

Step 1

ON RENUNCIATION OF LIFE

When writing to the servants of God, one should begin with our God and King Himself, the good, the supremely good, the all-good. Of all created and rational beings, endowed with the dignity of free will, some are friends of God, some are His true servants, some are useless servants (cf. Luke 17:10), some are entirely estranged, and there are some who, for all their weakness, take their stand against Him. We simple people assume that His friends, O holy Father, are properly speaking those intelligent and bodiless beings who surround Him. His true servants are all those who have done and are doing His will without hesitation or pause. His useless servants are those who think of themselves as having been worthy of the gift of baptism, but have not at all guarded their covenant with Him; while, it seems to us, the strangers from God, His opponents, are the unbelievers or heretics. His enemies are those who not only contravene and repudiate the commands of the Lord, but make stern war against all who obey Him.

Each of the above has his own special character and is deserving of fitting analysis. But for ignorant people like ourselves there is nothing to be gained by investigating these now. So, then, with unquestioning obedience let us reach out our unworthy hand to the true servants of God, to those who devoutly urge us on and in faith compel us by their commands. Let us make a treatise, with their knowledge as the implement of writing, a pen dipped in their subdued yet

glorious humility, applied to the smooth white parchments of their hearts, or rather resting on the tablets of the spirit. Let us write on it divine words, or rather seeds,¹ and let us begin like this.

God is the life of all free beings. He is the salvation of all, of believers or unbelievers, of the just or the unjust, of the pious or the impious, of those freed from the passions or caught up in them, of monks or those living in the world, of the educated or the illiterate, of the healthy or the sick, of the young or the very old. He is like the outpouring of light, the glimpse of the sun, or the changes of the weather, which are the same for everyone without exception. "For God is no respecter of persons" (Rom. 2:11). An impious man is a rational being, one that must die, who willingly runs away from life, and refuses to believe in the existence of his own everlasting Creator. A transgressor is someone who observes the divine law only in his own depraved fashion and holds on to heretical belief in opposition to God. A Christian is an imitator of Christ in thought, word and deed, as far as this is humanly possible, and he believes rightly and blamelessly in the Holy Trinity. A friend of God is the one who lives in communion with all that is natural and free from sin and who does not neglect to do what good he can. The self-controlled man strives with all his might amidst the trials, the snares, and the noise of the world, to be like someone who rises above them. The monk finds himself in an earthly and defiled body, but pushes himself into the rank and status of the incorporeal angels. The monk clings only to the commandments and words of God in every season and place and matter. The monk is ever embattled with what he is, and he is the unfailing warder of his senses. The monk has a body made holy, a tongue purified, a mind enlightened. Asleep or awake, the monk is a soul pained by the constant remembrance of death. Withdrawal from the world is a willing hatred of all that is materially prized, a denial of nature for the sake of what is above nature.

All this is done by those who willingly turn from the things of this life, either for the sake of the coming kingdom, or because of the number of their sins, or on account of their love of God. Without such objectives the denial of the world would make no sense. God who judges the contest stands waiting to see how it ends for the one who has taken on this race.

The man turning away from the world in order to shake off the

1. The phrase "or rather seeds" only occurs in some texts.

burden of his sins should imitate those who sit by the tombs outside the city. Let him not desist from ardent raging tears, from the wordless moans of the heart, until he sees Jesus Himself coming to roll back the rock of hardness² off him, to free the mind, that Lazarus of ours, from the bonds of sin, to say to His ministering angels, "Loose him from his passions and let him go to blessed dispassion."³ If it is not done thus, then it is all for nothing.

Those of us who wish to get away from Egypt, to escape from Pharaoh, need some Moses to be our intermediary with God, to stand between action and contemplation, and stretch out his arms to God, that those led by him may cross the sea of sin and put to flight the Amalek of the passions.⁴ Those who have given themselves up to God but imagine that they can go forward without a leader are surely deceiving themselves. The fugitives from Egypt had Moses, while those escaping from Sodom had an angel for a leader. The former are like those who heal the passions of the soul by the care of doctors; they are the ones who have come out of Egypt. The latter long to shed the uncleanness of the wretched body, for which reason they need an angel or the help of some like being. We must have someone very skilled, a doctor, for our septic wounds.

Violence (cf. Matt. 11:12) and unending pain are the lot of those who aim to ascend to heaven with the body, and this especially at the early stages of the enterprise, when our pleasure-loving disposition and our unfeeling hearts must travel through overwhelming grief toward the love of God and holiness. It is hard, truly hard. There has to be an abundance of invisible bitterness, especially for the careless, until our mind, that cur sniffing around the meat market and reveling in the uproar, is brought through simplicity, deep freedom from anger and diligence to a love of holiness and guidance. Yet full of pas-

2. GK *poroseos*. Rader's text has *pyroseos*, "of burning."

3. Throughout this work "dispassion" translates the Gk *apatheia*. For St. John Climacus dispassion is the denial of the passions, not merely in a negative way by ascetic discipline, but by redirecting the natural impulses of the soul and body toward their proper goal. See the Preface, p. 32.

4. John is referring to Exod. 17:11-13 and applying to it an allegorical interpretation. In the battle against the Amalekites (the passions) the Israelites (souls under a spiritual director) prevailed as long as the arms of Moses (the guide) were held raised in prayer by Hur (action) on one side and Aaron (contemplation) on the other. Action (*praxis*) is the ascetic struggle to practice the virtues and overcome the passions. It is the necessary foundation for contemplation (*theoria*), which is the direct apprehension or vision of God by the intellect.

sions and weakness as we are, let us take heart and let us in total confidence carry to Christ in our right hand and confess to Him our helplessness and our fragility. We will carry away more help than we deserve, if only we constantly push ourselves down into the depths of humility.

Let all those coming to this marvelous, tough, and painful—though also easy—contest leap, as it were, into a fire, so that a non-material flame may take up residence within them. But let each one test himself, draw food and drink from the bread of pain and the cup of weeping, lest he march himself to judgment.

If all are not saved who have been baptized, I will pass in silence over what follows.⁵

But to secure a rocklike foundation, those with a mind for the religious life will turn away from everything, will despise everything, will ridicule everything, will shake off everything. Innocence, abstinence, temperance—these make a fine thrice-firm foundation. Let all infants in Christ begin with these, taking real infants as their example; for among children no evil is found, nothing deceitful, no insatiable greed or gluttony, no flaming lust, but it seems that as you feed them more, they grow in strength until at last they come upon passion.

It is detestable and dangerous for a wrestler to be slack at the start of a contest, thereby giving proof of his impending defeat to everyone. Let us have a firm beginning to our religious life, for this will help us if a certain slackness comes later. A bold and eager soul will be spurred on by the memory of its first zeal and new wings can thus be obtained.

When the soul betrays itself, when that initial happy warmth grows cold, the reasons for such a loss ought to be carefully sought and, once found, ought to be combated with all possible zeal, for the initial fervor has to turn back through that same gate through which it had slipped away. The man who renounces the world because of fear is like burning incense, which begins with fragrance and ends in smoke. The man who leaves the world in hopes of a reward is like the millstone that always turns around on the same axis. But the man who leaves the world for love of God has taken fire from the start, and like fire set to fuel, it soon creates a conflagration.

5. I.e., if not all the baptized are saved, not all monks will reach their goal.

Some people when they build a house place bricks on top of rocks. Others raise columns up from the ground. Others still, when taking a walk, go slowly for a while, thus giving sinews and joints a warming up, and then stride out vigorously. Let the perceptive mind understand this analogy. Let us run our race eagerly as if summoned to it by our God and King. Our time is short. Let us not be found barren on the day of death and perish of hunger. Instead let us please the Lord as soldiers please the emperor; for at the end of the campaign we must give a good account of ourselves. We should be afraid of God in the way we fear wild beasts. I have seen men go out to plunder, having no fear of God but being brought up short somewhere at the sound of dogs, an effect that fear of God could not achieve in them.

We should love the Lord as we do our friends. Many a time I have seen people bring grief to God, without being bothered about it, and I have seen these very same people resort to every device, plan, pressure, plea from themselves and their friends, and every gift, simply to restore an old relationship upset by some minor grievance.

At the beginning of our religious life, we cultivate the virtues, and we do so with toil and difficulty. Progressing a little, we then lose our sense of grief or retain very little of it. But when our mortal intelligence turns to zeal and is mastered by it, then we work with full joy, determination, desire, and a holy flame.

All praise to those who from the beginning keep the commandments of God, and do so gladly and eagerly; and greatly to be pitied are those who after a long time in the ascetic life still keep them with great labor if they keep them at all. And let us not be horrified at or judge harshly those who renounce the religious life because of external circumstances. I have seen some men run away and accidentally meet the emperor, tarry with him, go to live in his palace, and take food with him. I have watched seed that accidentally fell into the ground bear much fruit again and again, though the opposite has also happened. I have seen someone go to a doctor for one kind of problem, and, because of that doctor's skill, be treated with an astringent and be cured of failing eyesight, for it often happens that very definite and lasting results emerge through chance rather than through the workings of prescience and planning. So let no one tell me that he is unfit for the monastic life because of the weight and number of his misdeeds, or that because of his addiction to pleasure he must be excused for remaining stuck in his sin. The more the putrefaction, the

greater the need for treatment, if the uncleanness is to be done away with, for the healthy do not make their way to the doctor's surgery.

In this world when an emperor summons us to obedience, we leave everything aside and answer the call at once without delays or hanging back or excuses. We had better be careful then not to refuse, through laziness or inertia, the call to the heavenly life in the service of the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the God of gods. Let us not find ourselves unable to defend ourselves at the great tribunal of judgment. Someone caught up in the affairs of the world can make progress, if he is determined. But it is not easy. Those bearing chains can still walk. But they often stumble and are thereby injured. The man who is unmarried and in the world, for all that he may be burdened, can nevertheless make haste toward the monastic life. But the married man is like someone chained hand and foot.⁶

Some people living carelessly in the world put a question to me: "How can we who are married and living amid public cares aspire to the monastic life?"

I answered: "Do whatever good you may. Speak evil of no one. Rob no one. Tell no lie. Despise no one and carry no hate. Do not separate yourself from the church assemblies.⁷ Show compassion to the needy. Do not be a cause of scandal to anyone. Stay away from the bed of another, and be satisfied with what your own wives can provide you. If you do all this, you will not be far from the kingdom of heaven."

Let us hasten with joy and trepidation to the noble contest and with no fear of our enemies. They are themselves unseen but they can look at the appearance of our soul. If they are really to see our spirits bowed down by fear, then indeed they will make a harsher sally against us, knowing how much we tremble. Let us courageously arm ourselves against them. No one goes to battle against a plucky fighter.

The Lord has wisely eased the struggles of novices, lest they be driven back into the world during their first battles. So then rejoice always in the Lord, all you servants of God. Recognize this first sign of the Lord's love. It is He Who has summoned you. He has often been known to act in the following way: when He sees courageous

6. Some versions add: "so when he wants to run he cannot."

7. Gk *ton synaxeon*. The synaxis was an assembly in church for the Office or the Eucharist. Here lay people are being told that they must not be absent from the weekly celebration of the Eucharist.

souls He permits them to be embattled from the very beginning, in order the sooner to reward them.

The Lord has concealed from those in the world the tough, but fine, nature of this struggle. Indeed, if people really understood it, no one would renounce the world. Still, offer your labors gladly to Christ in your youth and He will make your old age happy with abundant goodness.⁸ The things which they have gathered in their youth will come to the support and encouragement of those worn down by age, so we should toil zealously when we are young and run our course with serious hearts. Death can come at any time, and we have countless hidden enemies—evil enemies, harsh, deceitful, wicked enemies with fire in their hands, wishing to set the Lord's temple alight with the flame that is in it. These enemies are powerful, unsleeping, incorporeal and unseen. No novice should heed the devilish words of his foes as they murmur: "Do not wear out your body, in case you fall prey to disease and weakness." Hardly anyone can be found in this day and age willing to bring low the body, although they may deny it the pleasure of abundant food. The aim of this demon is to make our entrance into the stadium weak and lethargic, and a fitting end will follow this beginning.

The real servants of Christ, using the help of spiritual fathers and also their own self-understanding, will make every effort to select a place, a way of life, an abode, and the exercises that suit them. Community life is not for everyone, because of gluttonous tendencies, and the solitary life is not for everybody, on account of the tendency to anger. Let each seek out the most appropriate way.

All monastic life may be said to take one of three forms. There is the road of withdrawal and solitude for the spiritual athlete; there is the life of stillness⁹ shared with one or two others; there is the practice of living patiently in community. "Turn neither to right nor left," says Ecclesiastes (Prov. 4:27) but rather follow the royal way. The second of the three ways is said to be suitable for many people.

8. Gk *agatbeias*, a hapax legomenon; the HTM reading is "dispassion," *apatheias*.

9. Stillness (*besychia*) is a deep interior peace attained by those who practice the constant remembrance of God. It is the subject of Step 27. Although stillness is not impossible for monks living in community, solitude or near solitude is most conducive to it. According to the context, therefore, *besychia* is sometimes translated as "solitude." Stillness is equivalent to contemplation, for "he who has achieved stillness has arrived at the very center of the mysteries" (27 [1100C], p. 264). See the Preface, pp. 50–53.

JOHN CLIMACUS

"Woe to the man living alone when he falls into despondency¹⁰ or sleepiness, carelessness or despair, for then he has no one among men to lift him up." This is what Ecclesiastes says (Eccles. 4:10), and the Lord says: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:20).

Who, then, is the faithful and wise monk? It is the man who has kept unquenched the warmth of his vocation, who adds fire each day to fire, fervor to fervor, zeal to zeal, love to love, and this to the end of his life.

This is the first step. Let him who has set foot on it not turn back.

Step 2

ON DETACHMENT

If you truly love God and long to reach the kingdom that is to come, if you are truly pained by your failings and are mindful of punishment and of the eternal judgment, if you are truly afraid to die, then it will not be possible to have an attachment, or anxiety, or concern for money, for possessions, for family relationships, for worldly glory, for love and brotherhood, indeed for anything of earth. All worry about one's condition, even for one's body, will be pushed aside as hateful. Stripped of all thought of these, caring nothing about them, one will turn freely to Christ. One will look to heaven and to the help coming from there, as in the scriptural sayings: "I will cling close to you" (Ps. 62:9) and "I have not grown tired of following you nor have I longed for the day or the rest that man gives" (Jer. 17:16).

It would be a very great disgrace to leave everything after we have been called—and called by God, not man—and then to be worried about something that can do us no good in the hour of our need, that is, of our death. This is what the Lord meant when He told us not to turn back and not to be found useless for the kingdom of heaven. He knew how weak we could be at the start of our religious life, how easily we can turn back to the world when we associate with worldly people or happen to meet them. That is why it happened that when someone said to Him, "Let me go away to bury my father," He answered, "Let the dead bury the dead" (Matt. 8:22). There are de-

10. Despondency (*akidia*) is a listlessness or torpor—"accidie"—that afflicts a monk when he relaxes his struggle to attain the virtues. It begins as a loss of a sense of purpose and ends in despair and spiritual death. See Step 13.

Step 6

ON REMEMBRANCE OF DEATH

As thought comes before speech, so the remembrance of death and of sin comes before weeping and mourning. It is therefore appropriate to deal now with this theme.

To be reminded of death each day is to die each day; to remember one's departure from life is to provoke tears by the hour. Fear of death is a property of nature due to disobedience, but terror of death is a sign of unrepented sins. Christ is frightened of dying but not terrified, thereby clearly revealing the properties of His two natures.

Just as bread is the most necessary of all foods, so the thought of death is the most essential of all works. The remembrance of death brings labors and meditations, or rather, the sweetness of dishonor to those living in community, whereas for those living away from turbulence it produces freedom from daily worries and breeds constant prayer and guarding of the mind, virtues that are the cause and the effect of the thought of death.

Tin has a way of looking like silver but is of course quite distinct; and for those with some discernment, the difference between natural and contranatural fear of death is most obvious. You can clearly single out those who hold the thought of death at the center of their being, for they freely withdraw from everything created and they renounce their own will.

The man who lives daily with the thought of death is to be admired, and the man who gives himself to it by the hour is surely a

saint. And yet not every desire for death is good. A habitual sinner prays humbly for death, but the man who does not want to change his ways may, in sheer despair, actually long for death. And there are some who out of conceit consider themselves to be dispassionate, and for a while they have no fear of death, while a rare few hunger to leave by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Some, because they are puzzled, ask the following question: "If the remembrance of death is so good for us, why has God concealed from us the knowledge of when we will die?" In putting such a question, they fail to realize how marvelously God operates to save us. No one who knew in advance the hour of his death would accept baptism or join a monastery long before it, but instead would pass all his time in sin and would be baptized and do penance only on the day of his demise. Habit would make him a confirmed and quite incorrigible sinner.^{44a}

When you are lamenting your sins, do not ever admit that curse which suggests that God is soft-hearted toward men. (Such a notion may on occasion be of help to you when you see yourself being dragged down into deep despair.) For the aim of the enemy is to divert you from your mourning and from that fear of God which, however, is free from fear.

The man who wants to be reminded constantly of death and of God's judgment and who at the same time gives in to material cares and distractions, is like someone trying at the same time to swim and to clap his hands.

If your remembrance of death is clear and specific, you will cut down on your eating; and if, in your humility, you reduce the amount you eat, your passions will be correspondingly reduced.

To have an insensitive heart is to be dulled in mind, and food in abundance dries up the well of tears. Thirst, however, and the keeping of vigils afflict the heart; and when the heart is stirred, then the tears may run. Now all this may sound disgusting to the gluttonous and unbelievable to the sluggish, but a man pursuing the active life will try this course and the experience will make him smile, whereas the one who is still casting about him will become even more depressed.

The Fathers assert that perfect love is sinless. And it seems to me that in the same way a perfect sense of death is free from fear.

44a. This sentence is not in Rader's text.

There are many things that the mind of a man leading the active life can do. One can think about the love of God, the remembrance of death, the remembrance of God, the remembrance of the kingdom, the zeal of the holy martyrs, the remembrance of the presence of God as described in the saying, "I saw the Lord before me" (Ps. 15:8), the remembrance of the holy and spiritual powers, the remembrance of death, judgment, punishment, and sentence. The list begins with the sublime and ends with that which never fails.

This is what an Egyptian monk once said to me: "If it ever happened that I was inclined to offer some comfort to this carcass of mine, the remembrance of death that had been so firmly established in my heart would stand before me like a judge; and—a wonderful thing—even if I wanted to push it aside, I simply could not do so." Another monk, this time an inhabitant of the place called Tholas,⁴⁵ would go into an ecstasy at the thought of death, and when the brothers found him they had to raise him up and carry him, scarcely breathing, like someone who had fainted or had suffered an epileptic fit. And I must certainly tell you about Hesychius the Horebite. All his life he was careless and he paid not the slightest attention to his soul. Then a very grievous illness came on him, so that he was for a whole hour absent from the body. After he had revived, he begged us all to go away at once, built up the door of his cell, and remained twelve years inside without ever speaking to anyone and taking only bread and water. He never stirred and was always intent on what it was he had seen in his ecstasy. He never moved and had the look of someone out of his mind. And, silently, he wept warm tears. But when he was on the point of death, we broke in and we asked him many questions. All he would say was this: "Please forgive me. No one who has acquired the remembrance of death will ever be able to sin." It astonished us to see the blessed change and transformation that had taken place in someone hitherto so negligent. We buried him reverently in the cemetery near the fort;⁴⁶ and, some days later, when we looked for his holy remains, we could not find them. Such had been the marvel of his repentance that the Lord demonstrated to us

45. At the foot of Mount Sinai about five miles from the fort, St. John Climacus spent forty years there as a solitary (see the Preface, pp. 4-5).

46. The fort was built in 556-7 to protect the monks of Sinai from desert raiders. It is the present-day monastery of St. Catherine.

that fact that He accepts those who wish to make amends, even after the most prolonged negligence on their part.

Just as some declare that the abyss is infinite, for they call it a bottomless pit, so the thought of death is limitless and brings with it chastity and activity. The saint mentioned above proved this. Men like him unceasingly pile fear on fear, and never stop until the very strength in their bones is worn out.

We may be sure that remembrance of death, like every other blessing, is a gift from God. How else can you explain the fact that often we can be dry-eyed and hard at a cemetery, yet full of compunction when we are nowhere near such a place?

The man who has died to all things remembers death, but whoever holds some ties with the world will not cease plotting against himself.

Do not search about for the words to show people you love them. Instead, ask God to show them your love without your having to talk about it. Otherwise you will never have time enough both for loving gestures and for compunction.

Do not deceive yourself, foolish worker, into thinking that one time can make up for another. The day is not long enough to allow you to repay in full its debt to the Lord.

Someone has said that you cannot pass a day devoutly unless you think of it as your last. Even the Greeks have said some such thing, because they describe philosophy as meditation on death.

This, then, is the sixth step. He who has climbed it will never sin. "Remember your last end, and you will never sin" (Ecclus. 7:36).

Step 11

ON TALKATIVENESS AND SILENCE

The brief discussion in the previous chapter was concerned with the great danger of passing judgment on others, or rather with being judged and being punished by one's tongue, and it touched on the fact that this vice can lay hold of the most apparently spiritual people.

The time has come now to indicate the cause of this vice and to give an adequate account of the door by which it enters—or, more accurately, by which it goes out.

Talkativeness is the throne of vainglory on which it loves to preen itself and show off. Talkativeness is a sign of ignorance, a doorway to slander, a leader of jesting, a servant of lies, the ruin of compunction, a summoner of despondency, a messenger of sleep, a dissipation of recollection, the end of vigilance, the cooling of zeal, the darkening of prayer.

Intelligent silence is the mother of prayer, freedom from bondage, custodian of zeal, a guard on our thoughts, a watch on our enemies, a prison of mourning, a friend of tears, a sure recollection of death, a painter of punishment, a concern with judgment, servant of anguish, foe of license, a companion of stillness, the opponent of dogmatism, a growth of knowledge, a hand to shape contemplation, hidden progress, the secret journey upward. For the man who recognizes

his sins has taken control of his tongue, while the chatterer has yet to discover himself as he should.

The lover of silence draws close to God. He talks to Him in secret and God enlightens him. Jesus, by His silence, shamed Pilate; and a man, by his stillness, conquers vainglory. Peter wept bitterly for what he had said. He had forgotten the one who declared: "I said: I will guard my ways so that I may not sin with my tongue" (Ps. 38:1). He had forgotten too the saying, "Better to fall from a height to the ground than to slip with the tongue" (Ecclus. 20:18).

I would prefer not to write too much about this, despite the urgings of my wily passions. Someone who had asked me once about stillness told me that talkativeness invariably results from one of the following causes: from a bad or relaxed life-style ("the tongue," he said, "is a member of the body, like the rest, and therefore needs to be trained in its habits"); or it comes from vainglory, a particular problem with ascetics; or it comes at times from gluttony, which is why many who keep a hard check on the stomach can more easily restrain the blathering tongue.

The man who is seriously concerned about death reduces the amount of what he has to say, and the man who has received the gift of spiritual mourning runs from talkativeness as from a fire.

The lover of stillness keeps his mouth shut, but the man who likes to ramble outside is driven from his cell by this passion.

The man who has known the odor of heavenly fire runs from a gathering of men, like a bee from smoke, since smoke drives off a bee just as company militates against a man.

It is hard to keep water in without a dike. But it is harder still to hold in one's tongue.

This is the eleventh step. He who succeeds in taking it has with one blow cut off a host of evils.

JOHN CLIMACUS

Stolidity of Soul, Forgetfulness of the Things of Heaven, or, sometimes, Too Heavy a Burden of Troubles. My children who live with me are Changing from Place to Place, Disobedience to One's Superior, Forgetfulness of the Judgment to Come, and sometimes, the Abandonment of One's Vocation. The singing of psalms and manual labor are my opponents by whom I am now bound. My enemy is the thought of death, but what really slays me is prayer backed by a firm hope in the blessings of the future. And as to who gave birth to Prayer, you must ask her."

This is the thirteenth victory. He who has won it is really outstanding in all virtue.

Step 14

ON GLUTTONY

In our self-criticism we must refer particularly to the stomach, and indeed I wonder if anyone breaks free of this mistress before he dies.

Gluttony is hypocrisy of the stomach. Filled, it moans about scarcity; stuffed, and crammed, it wails about its hunger. Gluttony thinks up seasonings, creates sweet recipes. Stop up one urge and another bursts out; stop that one and you unleash yet another. Gluttony has a deceptive appearance: it eats moderately but wants to gobble everything at the same time. A stuffed belly produces fornication, while a mortified stomach leads to purity. The man who pets a lion may tame it but the man who coddles the body makes it ravenous.

The Jew celebrates on Sabbaths and feast days. The gluttonous monk celebrates on Saturdays and Sundays.⁵⁷ He counts the days to Easter, and for days in advance he gets the food ready. The slave of the belly ponders the menu with which to celebrate the feast. The servant of God, however, thinks of the graces that may enrich him.

If a visitor calls, then the slave of gluttony engages in charitable acts—but for the reasons associated with his love of food. He thinks that by allowing relaxations for himself, he is bringing consolation to his brother. He thinks that the duties of hospitality entitle him to

57. On the prohibition of fasting on Saturdays and Sundays see John Cassian, *Institutes* II, 18.

help himself to some wine, so that while apparently hiding his virtuous love of temperance, he is actually turning into a slave of intemperance.

Vanity and gluttony sometimes vie with one another and they struggle for the poor monk as if he were an acquired slave. The one tells him he should take it easy and the other suggests that he ought to emerge virtuously triumphant over his urge to gratify his appetite. A sensible monk, however, will avoid both vices, using one to repulse the other.

As long as the flesh is in full vigor, we should everywhere and at all times cultivate temperance, and when it has been tamed—something I doubt can happen this side of the grave—we should hide our achievement.

I have seen elderly priests tricked by demons so that on feast days they dispensed the young men with a blessing, though they were not in their charge, from abstinence from wine and so on. Now if priests giving such permission are quite clearly holy men, we may indulge. But within limits. If such priests tend to be careless, then we should ignore the permission they give, and we should do so especially if we are in the thick of the fight against the flesh.

I remember the case of Evagrius,⁵⁸ whom an evil demon led to the notion that of all men he was the most sensible in all he thought and said. The poor man was quite mistaken, of course, and in this matter as in many others he proved himself outstandingly foolish. He says: "When our soul wants different foods, keep it on bread and water,"^{58a} a statement that is like telling a child to climb the entire ladder in a single stride. So let us reject him and say: When our soul wants different foods, it is looking for what is proper to its nature. Hence, we have to be very cunning in the way we deal with this most skillful opponent. Unless we are caught up in some crisis or unless we happen to be doing penance for some particular failings, what we

58. Evagrius Ponticus (c. 345–399) left a promising ecclesiastical career in Constantinople to become a monk first in Palestine and then in Egypt, where he spent two years in Nitria and fourteen at the Cells. He became there the leading theoretical exponent of the monastic life. His Origenist cosmology led to his condemnation at the Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553. But his ascetic theology, with its sharp distinction between action and contemplation, its list of eight principal temptations, and its account of dispassion leading to love, remained fundamental for monasticism. Climacus, in spite of his abuse of Evagrius, is clearly much influenced by him (see the Preface, p. 60).

58a. Evagrius, *Practicus* 16 (ed. Guillaumont, *Sources chrétiennes* 171, p. 540).

ought to do is to deny ourselves fattening foods, then foods that warm us up, then whatever happens to make our food especially pleasant. Give yourself food that is satisfying and easily digestible, thereby counteracting endless hunger by giving yourself plenty. In this way we may be freed from too great a longing for food as though from a plague by rapid evacuation. And we should note too that most food that inflates the stomach also encourages desire.

Be sure to laugh at the demon who, when supper is over, says that in future you should eat later, for you may be sure that at the ninth hour he will change the arrangements made on the previous day.

There is one sort of temperance for those of good conduct and another for those inclined to particular weaknesses. Among the former any kind of bodily stirring evokes an immediate urge to restraint, while among the latter there is no relief or relaxation from such stirrings until the very day they die. The former strive always for peace of mind, but the latter try to appease God by their spiritual grief and their contrition.

Joy and consolation descend on the perfect when they reach the state of complete detachment. The warrior monk enjoys the heat of battle, but the slave of passion revels in the celebrations of Easter.⁵⁹

In his heart, the glutton dreams only of food and provisions whereas all who have the gift of mourning think only of judgment and of punishment.

Control your appetites⁶⁰ before they control you, and shame will greatly help you to maintain such mastery. Those who have tumbled headlong into the pit of sin know what I am talking about, and indeed only the eunuch is without such knowledge.⁶¹ So let us restrain our appetites with the thought of the fire to come. Some have been so mightily enslaved by their appetites that they actually cut off their own genitals, and thereby died twice over.⁶² For the truth is, as one

59. Literally: "the Feast of feasts and Festival of festivals."

60. Literally: "the belly." Among the ascetic writers gluttony and lust are always closely connected.

61. "The eunuchs are those of whom the Lord said that they have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake (Matt. 19:12), and who are practicing a general abstinence. For the other kind of eunuchs do not differ at all from ordinary men as far as the passions into which they fall are concerned" (scholion 13 [876B]).

62. I.e., physically and spiritually; the 24th Apostolic Canon sentences a layman who mutilates himself to three years' deprivation of Communion.

will discover, that the belly is the cause of all human shipwreck.

A fasting man prays austereley, but the mind of someone intemperate is filled up with unclean imaginings.

A full stomach dries up one's weeping, whereas the shrivelled stomach produces these tears. And the man who looks after his belly and at the same time hopes to control the spirit of fornication is like someone trying to put out a fire with oil.

Begrudge the stomach and your heart will be humbled; please the stomach and your mind will turn proud. And if you watch yourself early in the morning, at midday, and in the hour before dinner, you will discover the value of fasting, for in the morning your thoughts are lively, by the sixth hour they have grown quieter and by sundown they are finally calm. If you can begrudge the stomach, your mouth will stay closed, because the tongue flourishes where food is abundant. Fight as hard as you can against the stomach and let your vigilance hold it in. Make the effort, however little, and the Lord will quickly come to help you.

If leather bottles are kept supple, they can hold more; but they do not hold so much if they are neglected. The man who stuffs food into his stomach expands his insides, whereas the man who fights his stomach causes it to shrink, and once it has shrunk there is no possibility of overeating, so that henceforth one fasts quite naturally.

Sometimes thirst quenches thirst, but it is difficult if not impossible to end hunger by means of hunger. And if the stomach triumphs over you, tame it with hard work, and if you are too weak for this, fight it by keeping vigil. If you find yourself getting sleepy, turn to manual work, but keep away from that if you happen not to be sleepy, for you cannot serve both God and Mammon.⁶³ That is to say, you cannot turn your attention at the same time to God and to the work of your hands.

You should remember that frequently a demon can take up residence in your belly and keep a man from being satisfied, even after having devoured the whole of Egypt and after having drunk all of the Nile. After we have eaten, this demon goes off and sends the spirit of fornication against us, saying: "Get him now! Go after him. When his stomach is full, he will not put up much of a fight." Laughing, the spirit of fornication, that ally of the stomach's demon, comes, binds us

63. Monks supported themselves by the sale of their handiwork.

hand and foot in sleep, does anything he wants with us, befouls body and soul with his dirty dreams and emissions.

It is truly astounding how the incorporeal mind can be defiled and darkened by the body. Equally astonishing is the fact that the immaterial spirit can be purified and refined by clay.

If you have promised Christ to travel the straight and narrow road, then keep your stomach in check; for if you give in to it, if you enlarge it, you are breaking your promise. Listen and hear the word of warning: "Wide and spacious is the road of gluttony. It leads to the catastrophe of fornication, and there are many who travel that way. The gate is narrow and the way of fasting is hard, that way leading to the life of purity, and there are few to make the journey" (cf. Matt 7:13-14).

The fallen Lucifer is prince of the demons, and gluttony is prince of the passions. So when you sit at a well-laden table, remember death and remember judgment, and even then you will only manage to restrain yourself a little. And when you drink, keep always in mind the vinegar and gall of your Lord. Then indeed you will be either temperate or sighing; you will keep your mind humble. For you must not fool yourself. You will not escape from Pharaoh and you will not see the heavenly Passover unless you constantly eat bitter herbs and unleavened bread, the bitter herbs of toil and hard fasting, the unleavened bread of a mind made humble. Join to your breathing the word of him who said: "When devils plagued me, I put on sack-cloth, humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer stuck to the bosom of my soul" (Ps. 34:13).

To fast is to do violence to nature. It is to do away what whatever pleases the palate. Fasting ends lust, roots out bad thoughts, frees one from evil dreams. Fasting makes for purity of prayer, an enlightened soul, a watchful mind, a deliverance from blindness. Fasting is the door of compunction, humble sighing, joyful contrition, and end to chatter, an occasion for silence, a custodian of obedience, a lightening of sleep, health of the body, an agent of dispassion, a remission of sins, the gate, indeed, the delight of Paradise.

Let us put a question to this enemy of ours, this architect of our misfortunes, this gateway of passion, this fall of Adam and ruin of Esau, this destroyer of the Israelites, this one who bares the shame of Noah, this betrayer of Gomorrah, this reproach of Lot, this killer of the sons of Eli the priest, this guide to every uncleanness. Let us ask

her from whom she is born, who her children are, what enemy there is to crush her, who finally brings her low. Let us ask this bane of all men, this purchaser of everything with the gold coin of greed: "How did you gain access to us? To what does your coming lead? How do you depart from us?"

Angered by such abuse, raging and foaming, Gluttony answers us: "Why are you complaining, you who are my servants? How is it that you are trying to get away from me? Nature has bound me to you. The door for me is what food actually is, its character and quality. The reason for my being insatiable is habit. Unbroken habit, dullness of soul, and the failure to remember death are the roots of my passion. And how is it that you are looking for the names of my offspring? For if I were to count them, their number would be greater than the total of the grains of sand. Still, you may learn at least the names of my firstborn and beloved children. My firstborn son is the servant of Fornication, the second is Hardness of Heart, and the third is Sleepiness. From me flow a sea of Dirty Thoughts, waves of Filth, floods of unknown and unspeakable Impurities. My daughters are Laziness, Talkativeness, Breezy Familiarity, Jesting, Facetiousness, Contradiction, Stubbornness, Contempt, Disobedience, Stolidity of Mind, Captivity, Boastfulness, Audacity, Love of Worldly Things, followed by Impure Prayer, Distracted Thoughts, and sudden and often unexpected Catastrophes, with which is linked that most evil of all my daughters, namely, Despair. The thought of past failings is an obstacle to me, but hardly overcomes me. The thought of death is my enemy always, but nothing human can really wipe me out. He who has received the Paraclete prays to Him against me; and the Paraclete, when entreated, does not allow me to act passionately. But those who have never tasted Him inevitably seek pleasure in my sweetness."

Victory over this vice is a brave one. He who is able to achieve it should hasten towards dispassion and total chastity.

Step 15

ON CHASTITY

We have heard from that raving mistress gluttony, who has just spoken, that her offspring is war against bodies. And no wonder, for our ancient ancestor Adam also teaches us this. Indeed if he had not been overcome by the belly he would not have known what a wife was. Therefore those who keep the first commandment do not fall into the second transgression, but remain sons of Adam without knowing what Adam was. They were made a little lower than the angels (cf. Ps. 8:6) in being subject to death.⁶⁴ And this was to prevent evil from becoming immortal, as he who is called the Theologian says.^{64a}

To be chaste is to put on the nature of an incorporeal being.⁶⁵ Chastity is a supernatural denial of what one is by nature, so that a mortal and corruptible body is competing in a truly marvelous way with incorporeal spirits. A chaste man is someone who has driven out bodily love by means of divine love, who has used heavenly fire to quench the fires of the flesh.

64. The words "in being subject to death" do not occur in some versions.

64a. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. 45, 8* (PG 36, 633A).

65. Rader's text is translated here although a sentence has undoubtedly dropped out. HTM adds: "Purity is the longed-for house of Christ and the earthly heaven of the heart." Rader's own Latin translation reads: "Purity is the longed-for house of Christ and the earthly shield of the heart" (PG 88, 879D).

JOHN CLIMACUS

I have seen the poverty-stricken grow rich and forget their want, through living with the poor in spirit.

The monk who is greedy for money is a stranger to tedium of the spirit. Always he turns over within himself the words of the Apostle: "The man who does not work does not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10) and, "These hands of mine have served me and those who were with me" (Acts 20:34).

Such then is the sixteenth contest, and the man who has triumphed in it has either won love or cut out care.

Step 17

ON POVERTY

The poverty of a monk is resignation from care. It is life without anxiety and travels light, far from sorrow and faithful to the commandments. The poor monk is lord of the world. He has handed all his cares over to God, and by his faith has obtained all men as his servants. If he lacks something he does not complain to his fellows and he accepts what comes his way as if from the hand of the Lord. In his poverty he turns into a son of detachment and he sets no value on what he has. Having withdrawn from the world, he comes to regard everything as refuse. Indeed he is not genuinely poor if he starts to worry about something.

A man who has embraced poverty offers up prayer that is pure, while a man who loves possessions prays to material images.

Those living in obedience to another are free of all cupidity, for when the body has been given up, what else is there to call one's own? The only way they can be harmed is by readily and easily moving from place to place. I have seen monks content to remain in one locality on account of material possessions, but my praise is for those who are pilgrims for the Lord.

The man who has tasted the things of heaven easily thinks nothing of what is below, but he who has had no taste of heaven finds pleasure in possessions.

A man who is poor for no good reason falls into a double misfor-

tune. He goes without present goods and is deprived of these in the future.

We monks should be careful not to be less trusting than the birds, which are not anxious and do not gather into barns (cf. Matt. 6:26).

The man who gives up possessions for religious motives is great, but the man who renounces his will is holy indeed. The one will earn money or grace a hundred times over, but the other will inherit eternal life.

Waves never leave the sea. Anger and gloom never leave the miserly.

The man who thinks nothing of goods has freed himself from quarrels and disputes. But the lover of possessions will fight to the death for a needle. Sturdy faith cuts off cares, and remembrance of death denies the body. There was no trace of avarice in Job, and so he remained tranquil when he lost everything.

Avarice is said to be the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10), and it is so because it causes hatred, theft, envy, separations, hostility, stormy blasts, remembrance of past wrongs, inhuman acts and even murder.

A small fire can burn down an entire forest. But one virtue can help many to escape all the vices mentioned above. That virtue is detachment, which is a withdrawal from all evil desires, and which grows from an experience and taste of the knowledge of God and from a meditation on the account to be rendered at death.

The careful reader will recall the story of the mother of every evil.^{76a} Listing her wicked and accursed offspring, she named the stone of insensitivity as her second child. The many-headed serpent of idolatry prevented me from giving it its own due place. The discerning Fathers, for reasons unknown to me, give it third place in the chain of eight capital sins.

I have said enough about avarice, and I plan to say something about insensitivity as the third infirmity, despite being born second. Then I will go on to discuss sleep, keeping vigil, as well as childish cowardly fear, all failings of beginners.

This is the seventeenth step. He who has climbed it is traveling to heaven unburdened by material things.

^{76a} See 14 (869D), p. 170.

Step 18

ON INSENSITIVITY

Insensitivity is deadened feeling in body and spirit, and comes from long sickness and carelessness. Lack of awareness is negligence that has become habit. It is thought gone numb, an offspring of predisposition, a trap for zeal, a noose for courage, an ignorance of compunction, the gateway to despair, the mother of forgetfulness giving birth to loss of fear of God and, in turn, to a deadened spirit, like a daughter bearing her own mother.

The insensitive man is a foolish philosopher, an exegete condemned by his own words, a scholar who contradicts himself, a blind man teaching sight to others. He talks about healing a wound and does not stop making it worse. He complains about what has happened and does not stop eating what is harmful. He prays against it but carries on as before, doing it and being angry with himself. And the wretched man is in no way shamed by his own words. "I'm doing wrong," he cries, and zealously continues to do so. His lips pray against it and his body struggles for it. He talks profoundly about death and acts as if he will never die. He groans over the separation of soul and body, and yet lives in a state of somnolence as if he were eternal. He has plenty to say about self-control and fights for a gourmet life. He reads about the judgment and begins to smile, about vainglory and is vainglorious while he is reading. He recites what he has learnt about keeping vigil, and at once drops off to sleep. Prayer he extols, and runs from it as if from a plague. Blessings he showers

Let us strive with all our might to reach that summit of humility, or let us at least climb onto her shoulders. And if this is too much for us, let us at least not tumble out of her arms, since after such a tumble a man will scarcely receive any kind of everlasting gift.

Humility has its signs. It also has its sinews and its ways, and these are as follows—poverty, withdrawal from the world, the concealment of one's wisdom, simplicity of speech, the seeking of alms, the disguising of one's nobility, the exclusion of free and easy relationships, the banishment of idle talk.

Nothing can ever so humble the soul as destitution and the subsistence of a beggar. We will show ourselves true lovers of wisdom and of God if we stubbornly run away from all possibility of aggrandizement.

If you wish to fight against some passion, take humility as your ally, for she will tread on the asp and the basilisk of sin and despair, and she will trample under foot the lion and the serpent of physical devilishness and cunning (cf Ps. 90:13).

Humility is a heavenly waterspout which can lift the soul from the abyss up to heaven's height.

Someone discovered in his heart how beautiful humility is, and in his amazement he asked her to reveal her parent's name. Humility smiled, joyous and serene: "Why are you in such a rush to learn the name of my begetter? He has no name, nor will I reveal him to you until you have God for your possession. To Whom be glory forever." Amen.

The sea is the source of the fountain, and humility is the source of discernment.

Step 26

ON DISCERNMENT

Among beginners, discernment is real self-knowledge; among those midway along the road to perfection, it is a spiritual capacity to distinguish unfailingly between what is truly good and what in nature is opposed to the good; among the perfect, it is a knowledge resulting from divine illumination, which with its lamp can light up what is dark in others. To put the matter generally, discernment is—and is recognized to be—a solid understanding of the will of God in all times, in all places, in all things; and it is found only among those who are pure in heart, in body, and in speech.

The man who has devoutly destroyed within himself the three has also destroyed the five.⁹⁴ If he has neglected any of the former, then he will not be able to overcome even a single passion.

Discernment is an uncorrupted conscience. It is pure perception.

No one seeing or hearing something in monastic life that has a force over and beyond nature should, out of ignorance, become unbelieving. For much that is supernatural happens where the supernatural God abides.

Every demonic upheaval within us arises from the following three related causes, namely, carelessness, pride, or the envy of de-

94. According to Evagrius (*Phil.*, p.38), the three principal evil thoughts are gluttony, vainglory and avarice; these give rise to the other five, lust, despondency, pride, dejection and anger. Cf. Climacus, 26 (1021C), p. 235; also the Preface, p. 64.

mons. The first is pitiable, the second deplorable, but the third is blessed.

Let our God-directed⁹⁵ conscience be our aim and rule in everything so that, knowing how the wind is blowing, we may set our sails accordingly.⁹⁶

Amid all our efforts to please God, three pitfalls lie, prepared for us by demons. First is their attempt to impede any sort of worthwhile achievement; and if this fails, they strive secondly to ensure that what we do should not be in accordance with the will of God. And if the scoundrels fail in this too, then they stand quietly before our soul and praise us for the fact that in every respect we are living as God would wish. We should fight these risks, the first by zeal and fear of death, the second by obedience and self-abasement, the third by unceasing self-condemnation. "This work is ahead of us until the fire of God shall enter our sanctuary" (cf. Ps. 72:16–17), and then indeed the power of our predispositions will no longer constrain us. For our God is a fire consuming all lusts, all stirrings of passion, all predispositions, and all hardness of heart, both within and without, both visible and spiritual.

Demons, on the other hand, bring about the very opposite to all this. Grabbing a soul, they put out the light of the mind until in our wretchedness we find ourselves lacking sobriety or discernment, self-knowledge or shame; and we are burdened instead with indifference, insensitivity, want of discernment, and blindness.

All of this is well known to those who have abandoned fornication and become chaste, who have reined in their tongues and switched from shamelessness to modesty. They know that when the mind was cleansed, its callousness ended, or rather its mutilation healed, shame filled them for what they said and did previously in the season of their blindness.

95. HTM reads *meta theon* instead of *kata theon*: "After God, let us have our conscience," etc.

96. The scholiast comments: "A ship is sometimes overwhelmed by storms from without, and sometimes sinks through springing a leak within. We too sometimes perish through sins committed externally, and sometimes are destroyed by evil thoughts within. We must therefore both keep watch for the external attacks of spirits, and bail out the impurity of evil thoughts within. Only more effort must be made with the understanding against evil thoughts" (scholion 4 [1037AB]).

If the day of our soul does not turn to evening and become dark, no thieves will come then to rob or slay or ruin our soul.⁹⁷

Robbery is a hidden bondage of the soul. The slaying of the soul is the death of a rational mind that has fallen into evil ways. Ruin is despair of oneself following on a breach of God's law.

No one should plead inability to do what is asked of us in the gospels, since there are souls who have accomplished far more than is commanded. Of this truth you will be entirely persuaded, given what is said about the man who loved his neighbor more than himself and who laid down his life for him, in spite of the fact that the Lord had not ordered him to do so.⁹⁸

Those who have been humbled by their passions should take heart. Even if they tumble into every pit, even if they are trapped by every snare, even if they suffer every disease, still after their return to health they become a light to all, they prove to be doctors, beacons, pilots. They teach us the characteristics of every malady and out of their own experience they can rescue those about to lapse.

Anyone in the grip of previous bad habits and yet still able to give teaching, although only by their words, should do so. (Of course, they should not hold positions of authority.) Shamed by their own words, they may finally begin to practice what they preach. And there may even happen in their case what I have seen happen with people stuck in the mud. Mired themselves, they warned passersby, telling how they had sunk, explaining this for their salvation so that they too might not fall in the same manner, and the omnipotent God rescued them from the mud so that the others might be saved.

But anyone who is dominated by passions and who quite willingly embraces pleasure should be a lesson by his very silence. Jesus began both "to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1).

We humble monks have to travel a truly dangerous sea, a sea full of winds, rocks, and whirlpools, of pirates, waterspouts, and shallows, of monsters and waves. A rock in the soul is wild and sudden anger. A whirlpool is the hopelessness that lays hold of the mind on every side and struggles to drag it into the depths of despair. A shallow is

97. HTM adds two sentences: "Theft is loss of property. Theft is doing what is not good as if it were good."

98. Abba Leo of Cappadocia, who gave his life to redeem three captive monks; see John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, ch. 112.

the ignorance that makes a good of what is evil. A monster is this gross and savage body. Pirates are those deadly servants of vainglory who snatch our cargo, the hard-won earnings of our virtues. A wave is the swollen and packed stomach that by its gluttony hands us over to the beast. A waterspout is pride, the pride that flings us down from heaven, bears us up to the sky, and then dashes us into the lowest depths.

Educators can distinguish between the programs of study suitable for beginners, for the intermediate, and for teachers. And we ought to ensure that we do not spend an unduly long time at the beginner's stage, for it would be a disgrace to have an old man going to kindergarten.

Here for everyone is an excellent alphabet: A—obedience, B—fasting, Γ—sackcloth, Δ—ashes, E—tears, Z—confession, H—silence, Θ—humility, I—vigil, K—bravery, Λ—cold, M—struggle, N—hard work, Ξ—humiliation, O—contrition, Π—forgetfulness of wrongs, P—brotherly love, Σ—meekness, T—simple and unquestioning faith, Y—freedom from worldly concern, Φ—unhating rejection of parents, X—detachment, Ψ—innocent simplicity, Ω—voluntary abasement.

For the advanced, the following is a good plan and indeed a sign of progress: lack of vainglory, freedom from anger, good hope, stillness, discernment, continuous remembrance of the judgment, compassion, hospitality, gentleness in criticism, passionless prayer, lack of avarice.

And a measure, rule, and law for those in the flesh aiming at perfection in spirit and body is the following: A—an unfettered heart, B—perfect love, Γ—a well of humility, Δ—a detached mind, E—an indwelling of Christ, Z—an assurance of light and of prayer, H—an outpouring of divine illumination, Θ—a wish for death, I—hatred of life, K—flight from the body, Λ—an ambassador for the world, M—an importuner of God, N—fellow worshiper with the angels, Ξ—a depth of knowledge, O—a dwelling place of mysteries, Π—a custodian of holy secrets, P—a savior of men, Σ—lord over the demons, T—master of the passions, Y—lord of the body, Φ—controller of nature, X—a stranger to sin, Ψ—home of dispassion, Ω—with God's help an imitator of the Lord.

We have to be particularly vigilant whenever the body is sick, for at such a time the demons, observing our weakness and our inability to fight against them as usual, rush in to attack us. In times of illness the demon of anger and even of blasphemy may be discovered around

those who live in the world. Those leading a religious life but having all they need of a material kind may suffer the onslaught of the demon of gluttony and fornication. But ascetics who live without comforts may find themselves plagued by the tyrant of despondency and ingratitudo.

And I have noticed how the wolf of fornication increased the sufferings of the sick and, while they were laid low, caused stirrings of the flesh and even emissions. It was amazing to see how the body, for all its agonies, could still rage and lust. And when I looked once more I saw sick men comforted by the power of God or by the workings of compunction, and because they were comforted they kept the pain at bay and even arrived at a disposition where they had no wish to recover from their illness. At other times I saw men freed from their souls' passion by grave sickness, as though it were some kind of penance, and I could only praise the God who cleans clay with clay.

A mind disposed to the things of the spirit is certainly endowed with spiritual perception and this is something that, whether we possess it or not, we should always seek to have. And when it comes, our senses desist from their natural activities. This is why a wise man once said, "You shall obtain a sense of what is divine."⁹⁹

In the matter of actions, words, thoughts, and movements, the monastic life has to be lived with a perceptive heart.¹⁰⁰ Otherwise it will not be monastic or indeed angelic.

One has to distinguish between divine providence, divine assistance, divine protection, divine mercy, and divine consolation. Providence is shown in all of nature, assistance among the faithful alone, protection among those believers whose faith is most alive, mercy among those who serve God, and consolation among those who love Him.

One man's medicine can be another man's poison, and something can be a medicine to the same man at one time and a poison at another. So I have seen an incompetent physician who by inflicting dishonor on a sick but contrite man produced despair in him, and I have seen a skillful physician who cut through an arrogant heart with the knife of dishonor and thereby drained it of all its foul-smelling pus. I

99. HTM says that a Russian note attributes this saying to St. Nilus of Sinai (i.e., presumably Nilus of Ancyra).

100. The scholiast adds: "Because the monk must carefully investigate all his movements, even those of his thoughts" (scholion 18 [1040D]).

have seen a sick man striving to cleanse his impurity by drinking the medicine of obedience, by moving, walking, and staying awake. That same man when the eye of his soul was sick did not move, made no noise, and was silent. Therefore, "he who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Luke 14:35).

Since I am not so proud as to pry into the gifts of God, I cannot say why it is that some people appear to be naturally inclined to temperance or silence or purity or modesty or meekness or contrition. Others have to fight hard against their own natures to acquire these, they have to force themselves on to the best of their ability, suffering occasional defeat on the way; and it seems to me that the very fact of having to struggle against their own natures somehow puts them into a higher category than the first kind.

Never boast, man, about the wealth you acquired without having to work for it. The heavenly Giver anticipates how you may be injured, weakened, or ruined and therefore gives you some help by way of those gifts, which you certainly did not deserve.

What we learned as children, our education and our studies, may be a help or a hindrance to us in virtue in monastic life, when we come of age.

Angels are a light for monks and the monastic life is a light for all men. Hence monks should spare no effort to become a shining example in all things, and they should give no scandal in anything they say or do. For if the light becomes dark, then all the deeper will be the darkness of those living in the world.

And if you will lend a willing ear to what I have to say, you will agree that it would be bad for us to spread ourselves too thinly, to have our wretched souls pulled in all directions, to take on, alone, a fight against thousands upon thousands and ten thousands upon ten thousands of enemies, since the understanding of their evil workings, indeed even the listing of them, is far beyond our capacities. Instead, let us summon the Holy Trinity to help us as we marshal three against three.¹⁰¹ If we fail to do this we will make very hard work for ourselves. For if God really dwells in us, the God Who made dry land of the sea, then the Israel within us, the mind that looks to God, will surely make a safe crossing of this sea and it will look on the Egyp-

101. Self-control, love and humility, says the scholiast, against sensuality, avarice and ambition (scholion 29 [1044AB]): the three latter are the principal evil thoughts according to Evagrius (see note 94, p. 229).

tians sunk in the waters of tears. But if God has not yet arrived in us, who will understand the roaring waves of the sea, that is, of our bodies? Whereas if, because of our works, God rises within us, His enemies will be scattered; and if we draw near to Him through contemplation, "those who hate Him will run from before His face" (Ps. 67:2) and from ours.

Let us seek to discover the things of heaven through the sweat of our efforts, rather than by mere talk, for at the hour of death it is deeds, not words, that must be displayed.

Those who learn of treasure hidden away somewhere look for it, and when they find it, they make sure to hold on to what they have found. But those who get rich without any effort are quick to squander what they have.

It is hard to shake off old habits, especially bad ones; and when others are added to these, despair can result and obedience proves to be without value. Still, I know that God can do anything, that for Him nothing is impossible.

Certain people put a particular question to me, a question very difficult to solve and certainly beyond my capacities. Nor is it dealt with in any of the books that have come my way. The question took this form: "What are the special offspring of the eight deadly sins, and which of the three chief sins produce the other five?" To my credit, I pleaded ignorance and was therefore put in the position of being able to learn the following from those men of great holiness: "Gluttony is the mother of lust and vainglory is the mother of despondency. Dejection and anger are the offspring of those three,¹⁰² and the mother of pride is vainglory."

The statement of these ever-memorable fathers inspired me to put more questions regarding the lineage of the eight sins, which produced which. And these men, free as they were from passion, kindly instructed me, saying that no order or reason can be found among the irrational passions, that indeed every brand of disorder and chaos may be discovered in them. The blessed Fathers confirmed all this with persuasive examples and numerous proofs, some of which I include in this section. They will be a light by which to analyze the others.

102. I.e. (in the Evagrian scheme) of gluttony, vainglory and avarice. But Climacus does not in fact mention avarice in the present passage, although he treats it as one of the three chief vices in Step 17.

For instance, jokes at the wrong time can be the product of lust, or of vainglory when a man impiously pretends to be pious, or high living. Excessive sleep can arise from luxury, from fasting when those who fast become proud of it, from despondency, or sometimes from nature. Garrulity sometimes comes from gluttony, and sometimes from vainglory. Despondency can derive now from high living, now from lack of fear of God. Blasphemy is properly the child of pride, but can often arise out of the readiness to condemn one's neighbor for the same offense, or it can be due to the untimely envy of demons. Hardheartedness is sometimes the consequence of gluttony, frequently of insensitivity, and also of being grasping. And to be grasping can be due to lust, avarice, gluttony, vainglory, and indeed to many other causes. Malice comes from conceit and from anger, while hypocrisy comes from independence and self-direction.

The virtues opposed to these are born of opposing parents. And since I have not the time to examine them in detail, I will merely observe that the remedy for all the passions listed above is humility. Those who possess that virtue have won the whole battle.

The mother of all wickedness is pleasure and malice. If these are in a man, he will not see the Lord; and to abstain from the first without also giving up the second will not be of much use.

The fear we have in the presence of rulers and of wild beasts could serve as an example of fear of the Lord, and physical love can be a paradigm of the longing for God. (There is nothing wrong with using opposites for the purposes of finding examples of the virtues.)

This present generation is wretchedly corrupt. It is full of pride and hypocrisy. It works as hard as the Fathers of old, but it has none of their graces. And yet there has been no era so much in need of spiritual gifts as today. Still, we got what we deserved, since God is made manifest not in labors but in simplicity and in humility. If the power of the Lord is brought to perfection in weakness, the Lord will definitely not reject a humble worker.

If we happen to observe that one of our spiritual athletes is seriously ill, we must not maliciously try to discover the reason for his illness. Simply and lovingly we should do what we can to heal him as though he were a part of our own body and because he is a fellow campaigner hurt in battle.

Illness can occur sometimes to cleanse us from our sins and sometimes to humble our thinking. When our ever-gracious Master

and Lord discovers people getting lazy in their religious lives, He may humble their bodies by illness, as if by a lighter form of asceticism. Illness too can sometimes purify the soul from evil thoughts and passions.

Whatever happens to us, whether seen or unseen, can be accepted by us well, or passionately, or in some intermediate fashion. I once saw three brothers punished. One was angry, one did not feel any grief, but the third profited greatly from the fact that he rejoiced in his punishment.

I have watched farmers sowing the same type of seed, and yet each one had different ideas of what he was doing. One was planning to pay off his debts. Another was hoping to get rich. Another wanted to be able to bring gifts to honor the Lord. Another was hoping to earn praise for his work from the passers-by in life. Someone else wanted to irritate a jealous neighbor, while there was yet another who did not want to be reproached by men for laziness. And as for the seeds thrown into the earth, their names are fasting, keeping vigil, almsgiving, service, and suchlike. So let our brethren in the Lord keep a careful eye on their motives.

When we draw water from a well, it can happen that we inadvertently also bring up a frog. When we acquire virtues we can sometimes find ourselves involved with the vices which are imperceptibly interwoven with them. What I mean is this. Gluttony can be caught up with hospitality; lust with love; cunning with discernment; malice with prudence; duplicity, procrastination, slovenliness, stubbornness, wilfulness, and disobedience with meekness; refusal to learn with silence; conceit with joy; laziness with hope; nasty condemnation with love again; despondency and indolence with tranquillity; sarcasm with chastity; familiarity with lowliness. And behind all the virtues follows vainglory as a salve, or rather a poison, for everything.

We must not become upset if for a while the Lord seems to allow our requests to go unheard. Naturally the Lord would be delighted if in one moment all men became dissipationate. But He knows, in His providence, that this would not be to their advantage.

When requests are made to God and are not immediately answered, the reason may be one of the following: either that the petition is premature, or because it has been made unworthily or vaingloriously, or because, if granted, it would lead to conceit, or because negligence and carelessness would result.

Demons and passions quit the soul entirely or for some length of time. No one can deny that. However, the reasons for such a departure are known to very few.

Some of the faithful and even of the unfaithful have found themselves in the position of being bereft of all passions except one, and that one proved so overwhelming an evil that it took the place of all the others and was so devastating that it could lead to damnation.

The material of the passions is done away with when consumed by divine fire. It is uprooted, and all evil urges retire from the soul unless the man attracts them back again by his worldly habits and by his laziness.

Demons leave us alone so as to make us careless, then pounce on our miserable souls. And those beasts have another trick, of which I am aware; namely, to depart when the soul has become thoroughly imbued with the habits of evil, when it has turned into its own betrayer and enemy. It is rather like what happens to infants weaned from the mother's breast, who suck their fingers because the habit has taken hold of them.

There is a fifth kind of dispassion. It comes from great simplicity and from admirable innocence. "To such is help rightly given by the God Who saves the upright of heart" (Ps. 7:11) and Who rids them of all evil without their perceiving it. They are like infants who when undressed have no realization of the fact that they are naked.

Evil or passion is not something naturally implanted in things. God is not the creator of passions. On the other hand, there are many natural virtues that have come to us from Him. These clearly include the following: mercy, something even the pagans have; love, for even dumb animals bewail the loss of one of their own; faith, which all of us can generate of ourselves; hope, since we all lend, and take to the sea, and sow seed, expecting to do well out of it. Hence if love comes naturally to us—and it has been shown to be so—if it is the bond and the fulfilment of the law, virtues cannot be too far from nature. For which reason, those who claim to be unable to practice the virtues should be very ashamed of themselves.

At a level above nature are chastity, freedom from anger, humility, prayer, keeping vigil, fasting, uninterrupted compunction, and we learn about these from men, from angels, and from the Teacher and Giver, God the Word.

When confronted by evils, we should choose the least. For in-

stance, we are standing at prayer and some brothers approach us. We have to do one of two things, either to cease praying or to upset a brother by ignoring him. Now love is greater than prayer, since the latter is a particular virtue while the former embraces all virtues.

Long ago, in my young days, I came to a city or to a village, and while sitting at table I was afflicted at the same time by thoughts of gluttony and of vainglory. Knowing and fearing the outcome of gluttony, I decided to give in to vainglory. I also knew that in the young, the demon of gluttony often overcomes the demon of vainglory. This is not to be wondered at, for among people of the world love of money is the root of all evil, whereas in monks it is gluttony.

God in His providence often leaves some vestiges of passion in people of a very spiritual disposition. He does so in order that, by their endless condemnation of what are very minor defects, they may obtain a wealth of humility that no one can plunder.

Humility can come only when you have learned to practice obedience. When a man has a self-taught skill, he may start having high notions about himself.

The Fathers say that two virtues dominate the active life, namely, fasting and obedience. They are quite right about this, since fasting destroys sensuality and obedience completes the destruction by bringing in humility. Mourning too has a double effect by destroying sin and producing humility.

A pious man tends to give to anyone who asks. Someone more than usually pious gives even to those who do not ask. But to omit the opportunity to demand the return of something from the person who took it is characteristic, I think, only of the dispassionate.

Regarding every vice and every virtue, we must unceasingly scrutinize ourselves to see what point we have reached, a beginning, a middle, or the end.

Attacks by demons afflict us for three reasons: because we are sensual, because we are proud, or because the demons envy us. The last is a ground for rejoicing, the middle for pity, and where the first is concerned, the prospect is lifelong failure.

Endurance of hardship is a kind of perception or habit. The man who has it will never be afraid of pain, or toil or hardship, nor will he run from them. It was this marvelous grace that enabled the souls of the martyrs to rise superior to their torments.

Keeping guard over one's thoughts is one thing; watching over

one's mind another. Distant from each other as the east from the west, the latter is more significant and more laborious than the former.

It is one thing to pray for rescue from bad thoughts, another to stand up against them, and another still to despise and ignore them. The first situation is exemplified by the one who said: "O God, come and help me" (Ps. 69:2); the second by, "I will speak a word of contradiction to those who reproach me" (Ps. 118:42), and "You have made us a contradiction to our neighbors" (Ps. 79:7). And of the third the witness is the psalmist: "I was silent and did not open my mouth, I put a guard on my mouth when the sinner was before me" (Ps. 38:10); "The proud have gone too far in breaking the law, but I have not turned aside from my contemplation of You" (Ps. 118:51). So the man who stands in the middle position will often make use of the first of these, since he is insufficiently prepared, whereas the man who is still at the first stage cannot use the second method as a way of overcoming his enemies. However, the man who has come as far as the third step will completely ignore the demons.

The incorporeal cannot be hemmed in by what is corporeal; but the man who has God for his possession can do anything at all.

Everyone with a healthy sense of smell can detect hidden perfumes, and a pure soul can quickly recognize in others the sheer fragrance of goodness that he himself has received from God. And indeed he can also recognize—as others cannot—the foul odor from which he himself has been liberated.

Not everyone can achieve dispassion. But all can be saved and can be reconciled to God.

Have a care that alien thoughts may not secure a hold over you. I mean those that push you into being anxious to probe either the unspeakable decisions of God's providence or those visions that by coming to others give rise to the notion that the Lord shows favoritism. Such thoughts are the manifest outcome of pride.

There is a demon of avarice that often takes on the guise of humility. There are demons of vainglory and of sensuality and these encourage the giving of alms. If we can keep ourselves clear of these, we ought to do the works of mercy without cease.

Some hold that demons work against each other. But I do know that all of them work to destroy us.

Our own determination and intention together with the help of God come into play in every spiritual act of ours, visible or not, and

the latter is unlikely to operate without the former.

Ecclesiastes declares that there is a time for everything under heaven (cf. Eccles. 3:1), and "everything" may be taken to refer to our spiritual life. If this is so, then we ought to examine the matter; and we should do everything in proper season. For those entering the struggle—I mean novices—there is a time for dispassion and a time for passion. There is a time for tears and a time for hardness of heart, a time for obedience and a time for command, a time for fasting and a time for eating, a time for the battle against the body our enemy and a time for quiet in our flesh. There is a time for the soul's upheaval and a time for calm in the mind, a time for heart's sorrow and a time for joy of spirit, a time for teaching and a time for listening, a time for pollutions, perhaps on account of conceit, and a time for cleansing by humility, a time for effort and a time for secure rest, a time for stillness and a time for undistracted distraction, a time for unceasing prayer and a time for honest service. Proud zeal must therefore never be allowed to deceive us and we should never strain for what will come in its own good time, since winter is not the time for summer's goods nor seedtime the proper season for the harvest. There is a time for the sowing of labors and a time to reap the astounding fruits of grace; and if it were otherwise we would not receive in due time whatever was proper to the season.

God in His unspeakable providence has arranged that some received the holy reward of their toils even before they set to work, others while actually working, others again when the work was done, and still others at the time of their death. Let the reader ask himself which one of them was made more humble.

There is a despair that results from the great number of one's sins. It comes from a burdened conscience and intolerable grief, when the soul, engulfed by the mass and the burden of its wounds, slips into the deep waters of hopelessness. But there is also another kind of sorrow. It comes from pride and conceit and arises when a man thinks it unfair that he lapsed in some way. Now there is a distinctive aspect to each of these conditions which the observant will discover. The one man gives himself over to indifference, the other continues to practice his ascetic disciplines even though his despair persists in him, which is a contradiction. Temperance and good hope can heal the first man; the other will be cured by humility and by the practice of judging no one.

We should be neither amazed nor shocked when we find our-

selves watching someone do evil behind a cloak of fine words. After all, it was overweening pride that destroyed the serpent in Paradise.

Whatever you do, however you live, whether you live under obedience or whether you are independent, in what you do openly or in your spiritual life, let it be your rule and practice to ask if what you do is in accordance with the will of God. When we novices, for instance, do something and the humility deriving from that action is not added to the possessions of our souls, then the action, great or small, has not been undertaken in deference to the divine will. For those of us who are untried recruits in the life of the spirit, growth in humility comes out of doing what the Lord wants; for those who have reached midway along that route, the test is an end to inner conflict; and for the perfect there is increase and, indeed, a wealth of divine light.

The tiniest thing may not seem so to the great. But to those who are small, even great things are not quite perfect.

The sun is bright when clouds have left the air; and a soul, freed of its old habits and also forgiven, has surely seen the divine light.

Distinctions have to be made between sin, idleness, indifference, passion, and a lapse. The man who can analyze such matters, with God's help, should do so.

Some people are full of praise for the gift of miracle working and for those other spiritual gifts that can be seen. What they do not know is that there are many more important gifts and that these are hidden and are therefore secure.

A perfectly purified man can look into the soul of his neighbor—not of course into its actual substance—and can discern its present state. He who progresses further can even tell the state of the soul from the body.

A small fire can wipe out an entire forest and a small fault can ruin all our work.

There comes a breathing space from hostility when the powers of the mind are awakened without stirring the fire of passion. There is too an exhaustion of the body that can actually evoke the flesh's lust. So "we shall put no trust in ourselves" (2 Cor. 1:9). We ought, rather, to depend on God, Who in His own secret way can mortify our living lusts.

If it comes to our attention that there are some who love us in the Lord, we must be very careful to keep our distance from them, since nothing can so damage love and produce hatred as familiarity.

The eye of the soul is spiritual and very beautiful and next to incorporeal beings it surpasses everything. And so it happens that people who are still subject to the effects of the passions can frequently tell what the thoughts are of others because of their great love for them. This is particularly true of those who have not been overwhelmed by the defilements of the flesh. For there is nothing so directly opposed to immaterial nature as material nature. Let him who reads understand.

For laymen, superstitious observances are contrary to God's providence. But for monks they are contrary to spiritual knowledge.

Faltering souls should recognize the visitation of the Lord from their bodily circumstances and dangers and outward temptations. The perfect should recognize it from the coming of the Holy Spirit and the acquisition of graces.

There is a demon who attacks us when we are lying in bed. He fires evil and dirty thoughts at us, so that, too lazy to get up and arm ourselves against him with prayer, we might fall asleep with all these dirty thoughts in us and have dirty dreams.

There is a demon called the forerunner. He lays hold of us as soon as we awaken and defiles our very first thought.

Give the first fruits of your day to the Lord, for it will determine the rest of the day. An excellent servant of the Lord once said to me something well worth hearing. "I can tell from my morning how the rest of the day will go."

There are many roads to holiness—and to hell. A path wrong for one will suit another, yet what each is doing is pleasing to God.

Demons, using the temptations that occur to us, fight to make us say or do something improper. If they cannot get at us in this way, they turn quiet and whisper to us that we should offer up arrogant thanks to God.

Those with minds centered on the things of heaven, after the separation of soul and body rise up on high in two parts.¹⁰³ Those with minds directed to what is below will travel that downward route, for there is no intermediate halting place for souls separated from their bodies. Only one of God's creations has its being in something else and not in itself.¹⁰⁴ Yet it is amazing how it can come to exist outside that in which it received being.

103. I.e., first the soul and then, after the resurrection, the body.

104. I.e., the soul has its being in the body.

Pious mothers bear pious daughters, and the mothers themselves are born of the Lord. And it makes good sense to apply this norm in reverse.

The coward should not go out to battle. This was the injunction of Moses, or rather of God Himself (cf. Deut. 20:8), and the reason, a good one, was in case the last spiritual lapse should be worse than the first fall of the body.

Our eyes are a light to all the body. Discernment of the virtues is a light to all the mind.

On Expert Discernment

As the hart parched with thirst pants for running water (cf. Ps. 41:2), the monk longs for a knowledge or grasp of the good and divine will. And indeed he longs also for knowledge of what is not totally of God, even of what is opposed to God. There is here a vitally important theme, and one not easily explained. What I mean is this. What should we do at once, with no delay and as soon as possible, as is recommended in the saying, "Woe to him who delays from day to day" (Eccl. 5:7-8) and from period to period? On the other hand, what should be done moderately and with discretion, in accordance with the saying, "War is made by leadership" (Prov. 20:18) and "Let all things be done decently and in due order" (1 Cor. 14:40)? Not everyone can make quick and precise decisions in such delicate matters and even that man who had God within him and the Holy Spirit speaking for him, even he prays for this gift and says: "Teach me to do Your will, since You are my God" (Ps. 142:10), and "Direct me to your truth" (Ps. 24:5), and "Show me, Lord, the road I must travel, for I have lifted up my soul to You" (Ps. 142:8) from all the cares and passions of this life.

Those who wish to discover the will of God must begin by mortifying their own will. Then having prayed in faith and simplicity, all malice spent, they should turn humbly and in confidence to the fathers or even the brothers and they should accept their counsel, as though from God Himself, even when that counsel goes against the grain, even when the advice comes from those who do not seem very spiritual. God, after all, is not unjust. He will not lead astray the souls who, trusting and guileless, yield in lowliness to the advice and decision of their neighbor. Even if those consulted are stupid, God immaterially and invisibly speaks through them and anyone who faithfully submits to this norm will be filled with humility. If a man can ex-

press on a harp whatever ails him, surely a rational mind and a reasonable soul can provide better teaching than something inanimate.

Yet this perfect and easy rule is rejected by many for reasons of pride. Instead they have sought to discover the will of God by their own resources and within themselves and have then proceeded to offer us numerous and different opinions on this whole issue.

Some of those trying to discover the will of God abandoned every attachment. They asked God to be the arbiter of any thoughts they might have concerning the stirrings of their souls, whether to do something or to resist it. They prayed hard for a fixed number of days and they laid aside any inclination of their own. In this way they found out what God willed, either through some direct manner of intelligible communication from Him or by the complete evaporation from their souls of whatever it was they had proposed to do.

Others found so much trouble and distraction in whatever they were doing that they were led to think that bother of this sort could only have come from God, in accordance with the saying, "We wanted to come to you once and once again, but Satan prevented us" (1 Thess. 2:18).

But there were others who found that a venture of theirs had proved unexpectedly successful, and so they inferred that it had pleased God, and they went on to declare that God helps everyone who chooses to do the right thing (cf. Rom. 8:28).

The man who through illumination has come to possess God within himself both in things requiring immediate action and in those that take time will find immediate divine reassurance by the second way.

Wavering judgment and lingering doubt are the signs of an unenlightened and vainglorious soul.

God is not unjust. He will not slam the door against the man who humbly knocks.

In everything we do, in what has to be done now or later, the objective must be sought from God Himself; and every act that is not the product of personal inclination or of impurity will be imputed to us for good, especially if done for the sake of God and not for someone else. This is so, even if the actions themselves are not completely good.

There is always a danger in seeking for what is beyond our immediate reach, and what God has decided for us is hard to penetrate. In His providence, He often conceals His will from us, for He knows

that even if we knew about it, we would disobey it, thereby rendering ourselves liable to greater punishment.

An honest heart is unshaken by the various sorts of distraction. It sails along safely in the ship of innocence.

There are brave souls who lovingly and humbly undertake tasks that are well beyond them. There are proud hearts that do the same. Now it often happens that our enemies deliberately inspire us to do things beyond our capacities, and their objective is to make us falter so that we abandon even what lies within our power, and make ourselves ridiculous to our enemies.

I have observed men who were sick in soul and body and who, out of a sense of the great number of their sins, tried to do what was beyond their power, and therefore failed. To these I say that God judges our repentance not by our exertions but by our humility.

Sometimes one's upbringing may be responsible for the greatest evils. Sometimes it may be the company we keep. And often it may be the sheer perversity of the soul that produces disaster. The monk who is free of the first two may escape the third as well. But the man afflicted by the third is discredited everywhere, for there is no place safer than heaven.¹⁰⁵

In any conflict with unbelievers or heretics, we should stop after we have twice reproved them (cf. Titus 3:10). But where we are dealing with those who are eager to learn the truth, we should never grow tired of doing the right thing (cf. Gal. 6:9). And we should use both situations to test our own steadfastness.

A man who despairs of himself after hearing about the supernatural achievements of the saints is very unreasonable. In fact they should teach you one of two things, either to be courageous like them in the striving for excellence, or else to be deeply humble and conscious of your inherent weakness by way of thrice-holy humility.

Some of the impure demons are worse than others. They tell us not to sin alone but to bring company with us, and they tell us this in order that our punishment may be all the more severe. I have witnessed the case of someone who learned a sinful habit from another. The latter came to his senses, repented, and desisted from evil, but his change of heart was of no use because of what his disciple was doing.

The wickedness of the evil spirits is truly astounding and it is something not witnessed by many, and indeed even those few who

105. Yet Satan fell from heaven.

appreciate it see it only in part. How is it, for instance, that when we are living in luxury and abundance we can keep vigil and remain awake, whereas while fasting and wearing ourselves down with toil, we are wretchedly overcome by sleep? Why is it that our hearts grow calloused when we are dwelling alone in silence, and yet compunction may be stirred in us when we are involved with others? How is it that dreams tempt us when we are hungry and omit to do so when we are full? Amid want we become gloomy and incapable of compunction, while after some wine we grow happy and are quite able to be contrite. (Anyone who, with God's help, can shed light on this ought to do so, for the sake of the unenlightened. For we really are unilluminated where all this is concerned.) But switches of this sort, of course, do not always come from demons. In my own case—and for reasons I do not understand—I too experience this kind of change as a result of the temperament which I have been given and my burden of grubby and greedy flesh.

Regarding these changes mentioned above, changes that are so hard to explain, let us sincerely and humbly pray to the Lord. But if after time and prayer we still experience the same force at work in us, we should accept that this is due to nature and not to demons. And divine providence often likes to help us by means of adversity and to restrain our pride in every way.

It is a hardy enterprise to inquire into the depths of God's judgment, for the inquisitive sail in the ship of conceit.¹⁰⁶

Someone asked this question of a discerning man: "Why is it that God confers gifts and wonder-working powers on some, even though He knows in advance that they will lapse?" His answer was that God does this so that other spiritual men may grow cautious, and to show that the human will is free, and to demonstrate that on the day of judgment there will be no excuse for these who lapsed.

The Law, in its imperfection, says: "Attend to yourself" (Deut. 4:9). The Lord, in His perfection, tells us to correct our brother, saying, "If your brother sins against you, etc." (Matt. 18:15). If your reproof, or rather your reminder, can be pure and humble, then do as the Lord commanded, particularly in the case of those who will accept it. But if your progress has not reached this far, at least do what the Law says.

106. HTM adds: "Yet because of the weakness of many, something should be said."

You should not be surprised if those you love turn against you after you have rebuked them. The frivolous are instruments of the demons, and are used, especially against the demons' enemies.

There is one thing about us that never ceases to amaze me. Why is it that when we have Almighty God, the angels, and the saints to help us toward virtue, and when only the devil is against us, we still incline so readily to the passions? I do not want to go into detail on this. In fact I cannot. And if everything that has come into being continues to hold onto its nature, how is it, as the great Gregory puts it, that I am the image of God, yet mingled with clay?¹⁰⁷ Is it not a fact that a creature of God that has strayed from its created nature will continuously try to return to its original condition? Indeed everyone should struggle to raise his clay, so to speak, to a place on the throne of God. And no one should refuse to make the ascent, since the way and the door lie open. To hear about the achievements of the spiritual Fathers stirs mind and soul to imitation.¹⁰⁸

Doctrine listened to is a light in darkness, a road home to the lost traveler, an illumination for the blind. A discerning man is a discoverer of health, a destroyer of sickness.

Those who look with admiration on trifles do so for two reasons: either through profound ignorance or else because they make much of what their neighbors achieve so that they themselves may reach humility.

We should not spar with demons. We should make outright war on them. In the first case a fall is sometimes given or taken, but in the latter case the enemy is always under fierce attack.

The man who has conquered the passions has injured the demons, and by pretending to be still subject to them he deceives his enemies and remains invulnerable to them. A brother once suffered a disgrace but in his heart he was untroubled by it and in his mind he was prayerful. However, he lamented aloud and by feigned passion hid his dispassion. Another pretended to be eager for the job of father superior when in fact he had no wish at all for it. And how am I to speak of the chastity of the brother who entered a brothel for what

107. Not Pope Gregory the Great of Rome but Gregory of Nazianzus: *Or. 14, 6* (PG 35, 865A).

108. HTM has a longer version of this sentence: "It excites the mind and soul to emulation to hear the spiritual feats of the Fathers, and their zealous admirers are led to imitate them through listening to their teaching."

appeared as a determination to commit sin, and who actually enticed the harlot to take up the ascetic life?¹⁰⁹ Or, again, it once happened that a bunch of grapes was brought early one morning to an ascetic. When the person who brought the grapes had left, the hermit ate them, seeming to stuff them in, but in fact taking no pleasure in them, and in this way he fooled the demons into imagining that he was a glutton. Another one of the brethren once lost a few palm leaves¹¹⁰ and he pretended all day to be very upset about this.

However, people like this should be wary. In their efforts to fool the demons they may fool themselves. It was to these that the reference was made: "As deceivers and yet true" (2 Cor. 6:8).

If anyone wishes to present to the Lord a pure body and a clean heart, he must persevere in freedom from anger and in chastity. All our work is useless if we lack these.

Eyes show different colors and the sun of the spirit may shine in different ways in the soul. There is the way of bodily tears and there is the way of the tears of the soul. There is the way of the contemplation of what is before us and the way of the contemplation of what remains unseen. There is the way of things heard at second hand and the way of spontaneous joy within the soul. There is the way of stillness and the way of obedience. And in addition to these there is the way of rapture, the way of the mind mysteriously and marvelously carried into the light of Christ.

There are virtues, and there are begetters of virtues, and it is with these latter that a wise man would have his dealings. The teacher of these parent virtues is God Himself in His proper activity, and there are plenty of teachers for the derivative virtues.

We should be careful not to make up for lack of food by sleeping too much, and vice versa. This is a practice of foolish men. I have seen ascetics who, having yielded a little to their appetites, afterwards punished their poor stomachs by standing all night, thus teaching them to be content if they were not filled up.

The demon of avarice fights hard against those who have nothing. When it fails to overcome them, it begins to tell them about the wretched conditions of the poor, thereby inducing those in the religious life to become concerned once more with material things.

109. Sarapion the Sindonite; see F. Nau, "Histoire de Thais", *Annales du Musée Guimet* xxx, p. 51.

110. See note 28, p. 105.

When you are depressed, bear in mind the Lord's command to Peter to forgive a sinner seventy times seven (cf. Matt. 18:22). And you may be sure that He Who gave this command to another will Himself do very much more. But if, on the other hand, we become too self-assured, let us remember what has been said about the person who keeps the whole spiritual law and yet, having slipped into one passion, that of pride, is guilty of all (cf. James 2:10).

Some evil and jealous spirits of their own accord leave holy men so as to deprive these of the opportunity to win the prize of victory over them.

Blessed are the peacemakers (Matt. 5:9). No one will deny this. But I have seen foemakers who are also blessed. Two monks once developed an unhealthy fondness for one another. But a discerning and very experienced father brought them to the stage of detesting each other. He made them enemies by telling each man he was being slandered by the other, and by this piece of chicanery he warded off the demon's malice, and by causing hatred he brought an end to what was an unclean affection.

Again, there are some who infringe a commandment for the sake of a commandment. I have known young men who were bound by ties of honorable affection but who, to avoid any scandal, agreed to avoid each other's company for a time.

Like a wedding and a funeral, pride and despair are opposites. But sufficient confusion can be caused by demons to make them seem of a kind.

When we begin religious life, some unclean demons give us lessons in the interpretation of scripture. This happens particularly in the case of people who are either vainglorious or who have had a secular education, and these are gradually led into heresy and blasphemy. One may detect this diabolical teaching about God, or rather war against God, by the upheaval, confusion, and unholy joy in the soul during lessons.

The things that have come into being have received from the Creator their proper place, their beginning and, in some cases, their end. But there is no boundary to virtue. The psalmist says, "I have seen the end of all perfection, but Your commandment is very broad and is without limit" (Ps. 118:96). Now if it is true that some good ascetics pass from the strength of action to the strength of contemplation (cf. Ps. 83:7), and if it is true that love never fails (1 Cor. 13:8), and

that the Lord will guard the coming in of your fear and the going out of your love (cf. Ps. 120:8), then love has no boundary, and both in the present and in the future age we will never cease to progress in it, as we add light to light. Perhaps this may seem strange to many. Nevertheless it has to be said, and the evidence we have, blessed Father, would lead me to say that even the angels make progress and indeed that they add glory to glory and knowledge to knowledge.

Do not be surprised if demons often inspire good thoughts in us, together with the reasoned arguments against them. What these enemies of ours are trying to do is to get us to believe that they know even our innermost thoughts.

Do not be a harsh critic of those who resort to eloquence to teach many important things, but who have few actions to match their words. For edifying words have often compensated for a lack of deeds. All of us do not get an equal share of every good, and for some the word is mightier than the deed (cf. Ps. 102:20–21; 1 Pet. 5:8) and *vice versa* for others.

God neither caused nor created evil and, therefore, those who assert that certain passions come naturally to the soul are quite wrong. What they fail to realize is that we have taken natural attributes of our own and turned them into passions. For instance, the seed which we have for the sake of procreating children is abused by us for the sake of fornication. Nature has provided us with anger as something to be turned against the serpent, but we have used it against our neighbor. We have a natural urge to excel in virtue, but instead we compete in evil. Nature stirs within us the desire for glory, but that glory is of a heavenly kind. It is natural for us to be arrogant—against the demons. Joy is ours by nature, but it should be joy on account of the Lord and for the sake of doing good to our neighbor. Nature has given us resentment, but that ought to be against the enemies of our souls. We have a natural desire for food,¹¹¹ but not surely for profligacy.

An active soul is a provocation to demons, yet the greater our conflicts the greater our rewards. There will be no crown for the man who has never been under attack, and the man who perseveres in spite of any failures will be glorified as a champion by the angels.

111. HTM reads "pleasure" (*tryphesis*) for "food" (*trophis*).

He Who was three nights in the earth came back and lived forever. He who has conquered three hours will never die.¹¹²

If, after rising in us, the sun "knows his going down" (Ps. 103:19) for our providential chastening, "he made darkness the place of his concealment" (Ps. 17:12). The night came on, the night in which the fierce young lions go prowling once more after they had left us alone, the lions and all the beasts of the woods of thorny passions, roaring to seize the hope that is in us, and seeking from God their food of the passions either in thought or in deed. Through the darkness of our humility, the sun rises over us, and the wild beasts gather where they belong, in sensual hearts and not in ours (cf. Ps. 103:22). Then the demons speak to one another: "The Lord delighted in doing great things for them." And we speak: "He has done great things for us and we are glad" (cf. Ps. 135:4) but you are banished." "See, the Lord rides on a swift cloud," on the soul raised above earthly longings, "and He shall come into Egypt," into the darkened heart, "and He shall shatter the man-made idols" (Isa. 19:1), the empty fashionings of the mind.

Christ, although all-powerful, fled bodily from Herod. So let the foolish learn not to fling themselves into temptation. It is said: "Let not your foot be moved and let not your guardian angel slumber" (cf. Ps. 120:3).

Like bindweed round a cypress, vanity twines itself around courage. And we must be ever on guard against yielding to the mere thought that we have achieved any sort of good. We have to be really careful about this, in case it should be a trait within us, for if it is, then we have certainly failed.

If we watch out continually for signs of the passions, we will discover that there are many within us which, in our sickness, we never noticed. We were too weak, or they were too deeply rooted.

God judges us by our intentions, but because of His love for us

112. What is meant by "three hours" is obscure. Scholion 21a (1081A), quoting a saying of Abba Elias, suggests that they are death, the coming into the presence of God, and judgment. Scholion 21b (1081A) offers other interpretations: youth, maturity and old age, or pleasure, vainglory and avarice, or the three temptations of the demon (presumably the three temptations of Christ in the wilderness). As the conqueror of the three hours is Christ Himself, the expression could well refer to the three hours on the cross.

He only demands from us such actions as lie within our power. Great is the man who does all that lies within his power, but greater still is the man who, in all humility, tries to do more.

Demons often prevent us from doing what would be easy and valuable for us. Instead they like to push us into trying what is harder.

I find that Joseph is deemed blessed because he avoided an occasion of sin and not because he showed evidence of dispassion (cf. Gen. 39:12). Hence the question of the type and number of sins, the avoidance of which is rewarded by a crown. There is a difference between running from a shadow and the greater act of hastening toward the sun of righteousness. For to be in darkness is to stumble and to stumble is to fall, and to fall is to die.

Those brought down by wine often wash with water, but those brought down by passion wash with their tears.

There is a distinction between clouding, darkness, and blindness. Temperance will cure the first, solitude the second. The third will be cured by obedience and by the God Who for our sakes became obedient (cf. Phil. 2:8).

Two examples, drawn from the world, will provide useful analogies for those with minds intent on the things of heaven. A monastic community living according to the Lord is like a laundry where the dirt, grossness, and deformity of the soul are scrubbed away; and the solitary life for those who are moving from the monastery to total seclusion is like the dye-works where lust, the harboring of wrongs, and anger are erased.

Some would claim that our repeated lapses in some matter are caused by our failure to do adequate penance for earlier falls. But the problem then arises as to whether those who have not fallen into the same type of sin over and over again have actually repented as they should. People commit the same sin again and again either because they have thoroughly forgotten their previous sins, or because in their own pleasure-loving way they keep thinking that God is merciful, or because they have given up all hope of salvation. Now—and I may be severely criticized for this—it seems to me that their real difficulty is that they have not had the strength to grip firmly what in fact is a dominating habit.

Here is a question. Why does the incorporeal soul fail to perceive the real character of the evil spirits that come to dwell with it? The answer, perhaps, lies in the union of the soul with the body; but it is

known only to the One Who bound them together in the first place.

An experienced man once asked me earnestly to tell him which spirits were accustomed to depress the mind when we sin and which to exalt it. The question left me at a loss, and I had to swear my ignorance. So this man, himself so eager for knowledge, taught me, saying: "I shall give you the leaven of discernment briefly and I shall leave you to find out the rest by your own efforts. The spirits of lust, of anger, of gluttony, of despondency, and of sleepiness do not usually raise up the horn of the mind. But the spirits of money-grubbing, of ambition, of talkativeness, and many others pile evil onto evil. This also is the reason why the spirit of criticism is so near the latter."

A monk who has spent an hour or a day visiting people out in the world or entertaining them as guests should rejoice at the time of parting, like someone released from a trap. If however what he feels is a pang of regret, then this shows that he has become the plaything either of vainglory or of lust.

We must always find out which way the wind blows, lest we set our sails against it.

Show kindness and give a little respite to old men leading the active life whose bodies are worn out by ascetical practice. But insist that young men who have exhausted their souls with sin must be restrained and must think of the eternal torments.

I have already said that at the beginning of one's life as a monk one cannot suddenly become free of gluttony and vainglory. But we must not counter vainglory with high living simply because among novices, to defeat gluttony is to run into vainglory. So let us fight it by way of frugality. The time will come—and indeed is already here for those really wishing it—when the Lord will enable us to trample on this vice.

At the start of religious life, the young and those of advanced years are not troubled by the same passions, since very often they have quite opposite failings. Hence the fact that humility is so truly blessed, for it makes repentance safe and effective for both young and old.

Do not make a fuss about what I am going to say now. There are souls, true, upright, and rare, who know nothing of malice, hypocrisy and deceit, and who are quite unable to live in religious communities. Helped by a spiritual director, they can leave the harbor of solitude and rise heavenward without ever wishing for and experiencing the ups and downs, the stumbling blocks of community life.

Men can heal the lustful. Angels can heal the malicious. Only God can heal the proud.

It may be that an aspect of love is to allow a neighbor who comes on frequent visits to do what he pleases. Certainly we must show him every kindness.

Here is another problem. Is there a kind of repentance that can destroy good in the same way as evil? If so, how, to what extent, and in what circumstances?

We must be very shrewd in the matter of knowing when to stand up against sin, when and to what extent to fight against whatever nourishes the passions, and when to withdraw from the struggle. Because of our weakness there are times when we must choose flight if we are to avoid death. We must watch and see (for perhaps there are times when we can neutralize gall with bitterness) which of the demons uplift us, which depress us, which make us hard, which bring us consolation, which darken us, which pretend to enlighten us, which make us lazy, which shifty, which make us sad and which cheerful.

At the start of our religious lives, we may find that our passions are stronger than they were when we were in the world. This should not upset us, and if we remove the causes of our sickness, then health will come to us. Those beasts were formerly concealed in us, but they did not reveal themselves.

It may happen that those who are otherwise attaining perfection are tripped up by the demons on some minor matter. They should at once use every means to wrench this out of themselves a hundred times over.

Like the winds, which sometimes in calm weather ruffle only the surface of the sea and at other times stir up the depths, so there are the dark blasts of evil. Think about them. They reach down to disturb the very hearts of those dominated by the passions, whereas among those who have made progress, they merely ruffle the surface of the mind. That is why the latter soon recover their usual calm for their hearts were left undefiled.

It is characteristic of the perfect that they always know whether a thought comes from within themselves, or from God, or from the demons. Remember that demons do not automatically propose evil at the outset. Here we have a problem truly hard to penetrate.

Two corporeal eyes give light to the body, and the eyes of the heart are enlightened by discernment in things seen and unseen.

Step 28

ON PRAYER

Prayer is by nature a dialog and a union of man with God. Its effect is to hold the world together. It achieves a reconciliation with God.

Prayer is the mother and daughter of tears. It is an expiation of sin, a bridge across temptation, a bulwark against affliction. It wipes out conflict, is the work of angels, and is the nourishment of all bodiless beings. Prayer is future gladness, action without end, wellspring of virtues, source of grace, hidden progress, food of the soul, enlightenment of the mind, an axe against despair, hope demonstrated, sorrow done away with. It is wealth for monks, treasure of hermits, anger diminished. It is a mirror of progress, a demonstration of success, evidence of one's condition, the future revealed, a sign of glory. For the man who really prays it is the court, the judgment hall, the tribunal of the Lord—and this prior to the judgment that is to come.

Let us arise and pay heed to what that holy queen of the virtues cries out to us in a loud voice, saying: "Come to me, all of you who labor and are weighed down, and I will give you rest. Take upon yourselves my yoke, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt: 11:28-29), and a balm for the blows that fall on you. 'For my yoke is easy' (*ibid.* 30) and is a remedy for great sins."

Those of us wishing to stand before our King and God and to speak with Him should not rush into this without some preparation, lest it should happen that—seeing us from afar without arms and

without the dress appropriate to those who appear before the King—He should command His servants and His slaves to lay hold of us, to drive us out of His sight, to tear up our petitions and to throw them in our faces.

When you set out to appear before the Lord, let the garment of your soul be woven throughout with the thread of wrongs no longer remembered. Otherwise, prayer will be useless to you.

Pray in all simplicity. The publican and the prodigal son were reconciled to God by a single utterance.

The attitude of prayer is the same for all, but there are many kinds of prayer and many different prayers. Some talk and deal with God as with a friend and master, lifting their praises and their requests to Him not for themselves but for others. Some look for greater spiritual treasures and glory and for greater assurance in their prayers. Some beg to be freed entirely from their adversary. Some look for rank and others for relief from all their debts. Some seek freedom from gaol or for charges against them to be dropped.

But heartfelt thanksgiving should have first place in our book of prayer. Next should be confession and genuine contrition of soul. After that should come our request to the universal King. This method of prayer is best, as one of the brothers was told by an angel of the Lord.

If you ever found yourself having to appear before a human judge, you may use that as an example of how to conduct yourself in prayer. Perhaps you have never stood before a judge nor witnessed a cross-examination. In that case, take your cue from the way patients appeal to surgeons prior to an operation or a cautery.

In your prayers there is no need for high-flown words, for it is the simple and unsophisticated babblings of children that have more often won the heart of the Father in heaven.

Try not to talk excessively in your prayer, in case your mind is distracted by the search for words. One word from the publican sufficed to placate God, and a single utterance saved the thief. Talkative prayer frequently distracts the mind and deludes it, whereas brevity¹³¹ makes for concentration.

If it happens that, as you pray, some word evokes delight or re-

131. Gk *monologia*, i.e. short prayers of varied content. See the Preface, p. 44; *DS* viii (1972), col. 1131.

morse within you, linger over it; for at that moment our guardian angel is praying with us.

However pure you may be, do not be forward in your dealings with God. Approach Him rather in all humility, and you will be given still more boldness. And even if you have climbed the whole ladder of the virtues, pray still for the forgiveness of sins. Heed Paul's cry regarding sinners "of whom I am the first" (1 Tim. 1:15).

Oil and salt are the condiments of food; chastity and tears give flight to prayer.

If you are clothed in gentleness and in freedom from anger, you will find it no trouble to free your mind from captivity.

Until we have acquired true prayer, we are like those who introduce children to walking.

Make the effort to raise up, or rather, to enclose your mind within the words of your prayer; and if, like a child, it gets tired and falters, raise it up again. The mind, after all, is naturally unstable, but the God Who can do everything can also give it firm endurance. Persevere in this, therefore, and do not grow weary; and He Who sets a boundary to the sea of the mind will come to you too during your prayer and will say, "Thus far you shall come, and no farther" (Job 38:11). Spirit cannot be bound, but where He is found everything yields to the Creator of spirit.

If you have ever seen the Sun, you will be able to converse with Him in an appropriate way. But if you have not, then how can you truly talk to Him?

The beginning of prayer is the expulsion of distractions from the very start by a single thought;¹³² the middle stage is the concentration on what is being said or thought; its conclusion is rapture in the Lord.

Prayer brings one sort of joy to those living in community, and another to those praying in stillness. Elation is sometimes characteristic of the former, but humility is always to be found in the latter.

If you are careful to train your mind never to wander, it will stay by you even at mealtimes. But if you allow it to stray freely, then you will never have it beside you. "I would prefer to speak five words with my understanding" (1 Cor. 14:19) and so on, says the mighty practitioner of great and high prayer. But prayer of this sort is foreign to infant souls, and so because of our imperfection we need

quantity as well as quality in the words of our prayer, the former making a way for the latter, in accordance with the saying about giving prayer to him who prays resolutely, albeit impurely and laboriously (cf. 1 Kings [1 Sam.] 2:9).

There is a difference between the tarnish of prayer, its disappearance, the robbery of it, and its defilement. Prayer is tarnished when we stand before God, our minds seething with irrelevancies. It disappears when we are led off into useless cares. It is robbed when our thoughts stray without our realization of the fact. And it is defiled when we are in any way under attack.

If we happen not to be alone at the time of prayer, let us form within ourselves the demeanor of someone who prays. But if the servants of praise are not sharing our company, we may openly put on the appearance of those at prayer. For among the weak, the mind often conforms to the body.

Total contrition is necessary for everyone, but particularly for those who have come to the King to obtain forgiveness of their sins. While we are still in prison, let us listen to him who told Peter to put on the garment of obedience, to shed his own wishes, and, having been stripped of them, to come close to the Lord in prayer, seeking only His will (cf. Acts 12:8). Then you will receive the God Who takes the helm of your soul and pilots you safely.

Rise from love of the world and love of pleasure. Put care aside, strip your mind, refuse your body. Prayer, after all, is a turning away from the world, visible and invisible. What have I in heaven? Nothing. What have I longed for on earth besides You? Nothing except simply to cling always to You in undistracted prayer. Wealth pleases some, glory others, possessions others, but what I want is to cling to God and to put the hopes of my dispassion in Him (cf. Ps. 72:25, 28).

Faith gives wings to prayer, and without it no one can fly upward to heaven.

Those of us who are swept by passion must ceaselessly pray to the Lord, for all the passionate have advanced from passion to dispassion.

Even if the judge has no fear of God, yet because a soul widowed from God by sin and by a fall disturbs Him, He will take revenge on the body, the soul's adversary, and on the spirits who declare war on her (cf. Luke 18:1–7).

Our good Redeemer, by speedily granting what is asked, draws to His love those who are grateful. But He keeps ungrateful souls

¹³² Gk *monologistōs*, which may mean "by a repeated short prayer."

praying a long time before Him, hungering and thirsting for what they want, since a badly trained dog rushes off as soon as it is given bread and leaves the giver behind.

After a long spell of prayer, do not say that nothing has been gained, for you have already achieved something. For, after all, what higher good is there than to cling to the Lord and to persevere in unceasing union with Him?

A convicted man does not fear his sentence as much as a zealous man the time of prayer. So if he is shrewd and sensible, he will remember this and will therefore be able to avoid reproach, anger, anxiety, concerns, affliction, satiety, temptation, and distractions.

Get ready for your set time of prayer by unceasing prayer in your soul. In this way, you will soon make progress. I have observed that those who were outstanding in obedience and who tried as far as possible to keep in mind the thought of God were in full control of their minds and wept copiously as soon as they stood in prayer, for holy obedience had prepared them for this.

One can be held back and distracted by the singing of psalms in a congregation. This does not happen when one is a solitary. However, despondency can assail the latter, while in the former situation the brethren can give help by their zeal.

War reveals the love of a soldier for his king, and the time and practice of prayer show up a monk's love for God. So your prayer shows where you stand. Indeed, theologians say that prayer is a monk's mirror.

Someone who is occupied with some task and continues with it at the hour of prayer is being fooled by the demons, for these thieves aim to steal one hour after another from us.

Do not refuse a request to pray for the soul of another, even when you yourself lack the gift of prayer. For often the very faith of the person making the request will evoke the saving contrition of the one who is to offer the prayer.

Do not become conceited when you have prayed for others and have been heard, for it is their faith which has been active and efficacious.

A child is examined each day without fail regarding what he has learned from his teacher. And it is reasonable to ask that there be a reckoning of each prayer we have undertaken, in order that we may have an idea of the power we have received from God. You should see to this. And when you have prayed soberly, you will soon have to

cope with bouts of ill temper, something our enemies aim for.

Every virtuous act we do—and this is particularly true of prayer—should be done with great sensitivity. A soul prays with sensitivity when it has overcome anger.

Whatever is obtained as a result of long and persistent prayer will remain.

When a man has found the Lord, he no longer has to use words when he is praying, for the Spirit Himself will intercede for him with groans that cannot be uttered (cf. Rom. 8:26).

Do not form sensory images during prayer, for distraction will certainly follow.

The confident expectation of gaining that for which one is begging will show up during prayer. Confidence is doubt absent. Confidence is proof of the uncertain.

If prayer is a matter of concern to you, then show yourself to be merciful. Monks will receive a hundredfold if they are merciful, and they will receive everything else in the life to come.

When fire comes to dwell in the heart it resurrects prayer; and after prayer has been revived and taken up into heaven, a descent of fire takes place into the upper chamber of the soul.

Some claim that prayer is better than the remembrance of death. But for my part, my praise goes out to the two natures in one person.¹³³

When a good horse is mounted, it warms up and quickens its pace. The singing of psalms is the pace and a determined mind is the horse. It scents the battle from afar, is ready for it, and dominates the scene.

It would be very wrong to snatch water from the mouth of a thirsty person. Worse, however, is the case of a soul that is praying with compunction and is snatched away from its task before it has completed its longed-for prayer.

Do not stop praying as long as, by God's grace, the fire and the water have not been exhausted,¹³⁴ for it may happen that never again in your whole life will you have such a chance to ask for the forgiveness for your sins.

A man with a taste for prayer may defile his mind with one care-

133. Prayer and the remembrance of death (love and fear) form a unity analogous to that between the divine and human natures in Christ.

134. I.e., as long as fervor and tears remain.

less word, and then at prayer he will not get what he wants in the way he used to.

To keep a regular watch over the heart is one thing; to guard the heart by means of the mind is another for the mind is the ruler and high priest offering spiritual sacrifices to Christ. When heaven's holy fire lays hold of the former, it burns them because they still lack purification. This is what one of those endowed with the title of Theologian tells us.¹³⁵ But as for the latter, it enlightens them in proportion to the perfection they have achieved. It is one and the same fire that is called that which consumes (cf. Heb. 12:29) and that which illuminates (cf. John 1:9). Hence the reason why some emerge from prayer as from a blazing furnace and as though having been relieved of all material defilements. Others come forth as if they were resplendent with light and clothed in a garment of joy and of humility. But as for those who emerge without having experienced either of these effects, I would say that they have prayed in a bodily, not to say a Jewish, manner, and not spiritually.

A body changes in its activity as a result of contact with another body. How therefore could there be no change in someone who with innocent hands has touched the Body of God?¹³⁶

We may note that our all-good King, like some earthly monarch, sometimes distributes His gifts to His soldiers Himself, sometimes through a friend or a slave, and sometimes in a hidden way. But certainly it will be in accordance with the garment of humility worn by each of us.

A man stands before an earthly monarch. But he turns his face away and talks to the enemies of the king, and the king will be offended. In the same way, the Lord will be offended by someone who at prayer time turns away toward unclean thoughts. So if the dog keeps coming, drive him off with a stick and never give in to him, however much he may persist.

Ask with tears, seek with obedience, knock with patience. For so it goes that he "who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7:8).

In your prayers be careful not to beg too much on behalf of the

opposite sex, for the enemy may come at you from the unprotected side.¹³⁷

Do not insist on confessing your carnal acts in detail, since you might become a traitor to yourself.

The hour of prayer is no time for thinking over necessities, nor even spiritual tasks, because you may lose the better part (cf. Luke 10:42).

Hold on to the staff of prayer and you will not fall. And even a fall will not be fatal, since prayer is a devout coercion of God (cf. Luke 18:5).

The value of prayer can be guessed from the way the demons attack us during services in church, and its fruit may be inferred from the victory over the enemy. "By this I know You are on my side because the enemy will not come to gloat over me" (Ps. 40:12) in the hour of battle. "I cried out with all my heart," said the psalmist (Ps. 118:145). He is referring to body, soul, and spirit, and where the last two are gathered, God is in the midst of them (cf. Matt. 18:20).

We are not all the same, either in body or soul. Some profit from singing the psalms quickly, others from doing so slowly, the one fighting distraction, the others coping with ignorance.

If you are always in dialog with the King in regard to your enemies, take heart whenever they attack you. A long struggle will not be necessary for you, for they will soon give up of their own accord. These unholy beings are afraid that you may earn a crown as a result of your battle against them through prayer, and besides, when scoured by prayer they will run away as though from a fire.

Always be brave, and God will teach you your prayer.

You cannot learn to see just because someone tells you to do so. For that, you require your own natural power of sight. In the same way, you cannot discover from the teaching of others the beauty of prayer. Prayer has its own special teacher in God, who "teaches man knowledge" (Ps. 93:10). He grants the prayer of him who prays. And He blesses the years of the just.

135. St. Gregory of Nazianzus: cf. *Or. 21, 2* (PG 35, 1084D).

136. I.e., how are we not transformed by receiving the Body of Christ in Holy Communion?

137. I.e., from the side of the weapon (prayer) rather than from the side of the shield (asceticism).

Step 30

ON FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

And now at last, after all that has been said, there remains that triad, faith, hope, and love, binding and securing the union of all. "But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13), since that is the very name of God Himself (cf. 1 John 4:8). To me they appear, one as a ray, one as light, and one as a disk,¹⁴⁶ and all as a single radiance and a single splendor. The first can make and create all things, the mercy of God encircles the second and keeps it from confusion, while the third never falls, never halts on its way, never gives respite to the man wounded by its blessed rapture.

The man who wants to talk about love is undertaking to speak about God. But it is risky to talk about God and could even be dangerous for the unwary. Angels know how to speak about love, but even they do so only in proportion to the light within them.

"God is love" (1 John 4:16). But someone eager to define this is blindly striving to measure the sand in the ocean.

Love, by its nature, is a resemblance to God, insofar as this is humanly possible. In its activity it is inebriation of the soul. Its distinctive character is to be a fountain of faith, an abyss of patience, a sea of humility.

Love is the banishment of every sort of contrariness, for love thinks no evil.

Love, dispassion, and adoption are distinguished by name, and name only. Light, fire, and flame join to fashion one activity. So too with love, dispassion, and adoption.

Fear shows up if ever love departs, for the man with no fear is either filled with love or is dead in spirit.

There is nothing wrong about offering human analogies for longing, fear, concern, zeal, service, and love of God. Lucky the man who loves and longs for God as a smitten lover does for his beloved. Lucky the man whose fear of God is in no way less than the fear of the accused in front of a judge. Lucky the man who is caught up with the zeal of loyal slaves toward their owner. Lucky the man who is as passionately concerned with the virtues as a jealous husband watching over his wife. Lucky the man who prays before God like a courtier before the king. Lucky the man who strives without end to please the Lord as others try to please men.

Not even a mother clings to her nursing child as a son of love clings to the Lord at all times.

Someone truly in love keeps before his mind's eye the face of the beloved and embraces it there tenderly. Even during sleep the longing continues unappeased, and he murmurs to his beloved. That is how it is for the body. And that is how it is for the spirit. A man wounded by love had this to say about himself—and it really amazes me—"I sleep (because nature commands this) but my heart is awake (because of the abundance of my love)" (Song of Songs 5:2). You should take note, my brother, that the stag,¹⁴⁷ which is the soul, destroys reptiles and then, inflamed by love, as if struck by an arrow,¹⁴⁸ it longs and grows faint for the love of God (cf. Ps. 41:1).

The impact of hunger is not always obvious, but thirst has a definite and clear effect. It reveals to all the presence of a fever. Hence someone who yearns for God has this to say: "My soul is thirsty for God, for the mighty and living God" (cf. Ps. 41:3).

If the sight of the one we love clearly makes us change completely, so that we turn cheerful, glad, and carefree, what will the face of the Lord Himself not do as He comes to dwell, invisibly, in a pure soul?

When fear arises from the deeper reaches of the soul, it destroys

146. A common image among the Fathers to express the unity of the Trinity.

147. See note 86, p. 220.

148. Or: "venom" (i.e. of the reptiles).

and devours impurity. "Nail down my flesh with fear of You" (Ps. 118:120). So it is said.

Holy love has a way of consuming some. This is what is meant by the one who said, "You have ravished our hearts, ravished them" (Song of Songs 4:9). And it makes others bright and overjoyed. In this regard it has been said: "My heart was full of trust and I was helped, and my flesh has revived" (Ps. 27:7). For when the heart is cheerful, the face beams (cf. Prov. 15:13), and a man flooded¹⁴⁹ with the love of God reveals in his body, as if in a mirror, the splendor of his soul, a glory like that of Moses when he came face to face with God (cf. Exod. 34:29–35).

Men who have attained this angelic state often forget to eat, and I really think they do not even miss their food. No wonder, since an opposite desire drives out the very wish to eat, and indeed I suspect that the bodies of these incorruptible men are immune to sickness, for their bodies have been sanctified and rendered incorruptible by the flame of chastity which has put out the flame.¹⁵⁰ My belief is that they accept without any pleasure the food set out in front of them, for just as subterranean waters nourish the roots of a plant, the fires of heaven are there to sustain their souls.

The growth of fear is the starting point of love, and total purity is the foundation for theology.¹⁵¹

When a man's senses are perfectly united to God, then what God has said is somehow mysteriously clarified. But where there is no union of this kind, then it is extremely difficult to speak about God.

The consubstantial¹⁵² Word brings purity to completion, and His presence destroys death, and when death is done away with, the disciple of sacred knowledge is illuminated. The Word of the Lord, being from the Lord, remains eternally pure.

The man who does not know God speaks about Him only in probabilities.

Purity makes of a disciple someone who can speak of God, and he can move on to a knowledge of the Trinity.

He who loves the Lord has first loved his brother, for the latter is proof of the former. Someone who loves his neighbor will never tol-

¹⁴⁹ Literally: "somewhat commingled."

¹⁵⁰ I.e., of the passions.

¹⁵¹ The knowledge of God from experience rather than from study.

¹⁵² Or: "the indwelling Word" (*enousios*).

erate slanderers and will run from them as though from a fire. And the man who claims to love the Lord but is angry with his neighbor is like someone who dreams he is running.

Hope is the power behind love. Hope is what causes us to look forward to the reward of love. Hope is an abundance of hidden treasure. It is the abundant assurance of the riches in store for us. It is a rest from labor, a doorway of love. It lifts despair and is the image of what is not yet present. When hope fails, so does love. Struggles are bound by it, labors depend on it, and mercy lies all around it. The hopeful monk slays despondency, kills it with his sword. Hope comes from the experience of the Lord's gifts, and someone with no such experience must be ever in doubt. Hope is destroyed by anger, for hope does not disappoint and the angry man has no grace.

Love grants prophecy, miracles. It is an abyss of illumination, a fountain of fire, bubbling up to inflame the thirsty soul. It is the condition of angels, and the progress of eternity.

Most beautiful of all the virtues, tell us where you feed your flock, where you take your noonday rest (cf. Song of Songs 1:7). Enlighten us, end our thirst, lead us, show us the way, since we long to soar up to you. You rule everything, and now you have enraptured my soul. I am unable to hold in your flame, and therefore I will go forward praising you. "You rule the power of the sea, you make gentle (and deaden) the surge of its waves. You make humble the proud thought as a wounded man. With your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies" (cf. Ps. 88:9–10), and you have made your lovers invincible.

I long to know how Jacob saw you fixed above the ladder (cf. Gen. 28:12). That climb, how was it? Tell me, for I long to know. What is the mode, what is the law joining together those steps that the lover has set as an ascent in his heart? (cf. Ps. 83:6). I thirst to know the number of those steps, and the time required to climb them. He who discovered Your struggle and Your vision has spoken to us of the guides. But he would not—perhaps he could not—tell us any more.

This empress,¹⁵³ as if coming from heaven, spoke thus in my soul's hearing: "My love, you will never be able to know how beauti-

¹⁵³ I.e., love. HTM adds: "or I think I might properly say King" (i.e. God).

ful I am unless you get away from the grossness of the flesh. So let this ladder teach you the spiritual union of the virtues. And I am there on the summit, for as the great man said, a man who knew me well: ‘Remaining now are faith, hope, and love, these three. But love is the greatest of them all’ (1 Cor. 13:13).’

A BRIEF SUMMARY AND EXHORTATION

Ascend, my brothers, ascend eagerly. Let your hearts' resolve be to climb. Listen to the voice of the one who says: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of our God” (Isa. 2:3), Who makes our feet to be like the feet of the deer, “Who sets us on the high places, that we may be triumphant on His road” (Hab. 3:19).¹⁵⁴

Run, I beg you, run with him who said, “Let us hurry until we all arrive at the unity of faith and of the knowledge of God, at mature manhood, at the measure of the stature of Christ's fullness” (Eph. 4:13). Baptized in the thirtieth year of His earthly age, Christ attained the thirtieth step on the spiritual ladder, for God indeed is love, and to Him be praise, dominion, power. In Him is the cause, past, present, and future, of all that is good forever and ever. Amen.

154. Gk *odo*. HTM reads “with His song” (*odi*). The textus receptus of Hab. 3:19 is *odi* but Sinaiiticus, lectio prima, has *odo*.

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John Climacus

THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT

TRANSLATION

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Contents

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FOREWORD	ix
ABBREVIATIONS	x
PREFACE	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT	71
INDEXES	293