnote-34) even to Golgotha, the joys of Resurrection, the tongues of fire, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Spirit lifts us up to the mountains for the grace of God to be poured out into us abundantly, but there is a condition: we have to place our lives in the hands of the Almighty. When we take the life of the Virgin and see how it began and where it ended, we find a long full history, full of different stages of life: from Nazareth, to Bethlehem, to Mount Zion, going down to Egypt, returning to Golgotha, and at the mount of Resurrection – amazing stopping points – up and down, light and dark. Out of all these stages, who could ultimately bring about this extraordinary symphony, but our Lord alone!

You have the greatest opportunity to live these events and meanings, and are the most capable ones of enjoying the life of fellowship with God. So, have you benefited from being in the monastery? Have you benefited from your exodus into the wilderness? This is the question! If you remember this way, if you remember the reason you left the world, and if you attain these valuable promises and these great gifts, then, remember my weakness in your prayers.

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1. (The New King James Version 1982), Ps 63:1-2. All Biblical References are from the New King James Version (NKJV), unless otherwise stated. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ps 42:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Ps 119: 99, 77, 105, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Jn 14:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ps 119:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Ps 119:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Ps 119:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Jn 14:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Rom 10:1-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Jn 14:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Jn 13:34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. 1 Cor 13:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. 1 Cor 13:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. 1 Cor 13:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. 1 Pt 4:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Abba Poemen (Ward 1984), 181 {98}. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. 1 Cor 13:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Phil 4:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Philm 1:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Son 4:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Son 2:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Jn 14: 21, 23; Rev 3:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. (H and H 2007), 272. This is taken from the Trisagion of the Divine Liturgy of Saint Gregory. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Jam 1:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Rev 3:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Acts 7:2; Gen 17:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Rev 1:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Rev 4:1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Lk 10:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Ps 20:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Lk 16: 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. (The Douay-Rheims American Edition 1899), Lk 1:18. The Douay-Rheims American Version is used for consistency with the Arabic. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Lk 1:38. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)