

ALL CHRISTIANS MUST PRAY CEASELESSLY (PART 3)

—by St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite—

Furthermore, the righteous and saintly Evdokimos who lived in Constantinople spent his days within the royal palace, handling various issues. He interacted with the emperor and the rulers of the palace daily, and he had to deal with many responsibilities and distractions. Despite all this, he held on to noetic prayer like an inseparable companion, as Symeon the Translator relates in his biography. Living within the world and surrounded by worldly distractions, this blessed man truly lived an angelic and supernatural life, and he was thus granted by God to have a blessed and divine end to his life.¹ There are countless other people as well who lived in society and yet were entirely devoted to this noetic and life-saving prayer, as mentioned in various historical accounts.

Therefore my fellow Christians, I, along with the divine Saint John Chrysostom, make the following appeal to you, for the salvation of your souls: Do not be indifferent to this work of prayer. Emulate the people whom we have mentioned, and follow their example as much as possible. This may seem difficult in the beginning; but be certain and assured, from the almighty God Himself, that the very name of our Lord Jesus Christ (when it is invoked daily and ceaselessly by us) will make all the difficulties easy. As time goes on, once we grow accustomed to this prayer and we taste its sweetness, we will come to know through personal experience that it is neither impossible nor difficult; on the contrary, will see that it is both possible and easy. This is why the divine Saint Paul, who knew better than us the great benefit of prayer, commands us to pray ceaselessly (**1 Th. 5:17**). He certainly would never have advised us to do this if it was difficult or impossible. In such an instance, we would not be able to carry out this directive, and, consequently, we would necessarily disobey, transgress his commandment, and be worthy of condemnation.

However, when he advised us to pray ceaselessly, his intent was for us to pray with our mind—something that we are always able to do. For when we are working or walking or sitting or eating or drinking, we can continuously pray and carry out noetic prayer with our mind—which is truly pleasing to God. We can work with our body and pray with our mind. Our external being can serve and perform all types of physical labor, while our internal person can be completely

¹ St. Evdokimos is commemorated on July 31st.

devoted to the worship of God, without ceasing from this spiritual work of noetic prayer. This is what the God-man Jesus Christ also commands us in His Holy Gospel: **“When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray in secret to your Father” (Mt. 6:6)**. Our body serves as the room of the soul, and our five senses are the windows. The soul enters into its room when the mind ceases wandering about aimlessly preoccupied with the things of the world, and it remains within our heart. Likewise, our senses are closed and remain shut when we do not permit them to become fixated on the material and visible things of this world. In this manner, our mind remains free of every sinful and worldly preoccupation, and through hidden and noetic prayer we are united with our God and Father. Then, says the Lord, **“Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Mt. 6:6)**.

God, Who knows all things, sees the noetic prayer you offer to Him in secret, and He will reward you with noticeable and remarkable gifts; for this is the true and perfect prayer that fills the soul with divine grace and spiritual awards. The longer a fragrant myrrh remains sealed within a container, the more fragrant the container becomes. It is similar with prayer. The longer and more often you confine the prayer of Jesus within your heart, the more it will fill you with divine grace. Blessed and fortunate are they who become accustomed to this heavenly work because with this prayer they will overcome every temptation of the evil demons, just as David vanquished haughty Goliath (**1 Kg. 17:51**). With this prayer they are able to extinguish the unruly desires of the flesh, just as the three youths extinguished the flames of the furnace (**Dan. 25:26**). With this work of noetic prayer they pacify the passions, just as Daniel tamed the wild lions (**Dan. 6:18**). With this prayer they bring the dew of the Holy Spirit into their hearts, just as the prophet Elijah brought rain down upon the Carmile mountain (**3 Kg. 18:45**). This noetic prayer is what ascends to the very throne of God, and it is stored within golden vessels so that it may be offered as incense to the Lord, as Saint John the Theologian states in the book of Revelation: **“And the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Rev. 5:8)**. This noetic prayer is a light that perpetually illuminates man’s soul and sets ablaze man’s heart with the flames of God’s love. It is a chain that keeps man securely united with God.

O, what unsurpassable grace noetic prayer contains! This prayer allows man to always converse with God. What a truly extraordinary and exceptional privilege! Someone may be amongst other people in body and simultaneously with God in spirit! The angels do not have a physical voice; rather, they offer unceasing praise and doxology to God with their minds. Therefore, dear reader,

when you enter into your room and shut the door (that is, when your mind does not roam around freely but enters and remains within your heart), and when your senses are securely locked (so they are not focused on the material things of this present world), and when you persistently pray with your mind in this manner, you then become similar to the holy angels, and your Father Who sees your hidden prayer, which you offer to Him secretly within your heart, will repay you with magnificent spiritual gifts in the open.

But, what greater honor is there or what more can one ask for than to always be, as we have already mentioned, next to God noetically and to speak with Him ceaselessly? Without Him no person can be blessed and fortunate, neither in this life nor in the next life to come.