

## CONCERNING UNGRATEFULNESS

—from the book *The Salvation of Sinners*—

If a drop of water that continuously drips upon a hard rock eventually erodes it over time, how is it possible for the rivers of graces and blessings that God pours upon us not to soften our hearts? If steel, when it is placed in a fire, becomes red hot and indistinguishable from the fire on account of its contact with it, how is it possible for our hearts not to ignite and be set ablaze as they are ceaselessly enveloped with God's divine love? How is it possible for us ungrateful ones to disregard such a Lord and transgress His commandments?

When the immoral and shameless wife of Potiphar attempted to entice the all-comely Joseph to sin, Joseph replied in this manner: **“My lord has committed all he has to my hand. ... except for you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness?” (Gn. 39:8-9)**. Take note how he did not say that it was improper, but that he was not able to do such a thing. In this manner, he indicated that special benefactions not only strip us of the desire but even of the ability to harm our benefactor. They bind a person and immobilize his body parts in such a way that he is no longer able to harm or in any way wrong his benefactor. If all the help and assistance this foreign master had provided to Joseph were worthy of gratitude, how much more deserving of our gratefulness are the graces and gifts that our almighty Lord has given to us? Potiphar provided Joseph with a finite amount of wealth. God granted us the entire world: the sky, the earth, the sun, the ocean, the rivers, the fish, the animals, the birds, and everything else that exists. He created everything for our own benefit and delight. If we are bound by such a plethora of blessings and gifts, how then can we dare to sadden such a charitable and generous Benefactor?

O how senseless we are! If someone were to give us something of great value, for example a piece of property, or a yacht, or a building that was worth millions of dollars, wouldn't we feel obligated to that person for the rest of our life? Wouldn't we feel indebted to him, wouldn't we love him and happily do anything he asked of us? Yes, we certainly would! We have oftentimes seen this take place with our own eyes. If on account of such gifts we show such gratitude

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and loyalty to another human being, why do we not act in the same way toward our big-hearted and magnanimous Benefactor, the Creator of all things, Who has granted to us all these innumerable blessings? We are indeed more insensitive than the wild animals! How is it that we cannot sense and recognize our ungratefulness? What lion or beast ever dared to harm its benefactor?

In the life of Saint Gerasimos of Jordan, who is commemorated on March 4th, it is recorded that the Saint once found a lion that had a sharp piece of wood stuck in its paw. Because the Saint removed the fragment and cleaned the wound, henceforth not only did this lion never part from him, but it also obeyed him throughout the rest of its life. The Saint had appointed this lion to guard his the monastery's donkey. Each day the lion would lead the donkey to a pasture and watch over it as it grazed, and in the evening he would guide it back to the monastery. One day, a group of merchants passing through the area found a way to steal the donkey. When the lion returned to the Saint that evening without the donkey, the Saint assumed that the lion had eaten it, and so he commanded the lion to take on the donkey's job of carrying water from the well to the monastery every day. Unbelievable as it may sound, the lion did not resist, it did not become aggressive, it did not disobey! Rather, it patiently and tamely allowed the Saint's disciple to load it with water, which it would carry back to the monastery for an entire year. Until one day, as the lion was making its way to the well, this group of merchants happened to be in the area again. The lion immediately recognized the donkey, and straightaway charged toward them; he took the rope (to which the donkey was tied) in his mouth and led the donkey to Saint Gerasimos. Upon seeing this, the Saint forgave the lion and told him that he was free to go wherever he pleased. The lion gratefully bowed its head and departed. But even then it did not forget the Saint, but it would continue to go back to him every eight days and prostrate itself before him. After Saint Gerasimos fell asleep in the Lord, the next time the lion showed up looking for him, the Saint's disciple told the lion that his elder had passed away and pointed at his burial site. The lion then proceeded to the grave, where it groaned and lamented as if it were a human being. Finally, letting out a loud roar, it collapsed and died upon the grave.