

The Departure of the Soul

According to the Teaching of the Orthodox Church



Reader's Edition

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OF THE SOUL

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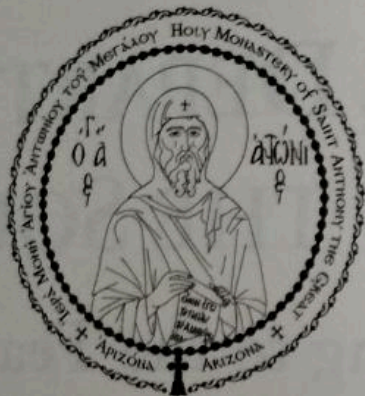
a Patristic anthology



Reader's Edition

St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery

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The Departure of the Soul
According to the Teaching of the Orthodox Church
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Cover icon: Last Judgment (details)
Stacked toll-houses: сребролюбие (avarice) and неправда (falsehood)
Stanylia, Drohobych district, Lviv oblast, Ukraine (National Museum,
Lviv) panel icon from the second half of the sixteenth century
Photographs courtesy of John-Paul Himka

«Δαίμονας οἱ ψυχῶν πράκτορες ἡμετέρων.
Μῦθος ἅπαντα κακοῖσι....»

– Ἀγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου

“Demons, the tax-collectors of our souls.
All a myth to the wicked....”

– St. Gregory the Theologian

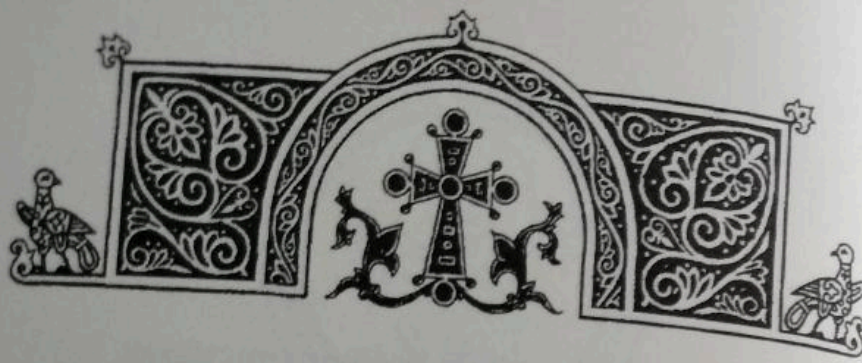


Table of Contents

Prologue

“Many Dogs Have Surrounded Me” by Geronda Ephraim of Arizona	9
---	---

Introduction

“The Trial of the Soul at the Hour of Death”	19
--	----

Prolegomenon

by Kathegoumenos Archimandrite Paisios.....	36
---	----

Chapter One

The Lives of the Saints.....	39
------------------------------	----

Chapter Two

The Writings of the Saints.....	131
---------------------------------	-----

Holy Hierarchs, Gerondas, and Clergy.....	173
---	-----

Chapter Three

Iconography.....	189
------------------	-----

Chapter Four

On Commemoration and Prayer for the Departed.....	225
---	-----

Epilogue

“Death must find us ready” by Geronda Ephraim of Arizona	247
---	-----

Appendix A

List of Scripture Verses.....	252
-------------------------------	-----

Appendix B

Canon for the Departure of the Soul.....	256
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Prologue

Geronda Ephraim

Former Abbot of

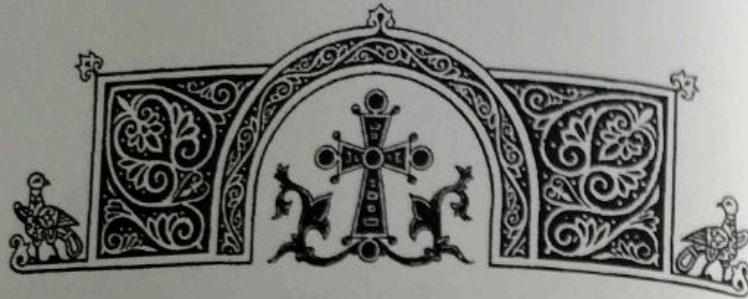
Philotheou Monastery, Mount Athos

Founder of

*St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery,
Florence, Arizona*

Judge Me, O God.

Psalm 42:1



*"Deliver me from the hands of demons,
for many dogs have surrounded me."*

— Canon for the Departure of the Soul

WHEN OUR BROTHERHOOD was first established, there was a frightful but also beneficial incident with a geronda¹ of the skete²; the older fathers certainly would remember this. This geronda, who was sick with a heart condition, called me one day to go and confess him. Indeed, we had confession, but the tempter intervened and convinced the geronda to hide certain faults. Perhaps these faults occurred when he was still living in the world.³ When his heart condition became serious and he realized that the time of his departure was approaching, he sent his brother to ask me to return again for confession. His brother, who was also a monk, told me that the geronda was impatient and asked me to find out what was happening and to try to calm him down a little before he lost his soul. I was surprised with this because I knew that monks are somewhat patient with temptations and ill-

¹ The word "geronda" is the Greek term for an elder or a spiritual father and can also be used as a term of respect for any elderly monk.

² A small monastic village, usually consisting of a central church and several monastic dwellings.

³ The monastic term "living in the world" here denotes the geronda's life before he became a monk on the Holy Mountain of Athos.

ness, and they do not easily become impatient due to some pain.

When we went there and I saw the geronda, I realized that it was not impatience, but instead, something new was happening to him, something relevant to his soul. I told his brother to leave us and that I would talk to the geronda alone. I sat next to him and understood that he was surrounded by demons.

"Geronda, are you surrounded by evil spirits?" I said to him.

"Yes, holy father."

I saw that he was agitated, looking to his left and right as if he was trying to protect himself from mad dogs that had surrounded him and were attacking him. I also saw that he was very attentive, carried away by something the demons were telling him. Trying to help him, I changed the tone of my voice a little and said to him:

"Geronda, what are the demons telling you?"

"Oh! I can't say what they are telling me."

"No, no, pay very close attention because they know our sins better than we can remember them."

He started little by little to tell me what the demons were telling him. They were accusing him of various faults that he had not confessed, and they were exposing them to him in his despair. I was getting all the information through him, hoping that God would have mercy on this man in this difficult hour of his despair. I kept telling him to confess his sins to me as he was hearing them from the demons, which he did. However, when I saw that he continued to be in a miserable state, agitated, restless, and despairing, I said to him:

"Geronda, I am going out for a little while, but I will come back."

"No, my dear spiritual father, stay next to me!"

"It's all right, I will only be gone for two or three minutes; it is not a big deal, I will be back."

I left and went to the fathers in our brotherhood and said to them:

"Fathers, the geronda is in a difficult situation. Let us do a prayer rope for him." We all did a prayer rope and when I returned to the geronda, I found him in a peaceful state.

"What is going on, Geronda? Where are they?" I said to him.

"Here. The dogs are still around."

"But are they saying anything to you?" "They are quiet now."

"Excellent!"

At night when I entered my cell for my personal vigil and started the prayer,⁴ I sensed that the demons which were at the geronda's place earlier were now in my own cell, causing me trouble. In all my years, this certainly was the first time that I encountered so many demons fighting me, so close, so perceptibly. I turned on the light to read, but I could not read. The demons were everywhere, left and right. However, I was not afraid at all because I knew that they were there to scare me out of going back to help the geronda. I told them to do their job and I would do mine. Later I went to the Divine Liturgy, but they did not appear there. After the Divine Liturgy, I went back to the ill and nearly dead man with another spiritual father with whom I performed the mysteries of Holy Unction and Confession. I asked the geronda a specific question:

⁴ "The prayer" refers to the single-phrased Jesus prayer, most commonly formulated as: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."

Prologue

"Well, were the demons the only ones that came? Where is your guardian angel?"

"He is here also."

"But why doesn't he take you?"

"He is waiting for an order from above."

"Well, you see your guardian angel, but do you also see our guardian angels?"

"I see them. And your angels are wearing a kind of crown on their head. Furthermore, they have something special on them which indicate that they guard spiritual fathers."

He continued to tell me that there would be a festival on Monday—it was Friday then—which certain people, who were presently absent, would attend. Of course, he meant his funeral, and these people were indeed there on Monday.

During his last days, the demons wanted to undermine him with something serious, because he had confessed everything else. Because they had lost on all the other issues, they were enraged and were trying to at least catch him in something at the end. The day before the geronda's death I had sent Father Joseph to keep vigil, pray on the prayer rope for him, and help him. When I went in the morning, the geronda said to me in the presence of others who were there:

"My good confessor, let me tell you how the demons almost caught me, and how I would have completely lost my soul."

"What is it, Geronda?"

"Last night the demons were telling me that I would get well and everything would go away if I would drink this whole jug of water. Of course, I understood they meant that if I drank it I would burst and die, and I was overtaken by the thought of doing it to end my torment. And as I was asking a father to give me the jug of water, my brother prevented it by

telling him that if I drank it I would burst. Thus, they didn't give it to me and I was saved."

In short, after the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, I visited the geronda again and found him very peaceful, sitting in an armchair. I said to him:

"How are you, Geronda?"

"I am very well, my dear confessor. May God reward you for what you did."

"I am going to lie down for an hour," I told him, "because I was in vigil last night, and I will come again afterwards to see you."

"Yes, go rest, Geronda."

Finally, I left. When I woke up after an hour, the fathers told me that the bells had rung half an hour earlier. Ah, I said, he must have departed from this world. And indeed, the geronda had expired.

The above case reveals a man who was not well prepared for his exit from this world. Now I will tell you the case of a well-prepared spiritual man so that you can see the difference in these two cases.

The well-prepared man was my geronda, Saint Joseph the Hesychast. When he was sitting in prayer, at some point he used to think through the events of his day to figure out which passion was still alive, which weakness still disturbed him, and he would make a new decision to fight them and obliterate them. This work took place every night during his prayers. So, all this labor had prepared him as perfectly as is humanly possible. I can say this because he used to tell me, "My child, the difficulty is how to cross the bridge of death. After that, by the grace of God, everything is taken care of." Those were the words of a well-prepared man.

I have never seen such a brave man facing with so much courage that which every man fears. This was confirmed by various states preceding his death. One of those states was that he was weeping continuously out of great love for Christ and our dear Panagia. He had no regrets. He was awaiting death as a festival, as deliverance from the burdens of the world. He was waiting for this hour in order to see God's face, to enjoy and be filled with its beauty. He was waiting to enter the angelic order with which he continuously lived. This is why a little before his death he began to worry and say, "But why am I not leaving? The revelation from God was perfect and definite. God has made His decision; why then am I delayed?" I told him then that we would pray for his departure. Indeed, twenty minutes later while he was talking to the fathers, he looked up to the heavens and saw something that only he could see and could not find words to describe it to us. Then he bowed his head and said, "I am leaving, I am departing. Bless; all is finished." He closed his eyes, received the sleep of a blessed man, and departed for the other world.

We must struggle to attain this precious salvation. The struggle is not a game. We did not come here simply to exist and live as it fell to our lot. The matter is more serious than anyone can imagine. God lives and therefore the salvation of man is something that is beyond seriousness, because if we lose our soul the misfortune is eternal. We must not take this matter lightly and let it escape us. The seriousness will become apparent to us in all its extent when we approach the hour of death. Then our mind grasps this reality and things become serious. Childish thinking is put aside. At that time, a man sees that everything he heard about death, everything he read, and everything he was admonished about is coming true. Most of all, of course, he now has the sense of death,

and he realizes that he is leaving. The mind begins to contemplate and question: "What is going to happen now? Where am I going?" The conscience becomes an eloquent mechanism that works unceasingly: "This happened, and that, and the other thing." It seems to him that he is hearing all this for the first time: "But when did all this take place and yet never bothered me?" Of course, negligence and indolence and the darkening of the mind had covered all like an obscuring veil. And now the wind of the approaching death blows and things come to light. The soul, seeing the reality of what is happening, begins to lose courage: "Now what is going to happen? Can I go back?"

"No," says the conscience, "now you will proceed towards the truth."

The man sees the evil demons approaching. They continuously and invisibly follow the various signs. From experience they understand when the hour of death is approaching, and they anticipate it by getting a front-row seat. They want to be first to come and shock and mortify the soul with their terrible appearance. They present the documents containing the soul's sins in order to create despair and hopelessness. The soul trembles and sighs, and when it sees the guardian angel—or more angels—it turns its eyes in supplication and pleads for help. But the angels help according to the person's deeds. Afterwards the soul turns its eyes towards relatives, friends, and brothers; it raises its hands asking for help, but receives no assistance from the others. And then it turns its only hope to God's mercy.

All these things that we said are the reality and the truth. We have seen many people leave this life. We have heard many accounts of the various events which occur at the hour of death. All these correspond to what we read in the Patristic

Prologue

Tradition. These things will also happen to us, and for this reason we must keep them in mind and take the appropriate course of action. The memory of death must restrain us continuously and keep us above all worldly things that we see down here. Our thought must always revolve around death, the departure, the ascent towards God's court of justice, and the conditions in Paradise versus Hades. Our prayer must be as continuous as possible. We must struggle because the prayer of the soul that struggles is heard by God. It has boldness, especially during the hour of death, and it will face the situation differently.

Let us think about all these things continuously. It is the Patristic truth. It is from life. It is from the revelation of God. And may we be inspired to struggle accordingly in order to attain eternal salvation.⁵



⁵ From spoken homilies delivered to Geronda Ephraim's brotherhood on January 6, 1977 and April 5, 1978 at Philotheou Monastery, Mount Athos, Greece.

Introduction

The Trial of the Soul at the Hour of Death

*For the ruler of this world cometh,
and hath nothing in Me.*

John 14:30



Strive to enter in at the strait gate.

(Luke 13:24)

HEAVEN, THE KINGDOM OF GOD, the eternal life is open. From the moment our Christ died upon the Cross, with His expiration Paradise became wide open. Up to that moment, the gate of Heaven, the door of Paradise, the entrance into the Upper Jerusalem was barred. Our Christ, spreading His immaculate arms and opening His embrace on the Cross, embraced the entire human race to give them eternal life.

The ultimate goal of our Orthodox Christian life is for us to be found worthy of entering into the glory of this Kingdom which now lies open to us. Just the mere thought of seeing what *eye hath not seen* and becoming an inheritor of *the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him* (1 Cor. 2:9) brings joy to the hearts of the faithful. And with such great hope, we patiently endure every affliction and temptation in this world in order to become permanent inhabitants of the Upper Jerusalem. *For our citizenship is in Heaven* (Phil. 3:20).

But we are also ever mindful of the terrifying desolation of hell awaiting those who neglect to love God and keep His word. The greatest commandment is this: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind* (Matt. 22:37). Failure to struggle to keep God's commandments results in the torment of being shut out of the

Introduction

Kingdom and gives rise to the pain of eternal separation from Christ: *Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matt. 25:41).

To save us from this dreadful, endless estrangement from Him, our Lord Jesus Christ came not only to open the entrance to Heaven by His sacrifice on the Cross, but as He Himself is the Way (cf. John 14:6), Christ also revealed the path to eternal life: *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments* (Matt. 19:17).

The two opposing paths and the unerring guide of the Orthodox Church

In the beginning, the Lord established the way of the commandments by giving but a single mandate to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden so that by offering their free will to God through obedience, they could progress ever further into the perfect likeness of their Creator. But instead, heeding the counsel of the devil, their disobedience cast them out of Paradise. Thus, two opposite paths were set for the human race: one rising to eternal union with God in His ineffable love, and one plummeting into the torments of everlasting separation. *Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the City* (Rev. 22:14).

Now, by enlightening and perfecting His children through His Word and the gift of the Holy Spirit, our Father continually prepares us in this world so that we may not be found alienated from Him in the next life through our countless acts of disobedience to His will. The Holy Trinity entrusted this grace of preparation to the Church, safeguarding the pathway to the Kingdom from salvation-obstructing heresies. The Church

readies us for our journey to Heaven through our participation in the Mysteries and instructs us through the divinely inspired teachings of the Holy Fathers how to prepare ourselves for that most crucial hour of the departure of our souls. The saints first became perfected in the highest gifts of God, only then venturing to teach us how to live in repentance, confessing our mistakes and struggling against the passions in order to reach the end of our lives with as few sins as possible. Thus, through the prayers of the Holy Fathers and by adhering to their sacred counsels, we shall be found worthy to escape the snares of the enemy and ascend to God.

Foreshadowed in the law and the prophets, this teaching regarding the critical need to prepare for the most difficult hour of death was imparted by our Savior Himself to His disciples shortly before His self-emptying death on the Cross.

The witness of Holy Scripture to the Orthodox teaching on the departure of the soul

On the night in which He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples for the last time before the departure of His soul. As recorded in the Gospel of St. John, in this opportune moment before His death, our Savior left us this important teaching about the hour of death:

Hereafter I will not talk much with you. For the ruler of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me (Jn. 14:30).

According to the God-bearing Fathers of the Orthodox Church, these words which Christ spoke to the apostles are at the basis of the Church's tradition and doctrine about the testing of the soul that occurs at the hour of death.⁶

⁶ The phrase "at the hour of death" will be used throughout this book to refer to an indeterminate period of time before and after death including the moment of the

Previously, our Savior taught the apostles about His Last Judgment, when He would come again with glory to judge the living and the dead at the end of time (cf. Matt. 13:40–43). But just before His Passion, our Christ also taught His disciples about the judgment of each individual soul at the hour of death. And through His prophets sent before His Incarnation, the Lord also taught us about mankind's common enemy, the fallen angels, who in their evil desire to impede our ascent to Heaven take on a malicious role in the trial.

So the Lord plainly taught us that the devil, the dark ruler of this world, plays a part at the hour of death. How he came to be the most malevolent enemy of the human race, obstructing the pathway to Heaven as the exactor of his own belongings which he seeks out in the departing soul, is also depicted clearly in the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church.

I beheld Satan as lightning fall from Heaven (Lk. 10:18): the occupation of the lower air by the fallen angels

The Archangel Lucifer conceived of a dreadful ambition: *I will set my throne above the stars of Heaven ... I will go up above the clouds, I will be like the Most High* (Isa. 14:13). Immediately God commanded His holy Archangel Michael to cast the would-be usurper down from the heights of Heaven. *And there was war in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in Heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him* (Rev. 12:7–9). The re-

separation of the soul from the body. Additionally, "trial of the soul" will be used in the sense of both a court proceeding and the suffering of tribulation.

maining orders of the angels obedient to God stood their ground in Heaven, while the fallen angels, darkened and evil as a result of their distance from God, took their stand in the space beneath the heavens (cf. Eph. 2:2 and 6:12), on the earth itself (cf. Job 2:2), and even in the abysses (cf. Rev. 12:12).

Renamed Satan after his fall from Heaven, the devil's maniacal hatred of the entire human race sprang from his envy, seeing our high calling from God (cf. Phil. 3:4). Man is called to occupy the angelic ranks in Heaven from which the rebellious angels fell (cf. Rev. 6:11). But the Fathers of the Church teach that after the fall of man, the human soul, now itself a corrupted spirit, became susceptible to the influence of the dark spirits urging humankind to every iniquity. Using the snare of sin baited with the saccharine sweetness of the passions, the devil and his demons continually strive to prevent this supreme purpose of the human race from finding realization in even a single person.

Christ's redemptive love for humanity

"The devil, the enemy of our race," writes St. Athanasios the Great, "having fallen from Heaven, wanders about our lower atmosphere, and there bearing rule over his fellow-spirits ... tries to hinder them that are going up ... while the Lord came to cast down the devil, and clear the air and prepare the way for us up into Heaven.... Stretching out His hands upon the Cross, He overthrew *the prince of the power of the air, that now works in the sons of disobedience* (Eph. 2:2) and made the way clear for us into the heavens."⁷

⁷ St. Athanasios the Great, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, NPNF, 2nd series, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, 1987), p. 577 (PG 26:1472); and *Letter 60*, NPNF, 2nd series, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, 1987), ch. 25, p. 50 (PG 25:140B).

Introduction

Whereas by His descent into Hades, Christ demolished the gates that were detaining the souls of the dead, similarly His Crucifixion cleared the air of the demonic ranks opposing the heavenly ascent of departing souls. Christ in His human nature first died and ascended to the throne of God, leaving us the path of His commandments so that we might follow Him to our eternal heavenly homeland. But just as the imprisoning gates of Hades are reforged, as it were, by disobedience to Christ's commandments, so too this disobedience obscured the way He cleared for those Christians who would follow Him to Heaven. Displaying the record of a soul's sins, the heavy debt of which hinders the ascent to God, the demons once again occupy their aerial stations, blocking our free passage and demanding reparation.

However, in His boundless love for the human race, God appointed guardian angels to accompany human beings (cf. Matt. 18:10) in order to help them in the struggle against the passions in this life and to assist them in that most arduous hour of death.

The help of the holy angels during the departure of the soul is immeasurable. The demons intend to bring the soul to despair by accusing the soul of sin, causing it to lose hope in the mercy of the Lord. But the holy angels comfort the terrified soul so that it might continue its ascent bolstered by its confidence in God. To counterbalance the handwriting against us (cf. Col. 2:14)—the evidence of the passions in our soul and the details of all our unconfessed sins together with our lack of remorse over them—the angels guarding us bring forward the record of our virtues, our repentance and sincere attempt toward amendment, and all the good deeds we may have performed in this life. In this way, as the departing soul passes through the lower atmosphere, a trial occurs.

The measure of mastery that the passions acquired over the soul—or the soul over the passions—is critical in determining the outcome of the trial. This is the lesson in our Savior's salvific words to us: *The ruler of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me* (Jn. 14:30)—that is, nothing of the culpable passions. The angels and the demons bring forth the evidence of either the elements of virtue or the remainder of the passions in our soul. And then comes the moment of the announcement of the verdict. For this, a Judge is required.

The particular judgment

As God is our Creator and Savior, the Giver of every good and the Bestower of life, He is also rightfully our Judge. Having given us such generous gifts, with great concern our Master also watches over the contest of our life. Far from lording His blessings over us as would a tyrant, our Benefactor reviews, weighs, and appraises how we spent this precious treasure of our time in this life which He gave to us in His kindness. Having both supervised and supported our struggle for salvation which He dearly desires to award to us, it is evident that our Lord Jesus Christ will be the Judge of each person, since the Father *has entrusted all judgment to the Son* (Jn. 5:22).

As stated in the Orthodox Nicene Creed, at the end of time Christ "shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead." Additionally, the Gospel parable of the rich man and Lazarus shows that prior to the Last Judgment, the Lord also conducts an immediate judgment at the departure of the soul (cf. Lk. 16:23–25). The Apostle Paul noted about this judgment: *Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment* (Heb. 9:27). The Orthodox Church calls this judgment the "particular judgment." At this trial, the soul receives

its allotment in the afterlife according to the life which it led on earth, either in Paradise, a place of repose and joy, or in Hades, a place of torment and sorrow. It then awaits the general Resurrection that will take place at the Second Coming of Christ.

The *theoria* of the departure of the soul and the transmission of the revelation through the teachings of the saints

Over the centuries, the Orthodox doctrine of the particular judgment of the soul was confirmed by the direct divine revelation granted by God to numerous saints *in a mystery* (1 Cor. 2:7). Having been given the *theoria*, or spiritual vision, of the trial of the soul at the hour of death, the saints then described this spiritual reality with words and images. Guided also by God in their choice of words describing their holy visions—the expressions of nearly inexpressible spiritual concepts—the Fathers then proclaimed their edifying teachings in order to help the faithful attain to the Kingdom of Heaven. In this way, the saints' experience of spiritual realities transmitted through their teachings has become a primary vehicle of testimony through which the Orthodox Church receives its doctrine.

A characteristic example of such a revelation and its expression is found in the sixth-century teaching of St. Columba of Iona. When one of his monks departed from this present life, the saint, "with his eyes upraised to Heaven, was for a long time lost in wonder and admiration." Having received the *theoria* of the trial, he concisely communicated its elements, declaring to his disciples near him:

I have this moment seen the holy angels contending in the air against the hostile powers; and I return thanks to Christ, the Judge, because the victorious angels have carried off to the joys of our heavenly country the soul of this stranger, who is the first person that hath died among us in this island.⁸

Thus, the saints' knowledge of the trial at death is empirical—a direct revelation from God. They then conveyed the revelation to the Church through their holy teachings. The transmission of this revelation has two components: one is pure revelation from God to His saint, and the other is a revelation or disclosure of the content of the experience in the form of a teaching that the saint then offers to the Church. Understanding the distinction between these two components will provide a clearer picture of the divine origin of the Church's doctrine of the trial of the soul at the hour of death.

Symbols and veils in the terminology of the Holy Fathers

The first of these components is the initial experience itself, properly defined as a divine revelation. The second is the expression or representation of the experience, either in spoken or written words or in visual images (as in iconography). Examples of this abound in the life of the Church, but perhaps the most well-known example is the profound vision of the holy Prophet and God-seer Moses on Mount Sinai (cf. Exod. 24:15ff). While Moses is in the dark cloud, God reveals to him the heavenly tabernacle. After Moses descends from the mountain, he constructs a material image of the immaterial taber-

⁸ St. Adamnan of Iona, *The Life of St. Columba* (Edinburg, 1874), bk. III, ch. VI.

Introduction

nacle, following the directions given to him by God (cf. Exod. 25:9).

The Fathers of the Church teach that the identity between the celestial and earthly (material) tabernacles is not absolute. Similar to an icon of a saint which is not "one in essence" with its archetype, the material tabernacle was both "like and unlike" the celestial one, as St. John of Damascus defines an "image" in his defense of the holy icons.⁹ St. Gregory Palamas comments on this as follows:

Can we say that when Moses had separated himself from all that sees and is seen, from all realities and concepts, and that when he had transcended the sight of the place where he was and entered the darkness, he saw nothing at all? *But he did see the immaterial tabernacle that he later showed in a material imitation to those who remained below....* Thus the tabernacle, the priesthood, and their appurtenances *were sensible symbols and veils*, covering the things which Moses saw in the divine darkness. But the things he saw *were not themselves symbols*.¹⁰

This passage, and many others like it, points to a distinction between the celestial or immaterial archetype and its "material imitation," as St. Gregory calls it. Also significant is that the material form is called both a "symbol" and a "veil." In the same way, the divinely revealed *theorias* of the trial of the soul are indeed spiritual realities, but the saints expressed them in material words and images, to the extent that this is possible

⁹ See St. John of Damascus, *On Holy Images* (London, 1898), pp. 10–17.

¹⁰ St. Gregory Palamas, *Τριάδες (Triads)* (Louvain, 1973), 2.3.55. (In Greek.) Italics added for emphasis.

within the obvious limitations of spoken or written languages and painted images.

Moreover, these verbal and visual images are "symbols" and "veils" in the particular sense in which St. Dionysios the Areopagite employs these terms (which differs from the conventional way in which most people understand the nature of the symbolic). As the material "veil" of an immaterial reality, a "symbol" both reveals and conceals, or as St. Dionysios states, "reveals precisely by concealing," so that God Himself "remains hidden even after this manifestation, or to speak more divinely, even in His manifestation."¹¹

The Lord Himself teaches us in parables, which are essentially images, but this certainly does not mean that the parables are in any way untrue. As St. Maximos the Confessor writes, the Gospel itself is an "image" of a truth that will only be revealed at the end of time, in the *eschaton*, but again, this does not mean that the "image" is somehow false. Instead, images point to the truth without being absolutely identical with it.¹²

By the grace of God and through the purity of their hearts, the saints are rendered capable of experiencing spiritual realities imperceptible to the vast majority of people. The images that the saints then transmit through their teachings enable the faithful to learn about the divine revelation. In this way, the members of the Church are able to understand the fundamental nature of what occurs at the departure of the soul. Above all, we also learn what is required in order to pass through the

¹¹ St. Dionysios the Areopagite, *Letter 3*, PG 3:1069B. (In Greek.)

¹² See St. Maximos the Confessor, *Περὶ Διαφόρων Ἀποριῶν (Ambigua)*, no. 21, PG 91:1244CD. (In Greek.) On this subject, see also the important essay by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, "Revelation through Acts, Words, and Images," in his *Theology and the Church* (Crestwood, 1980), pp. 109–154.

trial unscathed and enter joyfully into the Kingdom of the Heavens.

The courtroom and the toll-house: Patristic expressions of the revelation

In the sacred works of the Fathers of the Church, it is clearly recorded that the departing soul is met by both holy powers and evil spirits. The soul's entire life is laid bare: all its thoughts and desires, words and deeds are scrutinized, according to Christ's word that we shall have to give an account even for every idle word (cf. Matt. 12:36). Accordingly, many of the Fathers described the particular judgment as a court of law with God presiding while His angels act as the defense and the demons act as prosecutors bringing charges against the soul standing trial. The good and the sinful deeds committed throughout the defendant's lifetime are the exhibits brought forward as evidence and weighed in the balance held in the hand of the Lord Who proclaims the verdict.

Alongside the image of the courtroom trial, the Holy Fathers also use the terms "tax-collectors" and "toll-houses" as a way of representing the frenzied activity of the demons in their obstructive aerial stations. Tax collecting in the ancient world, which for the most part was violent and deceitful, provided a fitting simile depicting the demons' raging malice. The saints write about the debt accrued through sin and the demons' demand of a tax, as it were, upon the departing soul attempting to pass through. Man places himself under the demons' terrible oppression by casting off the easy yoke and light burden of God's salvific commandments (cf. Matt. 11:30). We therefore willingly enter into a kind of devastating contract with these evil advisors: we consent to continue in the sins

which they provoke through the passions, while they produce a record of them to use as evidence against us at our last breath.

A brief historical overview of the teaching

The chronologically arranged excerpts in *The Departure of the Soul* allow the reader to perceive the unbroken continuity of the doctrine of the trial of the soul at the hour of death throughout the entire history of the Church.

Beginning from the holy prophets and continuing to Christ's spoken word to His disciples, the teaching then appeared in several epistles of the apostles. It is present in the writings and prayers of the holy martyrs of the second and third centuries, and also flourished in the great theological works of the holy hierarchs and Fathers of the Church of the earliest eras. The revelation poured out upon the holy ascetics of the Egyptian desert was then generously imparted to the desert-dwelling monastic saints of the Orthodox British Isles. Continuing through the middle Byzantine period, the doctrine is found in the works of the greatest theologians of the Church, such as St. Maximos the Confessor, St. John of Damascus, and St. Symeon the New Theologian. The detailed revelation of the toll-houses contained in the Constantinopolitan tenth-century *Life of St. Basil the New* reached the heights of vivid description. Within mere decades of the baptism of Kievan Rus' the doctrine is found in the Russian Orthodox Church in the eleventh-century hagiographies (*Lives of the Saints*) of the holy passion-bearer Gleb, the first saint canonized by the Russian Church, and St. Theodosios of the Kiev Caves, the first monastic saint canonized by the Russian Church. It is also found in the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church and the Nemanja Dynasty from their foundation

beginning with St. Symeon the Myrrh-streamer's twelfth-century epistle to his son, St. Simon the First-crowned.

The teaching has continued in all quarters of the Holy Orthodox Church to the present day. The holy God-bearing Fathers of recent times—St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Herman of Alaska, St. Ignatios Brianchaninov, St. Theophan the Recluse, Sts. Ambrose, Anthony, Anatolios, Barsanuphios, and Sebastian of Optina, Sts. Makarios and Illidor of Glinsk, St. John of Kronstadt, St. Silouan the Athonite, St. Nikolai Velimirović, St. John of San Francisco, St. George of Drama, St. Justin Popović, St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia, and St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain—all taught about the toll-houses. Thus, the ancient and sacred doctrine of the trial has been incorporated into the Holy Scriptures, the liturgical services, the writings and *Lives* of the saints, and the iconography of the Orthodox Church.

The Master Reference Edition

The 1,112 pages of *The Departure of the Soul According to the Teaching of the Orthodox Church, Master Reference Edition* contain over 400 examples from Holy Scripture, the liturgical services, the writings and *Lives* of the saints, the decrees of holy synods, and the writings of hierarchs, gerondas, and theologians, and over 150 examples of iconography from world-renowned monasteries, cathedrals, and parish churches. The fullness of the Church's doctrine on the trial at the soul's departure necessitated *The Departure of the Soul's* large size. Extensive annotation and footnote cross-references allowing ease of comparison between excerpts, together with over 100 pages of indexes, appendices, and bibliography have been included

in order to help the reader navigate with ease this vast collection of sacred material.

“What can we do to pass safely through?”

Many have expressed concern over their loved ones, asking what can be done for those who are about to repose as well as for those who have already gone on ahead. As an answer to this most essential question, the chapter “On Commemoration and Prayer for the Departed,” points to the indispensable elements established by the Church for the successful completion of our passage to eternal life. In describing what help can be given to those who departed from this life in a state of soul other than perfect readiness, this crucial chapter emphasizes the Orthodox Church’s offering of great hope. The Church’s ultimate goal is to prepare the innumerable faithful souls, rendering them worthy of anchoring in the safe haven of our God and Father’s heavenly harbor, and thus uniting them in the unfathomable depths of His love for all eternity.

This project’s historical–educational objective of providing comprehensive confirmation of the Orthodox Church’s salvific teaching on the trials is closely connected with its higher spiritual objective: to help “as many as are of the faithful”¹³ to approach the mystery of the departure of the soul with the greatest possible readiness. Then, standing before our Savior Jesus Christ, the King of kings and just Judge of all, we shall have the best hopes of gazing upon His joyous countenance while hearing those most desired words:

*Well done, thou good and faithful servant,
enter thou into the joy of thy Lord! (Matt. 25:21)*

¹³ From the Litany of the Faithful in the Divine Liturgy.

Prolegomena

Kathegoumenos Archimandrite

Paisios

*of St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery,
Florence, Arizona*

*Be sober, be vigilant;
because your adversary the devil,
as a roaring lion, walketh about,
seeking whom he may devour.*

1 Peter 5:8



THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, as the true Body of Christ, preserves and perpetuates in her bosom Sacred Tradition. The saints, as bearers and, especially, as the creators of this Tradition, are those who have passed through the purification of their souls and continued towards illumination and *theosis* (deification) by means of noetic prayer and extreme patience which they demonstrated in their various battles against the passions, demons, and temptations arising from other people. The entire life of the Church is contained within this Sacred Tradition.

Holy Scripture, the dogmas of our Church, the various writings of the Holy Fathers, ecclesiastical hymnography, iconography—all are the consequence of prayer, that is, the experience of the uncreated energies of God by the illumined and deified members of our Church. This experience is part of the Sacred Tradition.

There are many other aspects of Sacred Tradition which, even though of lesser importance, nevertheless also contribute to the salvation of man. This present edition delves into one of these aspects: the passing of the soul at the hour of death through the toll-houses, namely, the time when the soul is separated from the body and we confront the bitter accusers of our souls, the demons, as we try to ascend to meet the Righteous Judge.

The purpose, then, of this edition is to touch as many souls as possible, so that, with the grace of God, they may become acquainted—if not also intimately familiar—with the great mystery of death. For “the hour of death will come upon us, it will come, and we shall not escape it. May the ruler of this world and of the air (cf. John 14:30; Eph. 2:2) find our transgressions few and insignificant when he comes, so that he cannot reprove us by the truth. Otherwise we shall weep in vain.”¹⁴

Let us pray to our Lord, that His infinite mercy may prevail at that inevitable hour, and that we may also be receptive of this great mercy.

† Kathegoumenos Archimandrite Paisios

Feast of the Synaxis of the Archangels

St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery,

Florence, Arizona

November 8, 2016

¹⁴ St. Hesychios the Priest, *On Watchfulness and Holiness in Φιλοκαλία (The Philokalia)*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1982), p. 166, no. 161. (In Greek.)

Chapter One

The Lives of the Saints

Fool, this night they demand thy soul from thee.

Luke 12:20



"Just as painters in working from models constantly gaze at their exemplar and thus strive to transfer the expression of the original to their own artistry, so too he who is anxious to make himself perfect in all kinds of virtue must gaze upon the lives of the saints as upon statues, so to speak, that move and act, and must make their excellence his own by imitation."¹⁵

— St. Basil the Great

THE HOLY TRADITION of the Orthodox Church is created by the experience of the saints, aspects of which include the Holy Scriptures, the hymnography of the liturgical services, the dogmatic and ascetical writings of the saints, iconography, and the *Lives of the Saints*. St. John Chrysostom, eulogizing the saints, writes, "The grace of God hath bequeathed to us in writing the lives of the saints and their conduct."¹⁶ Thus, proceeding from the very grace of God, the written lives of the deified members of the Body of Christ are a wellspring of the sacred doctrines of the Orthodox Church. These *Lives* were often written by the hand of another saint or by someone closest to the saint (their bishops,

¹⁵ St. Basil the Great, *Letter II*. Cited in Fr. Constantine Cavarnos, *Modern Orthodox Saints*, vol. 1 (Belmont, 1985), p. xii.

¹⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Encomium on the Holy Apostle Paul*, Homily 36, PG 63:839. (In Greek.)

deacons, disciples, or co-strugglers in the ascetical life). The details were then incorporated into their liturgical services in the *Menaion*, inscribed in holy icons (often in great detail with scenes of their life portrayed in subsections around the border of the icon), and referred to in the panegyric writings of other saints and theologians of the Church who commend the saints' lives as exemplars of true Christianity.

Thus the *Lives of the Saints* are by precise definition one of the forms of the Sacred Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

From the Life of St. Basil the New (†944)

(commemorated on March 26)

In his *Prologue from Ochrid*, St. Nikolai Velimirović, Bishop of Žiča and Ochrid,¹⁷ summarizes the *Life of Our Holy Father St. Basil the New*:

HE LIVED AT FIRST in a woods with neither shelter nor warmth. When he was arrested and questioned as to who he was, he replied: "One of those living on earth." They suspected that he might be a spy, and therefore tortured him very harshly. In the end he lived in freedom in Constantinople for many years. He could perceive everybody's secret thoughts, foretell the future and perform great miracles. The eldress Theodora was his novice, the same Theodora who appeared after her death to Gregory, another of Basil's novices, and described to him the twenty toll-houses through which every soul must pass. St. Basil died peacefully on March 25, 944, and took his place in the wondrous heav-

¹⁷ †1956, commemorated on March 18.

only company. After his death he was seen by a citizen of Constantinople, shining with great glory in heaven.¹⁸

The 344-page *Life of St. Basil the New* contains the most extensive and detailed description of the trial of the soul at the hour of death in all of Orthodox hagiography:

Gregory's vision of St. Theodora's journey past the celestial tollhouses; the author Gregory bewails the death of St. Basil's servant Theodora, who attended so solicitously to his needs and warmly welcomed his visitors¹⁹

At this time died that ever remembered and honored Theodora, who so very truly and piously served the holy man; she had become full of days and advanced in age. We were greatly saddened at losing her, all of us indeed who were related by spiritual love to the saint, both because of the repose and care provided to our holy father by her service, of which he was now deprived, but also because she was an unabashed intermediary to him for all of us who always came fervently to him for our benefit; she always received all of us with a cheerful countenance, kind demeanor, and dignified smile, and escorted us from there with kindness; with good and kindly words she urged everyone to always seek and know and pursue the good, and not to be led astray and compelled by their thoughts from the Evil One which cling to us inappropriately. The woman was most gentle and compassionate, caring for all with integrity of mind and unaffected demeanor, and re-

¹⁸ St. Nikolai Velimirović, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, vol. 1, (Birmingham, 1985), p. 331.

¹⁹ Section titles and words in < > are additions by the Dumbarton Oaks editors.

ceiving and comforting us as if we were her own children. And if for any reason whatever any grievous event, such as happens to humans in the course of life, befell any one of us, she acted as if she herself had experienced this and gave herself to lamentations and wailing so that as a result her eyes were never seen without tears of compassion.

Gregory wonders about Theodora's fate in the afterlife and whether she was rewarded for her faithful service to St. Basil; Gregory presses St. Basil to reveal her fate

When therefore I learned of her death and was overcome with unbearable sorrow, following upon that anguish uncertainty came to my mind concerning her: what recompense, right or left, did she obtain in that afterlife, and whether or not she benefited in any way from her assistance and unsullied service to the just man, which she faultlessly rendered for him each day? Pondering upon these matters, I journeyed to the holy man, and falling before that man's honored feet I supplicated him fervently with tears to tell me her fate; for I was truly persuaded that he knew everything clearly, as a true servant of Christ, since I had experience concerning the saint as a result of various miracles. At first he completely refused to provide me with any revelation about her; but as I pressed more, begging and pestering him about this, and since he did not wish in the end to cause me sorrow, one day he said to me with a smile on his lips and cheerful countenance, "Do you wish in truth to see Theodora and the state she has obtained?" Then I said to him with fervent eagerness, "Yes honored father, but where will I see her once she has already passed on from the temporal to the eternal?" The blessed man then said to me, "You will truly see her, my child, as you asked, and you will lay to rest your troubling thought, being

fully informed about her fate." When I wondered and considered, or better to say was at a loss as to how indeed and where I would see her (for I missed her greatly, since that woman had great spiritual love for me, seeing the great affection the holy man possessed for my humble self), therefore, as mentioned, my thoughts about her vexed me greatly and I desired to be reassured.

Gregory has a vision of a young man who guides him to a house with a locked gate

On that night after my prescribed prayers, as was my custom, when I lay down on my bed to get some sleep, I saw a young man coming towards me and saying, "Arise, the holy father declares to you, 'Come swiftly—since you have to go where Theodora lives—if indeed you desire to see her.'" After I leapt up quickly at this message, I seemed to arrive straightaway at the house where the holy man was living, but I did not find him. When I asked about him, some people there said to me, "He has gone to see his former servant Theodora." As I was disheartened at this, because I did not reach him in time to travel with him and see her, one of the people there described for me the road, instructing me about its features or landmarks, on which road if I journeyed I might arrive at my destination. As I journeyed I seemed to go along that road which leads to the divine church of the most Holy Theotokos of Blachernai. As I proceeded rejoicing and hastening to reach it, I found myself suddenly going up an ascending passageway that was quite narrow, and traversing this with fear and great anguish, I approached a gate which was locked very securely. I looked in through a peephole at the area within, in hopes I might see someone inside who might open the gate for me.

Gregory learns that he has arrived at the house of St. Basil and requests permission to enter

The house was exceedingly elegant and glorious, its construction and beauty such as no human would be able to describe; for never yet in all the days of my life have I seen such beauty and such varied construction, not of any house of the pious institutions, nor palace of the emperors. While I was marveling at this sight, I noticed within two very beautiful and majestic women sitting on the steps of a staircase there and conversing with one another. I called therefore to one of them through the same peephole of the gate; she heard my call and came to me. And I said to her, "Dear sister, whose is this exceedingly beautiful house?" She said to me in reply, "This house which you see belongs to our holy father Basil, who arrived here just a little earlier to visit his own children." Overjoyed at this message I said to her, "Is our holy father even now here, my lady, or has he in turn departed?" She said to me, "He is here. For I told you that he has come here to visit us his own children." I said in turn to her in supplication, "I beg you, my lady, indeed open the door for me that I may come in and see and make obeisance to him, since I too am his child and I have come here on his account, even if I am unworthy." But she said to me, "You are yourself his child?" I said, "Yes, my lady, I am his servant." And she said, "You have never before come here and so how do you say you are known to him? How will I open the gates to you who are unknown to those here? Go away from here, for without the command and wish of lady Theodora no one enters here, and so I cannot possibly open to you without her instructions." When I became still bolder in response and was vigorously beating on the door and boldly crying out for her to open up, Theodora, hearing the disturbance from within,

approached the gate to look through a peephole and see who was causing the disturbance. For the aforementioned woman, whom I had asked to open up to me, had told her, "Some stranger to this place has come to the gate and is importuning me to open it to him." The truly honored and blessed Theodora heard this from her, and after looking and recognizing me, said to her with a very sharp voice, "Open up, open quickly for this is Gregory, the beloved friend of my lord."

Theodora welcomes Gregory who inquires about her fate in the afterlife

As soon as she opened the doors, I quickly entered. The lady Theodora, full of ineffable joy, met and embraced me, and she kissed me with sincerity and joyfully spoke to me in most loving fashion and said, "Who is it who restored you here, my sweetest child Gregory, from that vain world to this day without evening? Have you indeed died in order to arrive here, freed from the vain concerns of that world, and come to this blessed way of life?" As I was astounded at this and completely uncomprehending what her words to me might mean (for I did not think that I was there in a trance and seeing what was happening noetically, but that I viewed these things as if in a waking vision and with physical eyes), I said to her, "My lady mother, I have not yet died, but through the prayer and intercession of our holy father I am still passing through life. For your sake have I come and arrived here, that I might see your honored face and learn in what lot and place you have ended up. For I greatly desired, from the day you left us, to learn about this; I ask therefore that you narrate to me everything truthfully in sequence. Tell me, my lady, how did you

escape the violence of death, and pass by all the spirits of evil in the air, how did you avoid their malicious malignity, and how are you now, and with whom do you live? For I know in detail from the Divine Scripture about the spirits of evil, as I am myself going to leave life soon."²⁰

Theodora begins her account of her terrible pain and suffering at the time of her death, as hordes of howling Ethiopians surrounded her deathbed

In response she said to me:

O my beloved child, lord Gregory, woe is me, how could you ask and remind me about such things? For what can I tell you about such events? My soul and mind grow dizzy at only the reminder of them and become very agitated and in extreme pain and as it were speechless and paralyzed, and I am afraid even to recollect and recreate them in my mind, lest somehow I might encounter them again. But since none of these things can harm someone once he has died and come to the land of the living, I say and will say these as best I can, if indeed their nature allows them to be described. For, as a result of my actions and deeds, all these terrible and grievous things have befallen me, but thanks to the intercession and assistance of our blessed father Basil the heavy has become light for me and the difficult easy and the crooked straight; and to speak simply, under his guardianship over what happened to me everything bad has ended in good, and to speak summarily, the life I live I live through him [Basil], and all of

²⁰ Gregory's knowledge of the toll-houses prior to hearing the dread account from St. Theodora bears witness to his previous awareness of this teaching of the Orthodox Church and specifically the Scriptural references to the trial of the soul at the hour of death.

which I am deemed worthy is from him. Thanks be to the holy God Who had mercy on us and provided this man to us as a fervent intercessor and helper in various crises. For when I was about to die and came to the point of separation from my pitiful and much suffering body—how will I describe, my sweetest child, the pain of death, what misery it entails, what great violence, how much piercing affliction from the boundless anguish and baneful compression, until the soul might leave the body? So much pain crushes the dying person, as when someone, having stripped off his clothes, throws his whole body on fiery coals strewn in great quantity on the earth, and is gradually burned by the fierce fire and bitterly endures the ordeal, and so then melting away dissolves and gives up his soul. So bitter, my child, is death and even more so for sinners like me, but the fate of the just I do not know; for I, wretched and miserable woman that I am, was a workshop of sins. For when my soul was breaking free, I saw clearly multitudes of Ethiopians standing around my bed, creating a disturbance and commotion, exacting payment for my deceptions and lawless vanities, howling like dogs and wolves, enraged like a bitter sea, producing false settlements, jeering, foaming rabidly, screaming, howling, squealing like pigs, examining my actions, carrying around documents in their hands, contorting in mockery their black and gloomy and dark faces, the mere sight of which alone seemed to me most terrifying and more bitter than even the Gehenna of fire. For it would be better for a living person to fall into that Gehenna of fire than to hear and see such things.

The dying Theodora is visited by two luminous angels who scold the Ethiopians and warn them that their efforts to secure her soul will be in vain

Although I was repelled by these harsh sights, the unbearable anguish and bitterness of death was not all I had to endure, but I experienced in addition the following misfortune. What was it? As I turned my eyes here and there away from the loathsome and accursed sights and directed the spiritual gaze of my soul elsewhere (for I could in no way stand to see or hear the chatterings of those polluted creatures), I suddenly saw two exceedingly beautiful young men just then coming toward me, their heads resplendent with golden hair, <their skin> white as snow, exceedingly sweet in appearance, clad in dazzling garments. They came to the right side of the bed in which I was lying, and stood near me conversing secretly with each other. Then one of them said to those black and gloomy creatures with a harsh voice, "O lawless and swarthy and accursed and dark and most hostile beings, why do you most wicked ones have the habit of rushing and running ahead <of the angels> to all humans who are passing from this vain life, to agitate and raise a clamor against them, babbling and shouting loudly and raising a terrible commotion? O you pests, most shameless savages, crazed, insatiate and misanthropic, do not be so joyful! For there is nothing here for you, there is no portion or allotment for you here, except only that having come running here together, you will in turn depart empty-handed and ineffective." That luminous and divinely handsome young man uttered in a truly mellifluous way these and similar words, but these creatures brought up all sorts of charges, whatever I might have done from the time of my youth in word or deed. Raising their voices like truly de-

ranged and perverted creatures who were out of their minds, they said, "You say that we have nothing against her, but then who has committed such sins from the time of her youth?"

A fearsome apparition of death arrives, ferociously attacks Theodora, and forces her soul out of her body

As they babbled these and other such words, I then was awaiting death. And death came suddenly, now resembling a roaring lion, now a young barbarian boldly girt up, carrying in his hands all types of swords, knives, scythes, saws, stone-cutting tools, spits, adzes, axes and very many other fearful tools of torture by which he contrives and pursues the various ways of one death for all men. When my humble and wretched soul saw him, it was overcome with trembling and unbearable fear. Those handsome youths said to him, "Why do you stand there? Loose her bonds and treat her with moderation, for she has no great weight of sins." Advancing he attacked my feet and then my hands with a very small stone-cutting tool, pulling and dislocating all my joints, I mean my twenty finger and toenails. And suddenly my hands and feet felt paralyzed, as though I did not have any control, my child, of either hands or feet, nor could I at all move any part of them even slightly due to that most bitter pain. Then advancing he cut my neck with an adze and I could no longer move my head, for it seemed disconnected from me. Then he concocted a potion (what it was I didn't know), and gave it to me to drink. And with God as my witness, O my child, it was so bitter that after I drank it my soul thrust itself apart with most frightful violence and left my body.

The Ethiopians and angels examine Theodora's past life, bringing forth her sins and good deeds weighing them on a balance scale to determine her fate

Those handsome young men received <my soul> in the veil of their cloaks as it came forth with a rush from my physical body. The totality of the soul resides in the heart of man, but the spirit in the mind. And when they received me, I saw my body where it lay, not breathing, dead, motionless and inert, and in amazement I marveled at it, as you might say, like someone who takes off his cloak and stands there contemplating it. In astonishment I said, "Bless me, how would I have known for sure that such dreadful things befall pitiful and humble human beings?" As I was making these remarks to myself, I looked and behold, like a swarm of bees, those gloomy and savage Ethiopians surrounded the divine youths holding me and said amid shouting, "We have on record great and very terrible transgressions of hers, and so she must defend herself extensively to us concerning them." And indeed those divine young men were examining the works I had performed, to see if somehow they could find a good deed among them—and indeed by the grace of Christ they found enough to bring forth as compensation, and through them they pleaded in justification of each sin of which the demons were accusing me, and which they submitted in order to receive judgments against me. That is to say if ever I gave to a hungry brother a morsel of bread, if ever I provided to a thirsty person a cup of wine or cold water, if I ever went to visit a brother or someone in chains and in jail, if I ever directed my steps filled with the spirit to go to a church of God to pray, if I ever put oil in the lamp to illuminate the holy and revered and divine icons, if I ever brought peace to people who were fighting, if ever I arose at night from my bed to

pray and made genuflections, if ever I poured forth tears to the Lord my God while standing in prayer, if ever I was ill-treated and endured it, if ever I washed a brother's feet, embracing the humility which exalts according to God, if ever with good words for goodness I supported someone who was without support, if ever I encouraged the faint-hearted with a most gentle word, if ever I turned someone away from sin, if ever I lamented over another's suffering and the calamities and unhappy circumstances in their life, and grieved with the grief-stricken and counseled him about endurance and gratitude, if ever I cooperated with another in a spiritual and salvific deed, if ever I made obeisance to the Lord God with the undistracted eye of the soul, suffering and wearing out my body through fasting and sleeping on the ground in order to subjugate and calm its turbulences, if ever by means of fasting I turned my face and my mind away from every vain sight and shut my mouth to all idle chatter and foul language and verbal abuse and slander and falsehood, and ribaldry and false oaths, and simply if ever I did a good and just deed while in that world below, they selected and weighed these deeds against the sins by which I transgressed of old and redeemed them one by one. While they were busy with this, those Ethiopians and dark demons attacked me forcefully, engaging with those bright angels of God, attempting to seize me from their holy and undefiled arms and to bring me down to the depths of Hades.

St. Basil gives the angels a bag of spiritual gold to use to pay the fees demanded at the various tollhouses; the vanquished Ethiopians depart in disappointment

While in the interim they were engaged in these actions, I was watching; and behold, there came my lord and the great

servant of God, Basil, and he said to those handsome and beautiful young men who were contesting on my behalf, "My lords, this soul has been allotted to me, for she served me for a long time, giving me comfort in my old age; therefore I petitioned the Lord on her behalf, and His goodness granted her to me." And taking from the fold of his garment a scarlet bag full of pure gold, he gave it to the two young men and said to them, "Take this and use it to redeem this woman as you proceed through the tollhouses of the air; for by the grace of Christ I have great spiritual wealth. And having accumulated this wealth by my own toils and sweat, I bestow it on her, so that you may use it to free her from the debts which she will incur from the spirits of evil." After speaking thus and handing over the gift, he departed. When those swarthy and gloomy demons saw what happened, they were astonished and with a glowering look remained for a long time silent and dumbfounded, then, disappointed of their hopes and troubled, they departed with cries and howls.

St. Basil brings Theodora jars of the oil of mercy which are poured over her head; she departs with the angels on her journey to the tollhouses

After they fled and disappeared from sight, behold again there came my lord Basil, bringing us innumerable jars full of pure oil. He was accompanied by solemn and exceedingly beautiful young men who were carrying the jars. The saint ordered them to open the jars and pour out the oil, better to say the oil from each and every container, on my head, and I became completely covered with oil and filled with mercy and spiritual fragrance. My face was greatly purified and I observed myself radiant and exceedingly brilliant and full of di-

vine happiness. Our lord and our common father Basil, the chosen of the Lord, then spoke to those handsome young men who were my guides, saying this, "My lords and fellow servants, when you have completed what is appropriate for this soul, deposit it there in the divine resting place made ready and prepared for me by the Lord"; and after he said this, he departed from our presence. Those handsome young men lifted me up, and raising their holy and fiery feet from the ground, like clouds or wind-driven ships on the sea, they journeyed upward on the road to the east, carrying me lightly through the air.

Theodora is challenged at the tollhouse of Slander

Going up and ahead we arrived at the first tollhouse which then appeared to us on our journey to heaven, the one said to be of Slander. Therein was a vast and wicked assemblage of Ethiopians, whose exarch sat in state amid great wickedness and frenzy. And immediately upon arriving there we stopped. As the overseeing justice is my witness, my child Gregory, if during my existence as a human being in that vain life below I ever slandered anyone or boldly reviled them to their face, those most wicked ones set before me the person's name and the year and day and hour when I made these remarks against someone, either directly or to myself, and the very words themselves. But often they made false accusations against me with fabrications based on wicked suspicion; words which I did not recognize at all since I had never said them. For I recognized clearly the evidence truthfully brought in accusation against me and I was ashamed and wholly shrank back in fear, but I had also often spoken to someone out of spiritual love, with the aim of correcting perchance a fallen brother or in my naiveté out of compassion, not know-

ing that these are offenses. They brought out for my prosecution not only everything I had said in the heat of the moment, but indeed even those words spoken out of naiveté, and they were contending vigorously with those holy and handsome youths who were escorting me to defend me against all these accusations. After the angels had thus defended me in the inquiry regarding the accusations falsely brought against me by the demons, we were released from the inquiry; for like a spider's web the false statements were dispersed. But since we had no response to make to them in defense against their truthful charges and their just accusations of my miserable self, my radiant young escorts took out some of the gift of spiritual gold given me by my lord and holy father Basil and gave them the appropriate amount. And so with God's help we forthwith passed by them and continued our journey in an upward direction.

The tollhouse of Verbal Abuse

Then we came to another tollhouse which they said was that for Verbal Abuse. There again we did the same as at the earlier tollhouse, and offered a defense through my good deeds and the divine gifts of our holy father Basil. We passed by these demons unharmed, but as we continued to ascend my escorts conferred with one another and said, "Truly this humble soul has been greatly benefited by the servant of the Lord, the very great Basil, since we would otherwise have endured a great struggle as we passed through the principalities and powers of this air."

The tollhouse of Envy

As they were saying these words to one another, we came to another tollhouse which they said was that of Envy. By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ those profane rulers of the darkness had no grounds for charging me (for I do not recall that I ever envied anyone while I was still living in the world below), and we happily proceeded past these. But those savage and most profane Ethiopians ground their teeth at me, so that I thought I would soon be devoured by them together with my escorts, and they would devour us while still alive.

The tollhouse of Falsehood

As we continued still further upward (for the magnitude of the height which we were ascending was great and immeasurable), we encountered another tollhouse which they said was that of Falsehood. A multitude of Ethiopians was gathered there, their faces loathsome and most savage, and their leader, the chief of falsehood, was similar to them in deceitfulness. When they saw us, they quickly rose against us and came out to meet us, throwing us into great confusion. Indeed when we first drew near them, as was our habit, they brought forth and exhibited to us every lie my wretched self had uttered in that vain world below, together with some proof and evidence and the names of the individuals and the times and places in which, like a crazy woman, I had often spoken falsely against someone and was not truthful about their actions. My guides made adequate restitution to them and, just as with the others, we passed by these as well through the intervention and intercession of the divine and God-bearing father Basil, who took pity on my humble self.

The tollhouse of Wrath and Anger

As we continued our journey we arrived at another tollhouse where a vast number of Ethiopians was assembled. They said it was the tollhouse of Wrath and Anger. The exarch of this tollhouse, sitting on a throne like an idol of sooty bronze, was full of uncontrolled wrath and bitterness; from there with shouts and unintelligible shrieks he ordered his retainers to investigate as quickly as possible my actions in life from the time of my youth and to let nothing escape them. As the offspring of anger and wrath they were biting one another with their teeth like dogs, uttering unintelligible words full of mad frenzy. When therefore we arrived before those pestilential Ethiopians, who were observing us with contorted faces and grim eyes amid bile and bitterness, they interrogated me in a bloodthirsty manner. They brought forward in evidence not only what in truth I had said arrogantly against someone with anger and wrath and how I either rebuked him in mockery or struck him with actual blows, but even the harm I had caused through a savage glance, and what I inflicted on my children for their edification, by striking them in wrath, or how when overcome by anger I became exasperated with them; all these and similar actions were reported in detail by those wicked Ethiopians who hate the good. Moreover they reported even those times when I became angry, and after becoming embittered with someone I attacked and swore and threatened him with hatred and enmity. In this way, raging and stirred to wrath like a bitter sea, they too brought forth and proffered this evidence, the names of the individuals and the very time and, word for word, the utterances that I had spoken many times in anger toward the targets of my rage and hostility, treating them like enemies; bringing these forth

as evidence and clearly setting forth the very words and the names of those who were present at the time and heard them, as well as the hour and the day. After those dearest young men who were my supporters responded also to these charges and gave the Ethiopians appropriate compensation, not from my good deeds (for these were already used up), but from the divine gift of spiritual gold furnished to me, as aforementioned, by our holy father Basil, we rose up away from them, making that long journey upon the heights of the air.

The tollhouse of Pride

As we ascended we encountered another tollhouse which they said was that of Pride. After the toll collectors there sought to accuse me, but by the grace of Christ found nothing (for how could I, who was a poor slave from infancy, seek to show pride toward anyone?), with God's help we passed by these demons, not being penalized by them at all.

The tollhouse of Idle Chatter

As we were continuing our ascent, we arrived at another tollhouse which they said was that for Idle Chatter. The guardians of the tollhouse came out to meet us far in advance, shamelessly exerting pressure on us to stand trial and defend ourselves with regard to their charges against us. We therefore paused in our journey and were brought before them, and those vengeful tax collectors brought me into their midst and interrogated me personally, setting forth the idle chatter and obscenities from the time of my youth, and in all truthfulness they keenly and eagerly added as evidence those worldly songs I had sung. As far as the insults, the foolish talk, the obsceni-

ties, the salacious jokes, the ribaldry, the indecent gaits, the dances, the obscene lyrics in which I had often engaged with certain people in a salacious and wild manner, either enticing them to laugh or teaching them to act in the same manner, or often after hearing these from others I related them, like a story, those lawless creatures brought forward all these actions and others like them and set them before me, so that when I heard and remembered as true all the charges they made against me, I shuddered and trembled and agreed with them that they were speaking the truth. How did those accursed creatures know these things which I myself had dispatched to the depths of forgetfulness because of the elapsed length of time and had no memory of them at all? After we made an appropriate defense against these accusations as well, and gave them sufficient restitution from the divine gift of spiritual gold given to me by our holy father Basil, we continued on that fearsome, unknown and lengthy journey which was bringing us upward.

The tollhouse of Usury and Deceit

During our journey along this road we came to another tollhouse which they said was that of Usury and Deceit. The attendants of that tollhouse, after carefully investigating my past with regard to such offenses and finding no evidence of usury, accused me of deceit alone. But since they could show no proof of this, cut to the heart they sharpened their teeth against me; and setting forth from there, we continued to ascend that truly long and inscrutable road, immeasurable for mankind.

The tollhouse of Ennui and Vainglory

We then arrived at another tollhouse which they said was that of Ennui and Vainglory. Since by the grace of Christ I had no part at all in these sins (for how and why was I, as a slave, going to be vainglorious?), we quickly proceeded past these, not penalized at all by them.

The tollhouse of Avarice

As we ascended we came to another tollhouse which they called that of Avarice. A <dark cloud of> mist surrounded this tollhouse, more than all the other tollhouses which we had passed. For I believe that those most vile Ethiopians create their buildings from the earthly exhalation, that is the <foul> fog and the thickness emanating from it, by taking the mist up into the air. And the <dark> mist poured over them was indicative of the nature of the passion of avarice over which they rule. After they, too, made investigation in their customary manner and found no trace of avarice in me (for how would I have any gold that I might love it, or even in its absence covet it and be found liable for trial by those avengers in the sky?), we passed by this tollhouse, by the grace of Christ not penalized at all.

The tollhouse of Excessive Wine Drinking and Inebriation

Then we came to another tollhouse which they said was that of Excessive Wine Drinking and Inebriation. The attendants and guardians of the tollhouse came out at a distance and stood there like rapacious wolves seeking to devour anyone who came near. Those godlike and luminous youths who were escorting me quickly proceeded to the tollhouse, since it

was decreed that all souls passing along that road should be investigated and interrogated by the rulers of the power of darkness. Those bitter examiners of evil and tax collectors confronted us as if they were blind drunk and besotted with much wine. They even possessed the very cups and glasses which I had drunk in the course of my whole life, all counted up, and they were lifting them to their mouths, saying: "Did you not drink this many glasses of wine on such and such a feast day, with such and such persons present and reveling with you? Did you not as a result get drunk and slip and fall in such and such a place and hurt your head? And again when you visited so and so, did you not drink this many cups?" And they were making many other similar accusations, attempting to snatch me from the undefiled arms of those luminous and handsome young men carrying me. Everything they said and alleged was true, as I remembered precisely and recognized these incidents. For oftentimes, inasmuch as I was a human being in the midst of life, when a friend or acquaintance visited me, I drank more wine with this person than usually and often as a result became drunk; and by making this allegation they were openly accusing me. My good guides and intercessors therefore paid the debt out of the rich gifts of my lord and our holy father Basil and redeemed my sins; and quickly departing from there, we continued on our way.

The angels say to Theodora that mankind would pay more attention to good works on earth, if they realized the terrible experiences their souls would undergo after death as they passed by the demons of the tollhouses

As we journeyed, my guides, the holy and radiant angels, meanwhile conversed, saying to me, "Do you see what great

misery is involved in passing the baneful and accursed powers and principalities of the ruler of the darkness of this air?" And in reply I said to them, "Yes, my lords, there is great stress and anxiety in order for one to be able to pass by these evil powers without interrogation and without harassment, and I think that no one in that world from which I have come fully knows or understands what transpires here after the soul's departure." They said to me, "We too understand that those in the world know nothing of things here. For the luxury and decadence and deceit of that vain life below do not allow these people to look up at all and to attend to the Divine Scriptures which always proclaim and teach clearly about these vices, so that by achieving the virtues and especially charity (which is more effective here than the other virtues and can benefit the people traveling this road) they may be able to foresee all these things and keep them indelible in the eyes of their mind day and night in order to escape those great and numerous woes which they will without exception encounter after their frightening departure from the body. For if they knew these things <in advance>, they would labor greatly to ransom themselves from such terrible miseries, as indeed some of them do and so pass unharmed by such tollhouses, but these people are rare and one in a thousand or ten thousand. But since they do not know these things, as I have already said, they live carelessly, as if they do not expect to die, slaves to their belly and to vain stupidity and life's deceit, not even coming to confess their terrible sins. Then suddenly death comes upon them like a trap, and such terrors befall them. Woe to that person who does not possess an abundance of good and spiritual works, so that he can use them to pass unharmed and without harassment by those bloodthirsty and harsh rulers of the air, in order not to be buffeted by them

and forcefully led down to the gloomy dungeons of Hades in the darkness and shadow of death, bound by unbreakable bonds and held fast until the Second Coming of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead, when He is going to judge and render to each according to his deeds. This you, too, would have suffered, if you had not received this gift of spiritual gold from the servant of the Lord and your dearest father Basil, who has benefited you greatly with the approval of the all-powerful God."

The tollhouse of Maliciousness

As we were speaking about these matters and continuing our journey, we arrived at another tollhouse which they said was that of Maliciousness. As we drew near it—it was truly an accursed and most terrible workshop of evil spirits—its attendants leapt up and came out to meet us like wild beasts and bloodsucking robbers, and they quickly examined and interrogated me in order to find a written charge against me in their wicked scale so they could use it against me and grab me. When by the grace of Christ, through the prayers of our holy father, they were unable to find anything against me, those workers of evil finally were truly abashed and began to howl, having failed in their hopes. For even though in other respects my miserable self was pitiable and wretched, yet I had no part in maliciousness, since I do not remember ever acting maliciously against anyone in all the days of my life while in that vain world below, but toward all, small and great, I always had spiritual love, as you yourself know precisely, my child Gregory; never was I malicious to anyone, nor did I take vengeance upon those who often caused me grief or even struck me. Since those accursed demonic creatures were unable to seize me at all on the grounds on which they ques-

tioned me, we departed from their midst, leaving them howling in vain, and we flew on to the next stop, without any penalty.

The angels explain to Theodora how the demons at the tollhouses learn in advance about the good and bad deeds of souls that pass by

As we traveled along the road, I asked those wondrous and handsome youths leading me, saying, "My lords, I beg you, help me with this matter which I do not understand, and resolve for me my questions about it. How do these workers of lawlessness know from so very great a distance the nature and number of the deeds we humans do in that world below? For, as I see, we are so very far from them, yet nothing escapes them." Then one of them said to me, "Do you not know that every Christian from the time of his divine baptism receives a good angel, who guards him and guides him to every good deed, always recording all his good works through his whole life? Similarly by the consent of God he is also accompanied by a wicked angel, who follows behind him, recording all the wicked deeds which the person commits while still alive throughout his whole life. Then every wicked and unhallowed deed of each person which those wicked angels note and record is dispatched in writing appropriately to each tollhouse according to its appellation along with the amount of debt owed, so that they, too, may retain <a list of> these sins for themselves. Thus your adversaries will be able to impede and drag down the soul of every dying person, as it is about to depart and ascend this road; they will lead it down to the abyss of fire and the depths of Hades, where they too have their abode, unless the soul has worthily repented for its ac-

tions, and through its good guardian angel brought good works in return to be measured and weighed against your foul and shameful offenses which have been clearly revealed by them. In this way it would be able to escape their clutches. But if the soul is found deficient in good deeds, as has been said (that is, whenever they do not exceed or are at least equal to the wicked deeds, so that through these deeds the sins may be redeemed), the demons rip the soul by force from our hands. After beating it mercilessly, they dispatch it in bonds, as already said, into the depths of Hades and lock it up in darkness and in the shadow of death until that fearful and inevitable Last Judgment. In this way the demons know all the sins that all men commit in the world, and so everyone renders an accounting here."

The tollhouse of Magic and Divination

While my guide spoke in this way with me as we went up the road and I was amazed at his words, we arrived at another tollhouse which they said was that for enchanter, poisoners, magicians, fortunetellers, diviners. There were in that tollhouse very many unclean spirits shaped like snakes, serpents, vipers, similar to horned asps and myriad other loathsome and wicked reptiles, whose sole appearance was a dark shape and blackness and spiritual error; for they were full of every bitterness. Since by the grace of Christ the demons neither had <in their records> nor could find any offense <in my lifetime> to bring against me in accusation, we passed by them, too, not deeming it necessary to make an accounting to them, nor were we in any way penalized by them.

Theodora asks the angels if one can purge one's sins and avoid interrogation at the tollhouses; the angels reply that this is possible through confession and repentance before death

As we were traveling that endless road, I again tried to question my guides, saying to them, "My lords and intercessors, I beg you to clarify this question as well for me. Regarding every sin which a person might commit in that world below, when he departs from there and passes by here, is he liable for it without any defense at all? Is he unable while still alive to erase those sins, but are they all <recorded> in each tollhouse exactly as you have told me? For I see how the demons interrogate me in detail on all offenses small and great, and I shudder in terror." They said to me, "It is not the same for everyone, but only for those like you who die before confessing and correcting their sins. For if you yourself had taken the opportunity to confess to your spiritual father all your offenses without concealment, and had received his instructions for repentance and obeyed them and obtained his forgiveness, you would have passed by all these harsh and deadly tollhouses unhindered. None of the wicked spirits here would be able to open his mouth against you or to make inquiry of us concerning any fault which you had confessed to your spiritual father, if you had obtained penances from him, as aforementioned, and had observed them. But since you did not confess these sins beforehand, but were satisfied with only a lengthy abstinence from them, giving no thought at all to their confession, for this reason, as you now see, all your sins are examined and scrutinized in detail by the rulers of the darkness of this air. For whenever someone confesses his sins in that world below and thereafter devotes himself to repent-

ance, God forgives him for the earlier sins he has confessed, and he is free thereafter, having invisibly received remission of them. For then the wicked demons in the tollhouses who have documentation of men's lawless acts noted in their ledgers, after quickly opening their foul records, cannot find even a trace in them of the sins they had recorded there; for the All-Holy Spirit has invisibly erased them. And the rulers of the tollhouses and their guards know that through confession all the sins recorded in these <ledgers> have been erased, and they glare at these <documents>, disappointed in their hopes. Then again, if that person is still alive whose sins they see erased from their records, they try to record new sins instead of those earlier ones and to seize him, when his <soul> travels up this road after his death. They rush <out of their tollhouses> more forcefully than before, crowding around the soul, dragging it towards every wicked and vile deed. Truly great and salvific and exceedingly beneficial is confession before death, for it quickly and easily saves the person <who has sinned> from such great and so many different miseries. Thus his soul proceeds with spiritual confidence unhindered past all the most harsh and frightful tollhouses of this air, and departs to its good and only Master, carrying away from Him the recompense for its good deeds many times over, munificently bestowed.

Repentance and prayer without confession of sins are not sufficient to escape the interrogation at the tollhouses

"But again if someone dedicates himself to repentance and prayer, ceasing from his wicked ways, but does not confess his former deeds and transgressions to one of the spiritual

fathers, and assumes that this repentance of his suffices to expunge his earlier evil deeds, merely refraining from these will not benefit him at all. Rather all his sins will be examined and scrutinized here exactly in the manner you have seen, having been found to be indelible in the ledgers of the wicked demons and terrible toll collectors. For by the power of the All-Holy Spirit, as has been said, all sins are erased and expunged when the one who confesses devotes himself to humility and unblushing revelation and disclosure and heartfelt hatred toward wickedness and complete aversion <from evil>. For otherwise it is impossible to be freed completely from these tollhouses and to pass unhindered on this road away from these wicked spirits.

The importance of consistent confession to a single spiritual father

"Similar, too, are the actions of those who wish to confess in a dishonest manner without having hope and faith in a single spiritual father, just as they possess no hope of being saved by one God, but reveal some faults to this confessor, others to that one, and others to yet another. Since they are ashamed to reveal their sins to their original spiritual father, if he is still alive (if not, he has departed to the One he desires), they go to another spiritual father and do the same thing in order not to be chastised more severely by him, and always caught in the same evil behavior they are censured and thoroughly despised. They do this and divide their sins among many spiritual fathers, even though the first confessor is still alive, but these people who wish, without his knowledge, to confess to another spiritual father will in no way benefit from such dishonesty and their deceptive confessions, but instead

they will be examined and chastised as fornicators and adulterers and pay the price for their actions."

The tollhouse of Gluttony

As we conversed and discussed these matters and journeyed along the road, we came to another tollhouse which they said was that of Gluttony. The attendants of this tollhouse and of its most wicked *exousiarch*, who were swollen, stout, fat, and terribly savage, attacked me more harshly and fiercely than the others at the earlier tollhouses. They howled and brought charges against me and cross-examined me about the gluttonies and secret snacks of my youth, and what I had eaten heedlessly from dawn to dusk, as irrational pigs do, since I was unaware of the bitter interrogations of those tollhouses. They rebuked me for eating during holy Lent and on all the dominical feast days, without saying prayers, and for how I used to eat each day in great abundance, at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, sating myself and eating beyond satiety, burdening my stomach and belly with gluttony and a multitude of different foods and drinks. They examined and interrogated me about all these sins, trying to snatch me and, like wolves, to devour me whole, saying to me with a loud echoing voice, "Did you not make a covenant with God and holy baptism saying, 'I renounce Satan and all his works'? How then, after rejecting these fearsome and frightening agreements and covenants with God, did you carry out our deeds and serve us so eagerly? Do these deeds not belong to us and to the power of our leader? Are you not a worker and friend of our deeds and practices?" My guides gave them what was owed, redeeming all those debts of mine out of the gifts of my

lord and holy father, and we passed by that most foul workshop and tollhouse which was filled with horror.

The tollhouse of Idolatry and Heresy

As we journeyed on that boundless and long road, the one without end, we arrived presently at another tollhouse which they said was that of Idolatry and every other Heresy, where they cruelly examined not only idolaters, but also all their supporters. We did not even deign to glance at this tollhouse; for by the grace of Christ the demons possessed no <record> at all of what they hoped for. For what could they say against me or bring as an accusation, since I never even thought about these sins, by the aid of God and the governance and guidance of His most great servant Basil, my holy father? For from the time I was deemed worthy of divine baptism, I neither knew nor served another God, other than the One in Whom I was baptized and with Whom I made my covenant in the tradition of the holy catholic and apostolic church of Christians, submitting to and abiding by and always holding securely guarded both the lessons and tenets of the orthodox teachers and holy fathers.

The tollhouse of Homosexuality and Pederasty

As we departed along the road, not at all penalized by them, we arrived at another very harsh tollhouse which was said to be that of Homosexuality and Pederasty. The exarch of that tollhouse was exceedingly bitter and fearsome, sometimes appearing as a fearsome horned serpent, at other times as a rat, and at another as a savage pig, and changing shape and form again and again and again, having the length of a

sea monster. Surrounding him was a foul odor, extensive and bitter and painful, in which he was relaxing as upon a great pillow and taking pleasure like a pig happily wallowing in the mire. His attendants and guardians were bitter and savage with a hateful appearance like the statues in the theater, completely blackened and totally useless and devoid of any beneficial aspect. Since they knew I was a woman, they had no charge to make against me; but they inquired only in regard to my life, if ever while I was a young woman I had slept in the same bed with another girl of my age and perchance committed the female sin of lesbianism with her. By the mercy of God and His grace they were abashed by their inquiry, since they found nothing in me of what they hoped, and they let us go; we departed from there, released from their pollution.

The tollhouse of Adultery

Then we arrived at another tollhouse (for already we were nearing the gate of heaven) and they said this was the place of interrogation for Adultery. My dear protectors and guides pointed the tollhouse out to me, encouraging and consoling me at the same time, saying the following words to me about that abominable and foul-smelling upcoming tollhouse, that it always somehow wretchedly drags down and thrusts into the dungeons of Hades many souls who have come up this far unhindered and are just about to make obeisance to the divine throne of grace, because most people have great lust and commit without fear such a loathsome and shameful deed. While they were speaking in this way to me, the mud-covered and gloomy demons who served that tollhouse rushed at us, questioning and interrogating me and conversing among

themselves, possessed of incomparable zeal and mocking my past deeds. For before I came to serve our saintly and holy father Basil I had a fellow slave as my mate by my master's order, and while living with him I had relations also with some other young men who were in my master's house, being seduced by them and because I was ignorant of such fearsome tollhouses and bitter interrogations. On account of these deeds of mine therefore the attendants of that tollhouse tried very hard to seize me. My guides resisted them, however, saying, "Since she was a slave in that world below, <her union> was not blessed by a priest. She did not legally marry her mate, by being deemed worthy of a priest's blessing, nor did he take her after receiving the marriage crown in a church of God, so that the charges might properly be for adultery; rather one must call these actions fornication, since he received this woman from her master's hand by only a simple command." The demons howled loudly and retorted, saying, "Is not a slave's second god his master who has acquired him through purchase? And she was joined to the man by the decision of her master and lord, so one must call their transgressions the offspring of adultery and not fornication." After they argued and questioned in this manner for many hours, by the grace of Christ my youthful guardians won the day and without paying the demons anything at all we proceeded further onward. The demons threatened us, shaking their abominable heads and saying, "Even if you were able to escape our hands, by no means can you escape the tollhouse of fornication, which is truly effective and more powerful than ours." As we traveled further up along the road, I was completely overwhelmed by fear and trembling, lest the tollhouse of Fornication, having records of my guilt, thrust me down and drive me into the depths of Hades.

The tollhouse of Murder

Behold, we suddenly arrived at another tollhouse, which they said was that of Murder, where every scourging, beating and slapping and every rape and injustice were under the authority of those demons in attendance there to accuse and examine souls who passed by, just as in the other tollhouses. When they found none of these offenses in my life by the grace of Christ, we passed by those demons there, not penalized at all.

The tollhouse of Theft

Behold, we came to another tollhouse which they said was that of Theft. As we drew near it, the avenging and bitter examiners minutely questioned every action of my whole life, and whatever <records> of theft they could find in their abode they brought against me with vigorous accusation. My divine young guides paid them adequate restitution from the divine gift of my lord and God's servant Basil, and we proceeded upward from there and journeyed further on.

Theodora comes to the tollhouse of Fornication, where many charges, both true and false, are made against her

As we went up that fearsome and endless road we came to another tollhouse which they said was that of Fornication. The official in charge of this tollhouse was quite wicked and bitter, presiding over it like an untamed lion, wearing a short tunic spattered with putrid foam and blood, in which he delighted as if it were imperial purple, preening himself and putting on airs. Images in the shape of conjoined demons, engaged, it would seem, in intercourse, could be seen worked

upon this tunic and woven from the shameful and vile act of those who, like pigs, fearlessly and insatiably, or better to say with reckless abandon, wallow in the intercourse of fornication, the images fashioned noetically and appropriately for the terrible attendants and the most foul tax collectors jumped up startled, and with mouths agape came to meet us, groaning loudly, and with all precision examined minutely everything I had done in that life on earth. In their desire to accuse me, not only did they set forth and bring forward with great boldness to charge me the transgressions I actually did commit and the very names of the men with whom I often used to jest when I was a young girl, saying to them certain shameless words like one of the crazy women who do such things, but also they resorted to their own suspicions and deceitfully proffered numerous falsehoods about me. As evidence of the charges falsely fabricated against me they presented some similar names and identifying characteristics and professions, and were determined in their attempt to seize me from the holy and undefiled hands of those radiant young men and to bring me down to the lowest dungeons of Hades.

Theodora is able to pass by after her accompanying angels pay the demons some of St. Basil's spiritual gold

As they were exacting payment in this manner and treating me badly, my good protectors and guides who supported me said to them, "Even if she often used to commit these acts, yet she has ceased from such foul deeds and restrained her speech for many years already." But those executioners answered them, "We, too, are aware that she stopped her evil utterances at a time of her own choosing, but she still keeps our secrets hidden within her. For she loved us and was not

willing to reveal our deeds to a spiritual father on earth through confession. For we find these sins here indelible in our ledgers. For what is confessed on earth is invisibly erased, and in no way found here by us; but since she did not confess, nor was she subject to penance, nor did she receive remission for these sins from her sponsor and spiritual father, but she wished to justify herself and seem holy and blameless to men, for this reason therefore she is justly interrogated by us. Therefore who <would dare> to snatch from our hands a woman who is accountable to us for such great and numerous evil deeds? So either depart, leaving her behind, or redeem the sins revealed by us through good works of corresponding weight." Therefore those holy youths, taking from a small pouch some of the gifts which my all-holy father and Christ's servant Basil had given them for the redemption of my soul, gave the demons corresponding weight for the charges they truthfully brought against me, as I have often also described previously.

After they raised me up from there, we continued our onward journey, while those mud-covered and murderous Ethiopians were grinding and gnashing their teeth against me and cut to the heart were saying, "Who has given her such divine and truly God-pleasing works through which she has escaped our hands, redeeming all her lawless acts? And we could not gain control over her at all."

The angels explain to Theodora how fortunate she is to have escaped the demons of the tollhouse of Fornication, who have sent countless souls to Hades

As we journeyed on, those radiant angels of God, my good protectors, said to me, "Do you see this tollhouse which

we passed by?" And when I said to them, "Yes, my lords," they replied, "Few souls pass by it without penalty, since that vain world below, as a result of its excessive luxuries and wantonness, loves fornication and pleasure, and is adulterous and sinful; and <that is true> especially of <the souls> which have not obeyed the holy lessons of the Divine Scriptures which daily proclaim and teach about these terrible and most awful tollhouses, but are led astray by their own wicked thoughts so as to consider these <divine> words nonsense.

"For oftentimes many souls which have come as far as this most terrible and deadly tollhouse are dragged down into the dungeons of Hades and confined in chains until that fearsome and great day of the Second Coming of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. For then all the souls confined there come forth to meet the Lord in order that each of them may receive the rewards from the just Judge for the deeds they have done. This you yourself would have suffered, had not the great servant of Christ, Basil, succeeded in rescuing you from these demons. But now delight and exult, since through his honored prayers you have won the victory and escaped this tollhouse. With all your might you have entirely destroyed and made a laughing stock of the ruling official and exarch of this tollhouse of Fornication who greatly boasts of devouring and stripping bare all the souls passing by here on account of their most grievous sin of fornication, but was unable to raise either hands or head against you. And from now on you will be subjected to no harm."

The tollhouse of Heartlessness and Cruelty

As they were saying these words to me, behold we came to yet another tollhouse which they said was that of Heartless-

ness and Cruelty. There all those who are merciless, stingy, heartless, harsh, those who hate their brethren, and misanthropes, are bitterly and harshly and vigorously questioned and mercilessly interrogated, just as they themselves behaved toward their kindred souls and brethren, when they were in that world below. For whenever a person succeeds in observing all God's commandments, but remains heartless and without mercy toward his neighbor and kindred soul, and that person dies, his soul ascends unhindered as far as that tollhouse. But on arrival there it is immediately seized by the bitter and merciless guardians of that tollhouse, who, after pitilessly striking and beating that soul because it was itself merciless and heartless, drag it down and confine it in the gloomy dungeons of Hades until the universal resurrection of all mortals; and God shows this soul no mercy or pity at all (as the soul had expected, because of its other virtues), but rather He loathes and is disgusted by it, because it never gave a piece of bread to a beggar, nor an obol to a pauper, nor cold water to a traveler, nor shelter to a foreign visitor, nor did it clothe with old rags

Theodora passes by this final tollhouse unscathed because of her many acts of charity

So those radiant and handsome young men explained to me about that tollhouse as we approached it along the road which we were ascending, and we found its official in charge most savage and unbending. As a result of his excessive heartlessness he appeared to be ossified by a most grievous disease, and as if wailing on account of his inherent wickedness, with contorted face and grim countenance. He clearly carried around in himself the forms and characteristics of the passions

he ruled over (for he sat there like an animal), breathing the fire of heartlessness and eager to devour all who passed by there. His attendants and terrible tax collectors, who were most harsh and merciless, came out to meet us swarming like ants, and gnashing and grinding their teeth at me. They were carrying many documents in their hands, questioning, interrogating, and investigating carefully the charges against me, to see if they could find the deeds of heartlessness which they needed to drag me down into their harsh dungeons. By Christ's grace they did not find anything against me that they hoped for, but rather goodness toward everyone and fairness, compassion and abundant alms-giving. For if ever I gave someone a piece of bread, or an obol, or a cup of wine or even of water, or I brought a stranger into my room, or shared another's grief, or mourned with someone in mourning, and visited the sick, or went to a jail to visit the brethren dreadfully confined in it, and encouraged them with words of exhortation to bear their miseries with patience, or in short if I acted as my will and my hand enabled me, my good protectors and guides pointed all these charitable deeds out to them. When those bloodsucking and harsh Ethiopians saw this evidence, they were completely overcome with shame and, letting us go, disappeared from sight.

Theodora and her guiding angels pass through the gate of heaven and are welcomed by a group of radiant youths

We quickly departed from them, rejoicing and filled with the greatest joy, because we were not penalized by them in any way, and we entered joyfully within the gate of heaven. It was wondrous and beautiful like a kind of brilliant crystal,

and the artwork upon the gate was distinctive, made from the splendor of the stars and fire, as in the yellowness of gold, splendidly adorned and beautiful; and a young man was standing at this gate girt in lightning, and his feet glowed with the gleam of unquenchable fire, and the appearance of his face was most sweet and very pleasant. Rejoicing and happy he received us, greatly glorifying God Who had given His approval for a soul to pass without punishment the bitter and terrifying tollhouses of the darkness of the air. After embracing us, he let us continue our journey. As we journeyed further on within heaven, we found water above the firmament, which receded before us and revealed to us the road, and after we passed by it, the waters came back together again. After we passed by that fearsome and uncontrollable volume of water, we arrived at an airy expanse that was awesome and incomparable, and upon it was spread out a shining gold parchment skin, extending beyond the fearsome breadth of the ether. Upon that parchment skin were some handsome young men extraordinary in form, numberless, clothed in fire, and their hair <was as brilliant> as lightning, their feet <were white> as milk, and their faces <were white> as snow or, better to say, more brilliant than light. When they saw me in the hands of those holy and radiant guiding angels, they ran together toward us and rejoiced, leaping about with joy and happy at my salvation, saying, "Behold, with God's good will at this hour a soul has been added as a treasure to the kingdom of the heavens." And they journeyed with us, singing the sweetest and most delightful song, and together with them we proceeded on our way to make obeisance to the fiery and divine throne of God.

Theodora and the angels proceed toward the throne of God

As we proceeded, behold, a cloud appeared before us. It was not like the clouds beneath the sky, but different because of its vivid color like a violet or a rose, and its beauty was beyond description by the human tongue, and unseen by human eyes. We passed by it and, behold, another cloud appeared white as light, radiating lightning, which was sweet and glorious, and it was dispersed before our advance like the previous one. And behold, another cloud shining like gold, and beyond that a courtyard with various types of flooring, radiating beams of light and sending forth in abundance radiances of myriad colors in hues of glory, and in it there was sweet rejoicing astonishing to the human mind. And behold, there was a man who was shaped like fire and the sweetness of the Lord was in him. Proceeding still a little further we looked and, behold, there was a white throne radiant with light and from all over beaming forth and emitting multicolored rays, gladdening and pleasing all who stood there. For around that throne stood exceedingly handsome young men, of large stature, like cypress trees with leafy foliage, dyed in purple and in linen which was bright and awesome, such as no human speech can describe. Proceeding before that most awesome throne, which rose to a boundless height and was beautified with the boundless glory of goodness and justice, my guides hymned the Lord Who ineffably reposes upon it. Immediately then we all together made obeisance to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the uncreated and incomprehensible and life-giving Holy Trinity. Then in unison all the choirs of angels standing there with us sang, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts." And that throne was full of glory, and

everyone standing there rejoiced at my salvation, celebrating in inexpressible glory. And behold, an exceedingly dear voice full of all delight said from high above to my guides, "As you customarily do for all souls, bring this soul over to all the abodes and lodgings of the saints and to all the subterranean regions, and then bring it to rest where my servant Basil has commanded you."

Theodora visits the gleaming abodes of the saints

Departing thence we journeyed to the abodes of the saints. These were very many, not subject to enumeration, radiating with the brightest gleam as though from the sun's rays. By the hand of God immaterially and noetically they radiated inexplicably with myriad colors of divine light as if of linen and purple in that plain and place of Eden, in the place of spiritual green grass, where noetic water of relaxation gushes up, in a place of life and living water of repose, in a place of divine refreshment. For like extraordinary palaces noetically constructed of multicolored mosaic tesserae and variegated marbles, such were those eternal abodes of the saints, one surpassing another in radiance, so that each of the saints in turn, observing that awesome and immaterial beauty of the abodes, rejoices and exults, never in the end being sated with the luxurious beauty of the other's abode. Separate were the abodes of the apostles, separate those of the prophets, of the martyrs, and of the holy men, of the hierarchs and teachers, and of the righteous; in short each division of saints had a separate place for its domicile prepared for it, according, that is, to the individual deeds of each. The place and region in which these abodes of the saints were prepared by the right hand of the Lord according to the virtue of each, as aforementioned, were

in breadth and width, in my estimation, one hundred times the size of the earthly Queen of cities Constantinople, and human mind and speech cannot describe its beauty and radiance. As we passed through these abodes, all the saints came forth to meet us and embraced us noetically in spirit, greatly rejoicing and happy at my salvation.

Description of the abodes of Abraham and the other patriarchs

After we passed through all the abodes of the saints there, we went also to the divine patriarch Abraham. Behold, his abode was filled with ineffable glory and ageless bliss and spiritual aromatics of both unguents and heavenly spices. His bosom, in which the abode of the righteous was wondrously constructed from above by God in accordance with his divine virtues, was full of various flowers, sweet-smelling violets and roses, and spices of various types, and green grass and much-loved repose, and every other pleasant fragrance and delightful rejoicing. I myself might often try, my sweetest child Gregory, to describe its pleasing location and beauty and sweetest delight, but I could never completely do so. For there are in that place noetic palaces for the divine patriarchs, I mean for Isaac and Jacob and his twelve descendants, devised through the Holy Spirit immaterially and noetically, and constructed by God the Almighty, composed of rays in myriad forms of awesome splendors and beautified to the highest splendor. Abraham was seated there on a holy and luminous throne, and around him were Christian children, illuminated by holy baptism and freed without stain from the bonds of the body, standing in ineffable glory and leaping about and dancing with inexpressible joy. Isaac was also there, as aforementioned, and Jacob and the twelve patriarchs descended

from him, and all their descendants also who were well pleasing to God through their extraordinary and divine actions, reposing upon variegated and wondrous thrones. In such a way, you should note, were the souls of the righteous and holy ones also seen there, as if emitting a sunbeam. We saw them as if they were in bodily form, but we could not touch or in any way grasp this <beam>. For thus also are the souls of all the holy seen by those who are sanctified like them, possessing bodily skin by transference; since the souls were immaterial like sunbeams, they could not be held by corporeal hands. And so omitting most of the narration of the sights and objects there (for even if I wished to follow their trail and to describe to you everything in sequence to the best of my ability, I could by no means do so, nor would there be sufficient time for me to narrate this), I will mention only a few items and may my words be clear to the mind as they are measured out.

Theodora descends into Hades, where she witnesses the torments of sinners

I proceeded therefore, after seeing all of Paradise around me, and we descended into the subterranean regions and passed through the dungeons of Hades, which our Lord Jesus Christ shattered at the time of His honored and undefiled passion; as He descended there with His soul in a divine manner, fettering with unbreakable chains all the power of death and of Hades. Then we ascended from there and proceeded to the west, where bitter chastisements and harsh punishments await those who are piteous and sinners like me. For those divine guides of mine and my good protectors by the command of God pointed out everything to me, saying to me, "Look and behold the miseries from which the Lord has

rescued you through the honored prayers of His servant Basil." For I also saw those gloomy dungeons of Hades in the darkness and shadow of death, where the souls of those condemned for eternity are confined (they are very, very many, like the sand beside the shore of the sea, or rather more than the soil of the earth). They are completely unable to see the sweet light for eternity, but they continuously cry out "Woe, woe" and raise a bitter song, spiritually hungering and thirsting for the food and drink of their salvation; and stripped of any spiritual cloak. They are also devoured by the filth of their own transgressions, whence also wailing they always cry out in bitterness and pain of their souls and say with a groan, "Alas, alas, woe, woe," with a clearly non-corporeal and unspoken sound, not articulated or uttered by bodily organs; and there is no one showing pity or mercy to them. Indeed, Gregory my son, during the soul's journey in these terrible and utterly dark dungeons of Hades, the holy angels of God who are its guides, inasmuch as they are light, illuminate those dark places, where, as aforementioned, the sinners are punished. Thus the soul sees the terrible places of torture there full of cries and lamentations, so that it can realize the great dark and bitter punishment from which it was rescued, by its abstinence from sin through God's mercy, and how it arrived at the better and immortal life in various ways through its pious journey on the right roads of God's divine commandments.

Theodora ends her narrative by describing her arrival at the heavenly abode St. Basil has prepared for the souls of those whom he guided to salvation

After undergoing all these and similar experiences for forty days from the day I was separated from my humble body of

clay, I came to this place of repose where you see me; it is not mine, but belongs to our saintly and common father Basil, the truly genuine servant of Christ our God, who still dwells in that vain world below. His apostolic teaching turns toward salvation many souls which have strayed, and brings them purified and saved by repentance and true confession and pure knowledge to our Lord God, like burnt incense and an acceptable sacrifice unto sweet-smelling spiritual aroma. For many other souls live here with us, whom Basil saved before me from their lawless path, and he sanctified them and sent them forth, saved, here to the Lord. For here are the spirits of Kyr John and his wife Kyra Helena, who served him well and in a God-pleasing way in that world below; but of the remaining souls whom long ago he instructed and guided to life here, who live here with me, I have no knowledge of who they are and to whom their souls might belong; in no way at all, while I was still in that world below, did I learn about them, nor was I told their names. Nevertheless come with me and let us go inside, and you will see where we have our lodgings. For the chosen man of God and our all-holy father and the truly great Basil arrived here a little earlier to visit us and is still here.

Gregory's description of the beautiful courtyard of St. Basil's abode, paved with golden tiles

As we then went inside, with Theodora leading the way ahead of me, I gazed at her; and behold, she was totally beautiful and lovely, anointed with divine oil and perfume, and dripping [as if with dew], clad in linen white as snow, and wearing a scarf of linen around her head, and I was dumbfounded and completely amazed at her ineffable and incredible appearance. We entered into a strange and extraordinary

courtyard, with a radiant floor, adorned with golden tiles. There was no dirt at all on it, and the air illuminated it like lightning, and in the interstices of those golden tiles were beautifully planted flowering plants of every sort, fragrant and abounding in fruits, and they were sending forth inexpressible and indescribable pleasure and joy and filling those who saw them with divine happiness; and that courtyard was very, very large in width and length.

At the east end of the court is an emerald banquet table, covered with fruits and flowers

As I raised my eyes toward the east side of the court, I saw shining palaces awesomely constructed and rising to a boundless height. Indeed in no way did we enter into them; but very close to their entrances stood a very large table, thirty cubits long, and it was beautifully quarried and constructed from emerald, emitting flashing rays, and at its head a beautiful flowering almond tree stood planted, arching over it, shading all its surface and providing an incomparably lovely appearance. On this table could also be seen set forth like dishes, radiant gilded red gemstones which were, in simple words, similar to all the precious stones and gold which come from Paradise, and were highly embellished <and generating> happiness and <exhibiting> incomparable loveliness, beauty and pleasure inexplicable by the human tongue and never heard by the human ear. The foods set forth in their midst appeared as the most beautiful and awesomely colorful fruits, of purple and radiant colors and scarlet hue like sugarcane root, each inexplicably and indescribably having each other's shapes and rich flavors, all mingled together; and multicolored flowers of best quality were lying in these dishes. Above those divine fruits were various types of violets and sweet-smelling roses,

providing to viewers a fragrance and sweetness not to be put in words, in smell and perception inconceivable and indescribable to the human mind. For since each of the fruits had its own fragrance and sweetness, and a fragrant and varied smell was mingled together from all of them, the whole area there was filled with ineffable sweetness and happiness and those who saw it never became sated.

St. Basil is seated on a throne at the head of this table, feasting together with innumerable young men

Our sanctified father Basil, the great ascetic, was sitting at the head of this beautiful and wondrous table on a high and most awesome throne, and he was endowed with extraordinary beauty, and as lord of all those there was resting gloriously on a very great and most awesome throne, as aforementioned. This throne was green and varied in colors, emitting rays of its own brilliance, and was fashioned by the Architect and sole Creator of everything; and the holy man was master of all those ineffable and previously unseen and inexplicable good things and of the inexpressible happiness. Sharing in his happiness and feasting with him were very many young men, beyond enumeration, delighting in that wondrous and truly divine enjoyment; and the more they ate of those divine foods set out there on the wondrous table created by God, the more they still had and were never without. While then they ate those immaterial and spiritual delicacies, they were filled with ineffable joy and inexplicable exultation; their faces were like brilliant rays of the sun, full of pleasure and boundless joy, and all were conversing with one another with smiling faces and mellifluous voices, and they were wondrously nourished on celestial bread and were drinking a cup of joy and sweetness beyond description. The mixed wine in those immaterial

cups, bright as the sun, gleamed intensely in fiery beauty with a red color like red hot coals and whenever one of them received in his hands that wondrous and gleaming cup, filled with nectar of ambrosia, and brought it to his own mouth to drink, he would be filled with the sweetness of the Holy Spirit and with divine happiness and grace, and seemed for a long time dumbfounded and awestruck; and his face would gleam and be even more brilliant, like a rose that has just emerged from the calyx. The young men serving them were exceedingly beautiful, with handsome faces, their arms and fingers white as snow, so that one who saw them might say that they were made from milk mixed with fig-tree juice, clad immaterially in a cloak dyed scarlet and imbued with all beauty; and their feet were snowy-white, they were girt with belts like *loroi* with colors of a rainbow in the sky and radiating light, and on their heads they wore diadems of gold which were exceedingly lovely and colorful with gems and precious pearls shining like sunbeams.

Gregory prostrates himself before St. Basil and receives the father's blessing

The most wondrous *amma* lady Theodora (who was the only woman I saw near our holy father Basil at that most wondrous table) went ahead of me and spoke with him about me. And with a smile on his face he gazed at me, and with a nod urged me to approach him. And so in response to his divine nod, we came near him and I made the customary prostration on the ground before him, and I asked for his prayer and blessing. He said to me in a gentle and calm voice, "Welcome here, my child, may God have mercy on you and bless you and sanctify you and preserve you unto every good deed, and cause His face to shine upon you and fill you with all

blessings in heaven and on earth, and send you help from His holy abode and aid you out of Sion and fortify you with His divine powers for the war against the invisible enemy, becoming for you a mighty wall against him."

St. Basil tells Gregory he should now be reassured about Theodora's destiny in the afterlife

As I was amazed at what happened and was moving my knee and face <with emotion>, while I was lying on that floor paved with gold, Basil touched me with his divine hand and raised me up, speaking to me as follows, pointing out to me with his finger the truly blessed Theodora: "Behold Theodora whom you desired to see and sought to behold, about whom you were greatly distressed and often entreated me, demanding to learn what lot she received and in which place she has now taken her rest. Behold, she stands before you and before your eyes; behold, now you see her and her condition. Therefore in the future do not pester me continuously about her any longer." That honored woman, who had received God's mercy through Basil, gazed at me with a most sweet and gladdening look and said, "Be happy, my child Gregory, and exult, and may the Lord be gracious to you, because you were anxious and concerned for my humble self; for this reason the Lord God has consented to fulfill your desire through the acceptable prayers and divine interventions of His servant and our holy father and shepherd Basil, who has accomplished many and great mercies for us both."

Theodora leads Gregory into a beautiful garden of fruit trees

After they finished speaking with me, the eyes of all those who were feasting sumptuously with the saint at that won-

drous table and who shared in his happiness looked directly at and gazed quite intently upon us in great silence. Then the holy man said to her, "Go with him and show him the beauty of the plants in our garden." So she took me and we both proceeded to the right side of the forecourt. Behold, there was a wondrous gate and a garden wall built to a boundless height, made of gold; and when the gate was opened we went inside. There was in the garden vegetation gleaming like gold, adorned with indescribable roses and violets. Astonished at its beauty and extraordinary delightfulness and especially at the sweetness and the inexpressible fragrance given off by it, and not wishing at all to leave there, I gave some attention to where my guide directed me. There I saw an innumerable multitude of incomparable trees of seventy kinds, impossible to count, beautiful in form and wondrous, each of them laden with an incalculable multitude of fruits, their branches bent down to the ground below from the weight of the fruits, on the verge of being broken by them yet never experiencing any harm or damage, since they were totally incorruptible and indestructible. As I indeed realized from their similarity, the fruits set out on that awesome and wondrous table, that is, the shining and delightful fruits, were from those extraordinary trees.

Theodora explains to Gregory that this garden was created by God and by St. Basil for the repose of his spiritual children

As I was astonished at the beauty and height of the trees and at their wondrous and awesome fruits (for I had never seen such wonders of this kind), my guide Theodora said to me, "Why do you marvel at these, my child Gregory? If you could see that garden which the Lord planted eastward in

Eden, you would have to shudder greatly and be even more astonished, since this garden is in comparison to that one a shadow and a mere dream." I said to her, "I ask you, my lady, who planted this garden? For I have never seen such a place." And she answered me, "Since you still live in that vain world below, where might you ever expect to see such things and such happiness? For the things you see here have been created noetically by the hands of the Most High—for all these things are noetic and imperishable and we are moving about here noetically. But the toils and sweat of the divine contests of our holy father and guardian Basil, at which he toiled for God from his youth even to his old age, fasting, going without sleep, sleeping on a hard bed, praying, enduring heat and cold in the wilderness, eating only wild plants, and these not to satiety, but just enough to stay alive, submitting willingly to every affliction and mortification for many years before he came to the city where he still lives for the salvation of many souls, <with these toils> he created and produced this garden which you see for the rest and repose of us his children, and not only this one, but also the very palaces of the heavens; for he has access to the throne of the Lord, dwelling together with the immaterial angels, and making entreaties with them on behalf of the world. For those in the world who endure toils and afflictions for God and the fulfillment of His holy commandments inherit and enjoy such blessings here from the just Rewarder, as they rejoice unceasingly and happily, as the Divine Scripture says somewhere, 'You shall eat the labors of your hands,' for 'Each shall receive as his wages according to his labor;' and 'If a person sows there, this he will reap' upon coming here, and what he does there, of these he will be the heir in this age."

Gregory tries in vain to feel his body and realizes he is indeed undergoing a noetic experience

As I was amazed and startled at these words, because she said that we were there noetically and not with bodily senses (for I seemed to be present there in body and in a waking vision, not noetically), I tried to touch myself, to see if indeed what appeared to be my body was flesh. I wanted to grasp one hand with the other, and I was touching my body to see if it had any bones at all, and I was attempting to inventory all my limbs, yet through <my attempts at> touching I realized that I possessed no <flesh or bones> at all. Thus I found myself resembling a fiery flame or a sunbeam, and I seemed in one sense to touch this sunbeam with my hand, but yet was unable to grasp it at all. For I did not perceive that I touched any of my limbs at all, because I was there in a noetic state and not in a waking dream; therefore I was still more astonished in my mind at these events.

Gregory awakes from his dream, and makes a special effort to recall his vision. He then sets forth to visit St. Basil

After these awesome and truly miraculous sights, we returned again to the forecourt. Going out through the gate by which we had also entered the garden, we found the table and everything lying on it still there, beautiful and of divine nature, but we saw none of the people who had been banqueting at it. After embracing the truly blessed and holy Theodora, I seemed to depart from there and, as if coming to my senses, I was released from that awesome and miraculous vision and began to think about my experiences, "Who am I and where do I live and what are the visions which I saw and

what was I told?" I was rehearsing everything in my mind lest anything that I saw escape me; and I was recalling everything carefully, as if I saw them again with my very eyes unimpeachably in a waking vision. Arising then from my bed at that very hour, I set forth for the blessed man to narrate to him the vision and to learn from him whether it came from God or from demons.

When Gregory feigns ignorance of any unusual experience the previous night, St. Basil provides a brief summary of his vision

As I was considering these things in my mind while I journeyed, I came to the saint, and after I made the customary obeisance on the ground to him and received his blessing, I sat next to him at his bidding. When I had sat down, before I could describe to him my vision, he said to me with a most sweet and cheerful voice <and> a smiling face, "Do you know, Gregory my son, where we both were last night?" In order to test him, I spoke to him feigning ignorance, and gave a false response to the divine word he spoke to me, "And where indeed then would I have been, my lord, except in my cell and in my own bed, in which I was sleeping quietly and resting pleasantly?" When I spoke to him thus, wishing to draw him out, to see if he had further information to tell me concerning the awesome and marvelous wonders which I myself had seen that night, he said to me, "Truly we each of us slept alone in our individual cells, as I myself know, my child, but though physically sleeping each in our own bed at the customary time for sleep, yet in spirit we were both somewhere else. Are you not aware of my revelation to you on this night? Did you not see Theodora? When you were striving to catch up with me, did you not arrive in the course of your

wandering at the gate of our noetic and spiritual house, which the Lord in His mercy and compassion has bestowed on us His useless servants? Did not Theodora come out and receive you with great joy, and after leading you within describe for you her departure and death, how with great exertion she passed by the <tollhouses> of the air, where necessary with our aid, and how with great difficulty through God's mercy she was able to escape that bitter savagery of the accursed demons who sit in attendance in their tollhouses? Did you not enter into the forecourt with her at my bidding? Did you not see that wondrous table and its extraordinary construction, its nature and its artistry? Did you not see that divine feast and the spiritual flowers? Did you not observe and wonder in your mind, saying, 'What kind of very beautiful and colorful fruits might those be that are set out, and which ones and of what nature are the wondrous and fragrant blossoms upon it? Who are the people feasting with me at the table upon those wondrous delicacies, and who are those handsome young men serving those partaking of a spiritual meal at the table?' While standing at a distance did you not observe and marvel at the beauty of those wondrous palaces and extraordinary royal residences? Did you not come to me at my bidding, and did I not show you Theodora concerning whom you often entreated me to learn what lot she received? At my bidding did she not take you and did you not both enter into the garden allotted to me there by God? Did you not grow dizzy and tremble at that golden vegetation there, as you took it in your mind as though with your hand, utterly astonished at the beauty of its flowers? Did you not gaze moreover on those ever-blooming plants and marvel at the inexpressible radiance and beauty of their fruits? Did you not observe all these things last night? How then can you claim that you have never seen anything

like this and that you were not somewhere else and that you know nothing at all of such things?"

Gregory gives thanks to God and acknowledges the truth of St. Basil's description of his vision

As the holy man thus interrogated me and I gazed steadily at him and recognized the very clear truth of his words, I was seized with unspeakable trembling and became speechless and was transfixed with fear and amazement. For I saw that the holy man's words came forth as if from a fiery mouth, and I began to drench my face with hot tears, recognizing and understanding the nature of this very great beacon, our divine father before God, and that he described to me truly and exactly everything that he, as if he was there in person, understood in his spirit. In response I said to him in anguish of heart, "Yes, holy servant of God, everything occurred exactly as you who carry God with you have said, and thus have I seen these things, and there is no falsehood in them. Therefore I give thanks to the holy God, because He deemed me, a pitiful and unworthy sinner and one unworthy of any kindness, worthy to come to know you His genuine servant and to be under the protection of your wings and to enjoy these wondrous and extraordinary sights."

St. Basil predicts that he will predecease Gregory, who will then compose the Life of his spiritual father

The blessed man said to me, "If you lead your life rightly, conducting yourself according to God, and through every good work you serve Him in a pleasing manner, Gregory my child, after your departure from here at God's bidding I will receive you in the next world, so you may be with me unto

the unending ages in the eternal abodes which you have witnessed. For you should know that I myself will depart from human and earthly affairs before you. Then when you die a considerable time later, you yourself will come to me, nourished on good deeds as God has preordained for me. But as long as I am still in this life, take care that no one knows in any way whatsoever about all these things that you have seen and that you have heard from me. For after my death you will record my worthless life in this city together with all your visions, and you will leave this account for future generations for the benefit of many souls who may encounter it, with the assistance and approval of divine grace to this end; and I will be with you in spirit guiding you to all truth."²¹

From the Life of St. Anthony the Great (†356)

(commemorated on January 17)

by St. Athanasios the Great,
Archbishop of Alexandria²²

Renowned throughout the world as the father of monks, St. Anthony the Great reached the heights of divine love through his assiduous ascetical struggles. As a young man hearing the Gospel read in church one morning proclaiming, *If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give*

²¹ Originally published in Denis F. Sullivan, Alice-Mary Talbot, and Stamatina McGrath, trans. and eds., *The Life of St. Basil the Younger* (Washington, D.C., 2014), pp. 191–277. © 2014, The Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection Trustees for Harvard University. We would like to gratefully acknowledge the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection Trustees for Harvard University for their generous permission to reproduce this substantial excerpt from their critical edition.

²² †373, commemorated on January 18.

to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me (Matt. 19:21), he left the world and all that is in it and began an astonishing life battling against the passions and the demons. Enclosing himself in a tomb and immersing himself in prayer, one night the enraged demons appeared and physically beat him, leaving him half dead, but he returned the following night undaunted and battled with all his heart for Christ's love. Indeed, the Lord appeared, shining His Uncreated Light upon His beloved monk, filling him with ineffable joy and strength and approving his contending spirit. In the deepest desert, Anthony the Great achieved what few in this world ever have, enabling him to say, "I no longer fear God, but I love Him." From antiquity the *Life of St. Anthony* was highly acclaimed; St. John Chrysostom wrote in unqualified praise of the *Life*, exhorting all to "look earnestly into what is written in that book."²³ Truly manifesting the life hidden in Christ, every generation of monastics has looked to St. Anthony as their exemplar.

ONCE WHEN ABOUT to eat, having risen up to pray about the ninth hour, St. Anthony perceived that he was caught up in the spirit, and, wonderful to tell, he stood and saw himself, as it were, from outside himself, and that he was led in the air by certain ones. Next certain bitter and terrible beings stood in the air and wished to hinder him from passing through. But when his conductors opposed them, they demanded to know whether he was not accountable to them. And when they wished to sum up the account from his birth, Anthony's conductors stopped them, saying, "The Lord hath wiped out the sins from his birth, but from the time he be-

²³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, NPNF, 1st series, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, 1998), p. 54. (PG 57:90.)

came a monk, and devoted himself to God, it is permitted you to make a reckoning." Then when they accused him but could not convict him, his way was free and unhindered. And immediately he saw himself, as it were, coming and standing by himself, and again he was Anthony as before. Then forgetful of eating, he remained the rest of the day and through the whole of the night groaning and praying. For he was astonished when he saw against what mighty opponents our wrestling is, and by what labors we have to pass through the air. And he remembered that this is what the Apostle said, *according to the prince of the power of the air* (Eph. 2:2). For in it the enemy hath power to fight and to attempt to hinder those who pass through. Wherefore most earnestly he exhorted, *Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day* (Eph. 6:13), that the enemy, *having no evil thing to say against us, may be ashamed* (Titus 2:8). And we who have learned this, let us be mindful of the Apostle when he says, *whether in the body I know not, or whether out of the body I know not; God knoweth* (2 Cor. 12:2). But Paul was caught up unto the third heaven, and having heard things unspeakable he came down; while Anthony saw that he had come to the air, and contended until he was free.

And he had also this favor granted him. For as he was sitting alone on the mountain, if ever he was in perplexity in his meditations, this was revealed to him by Providence in prayer. And the happy man, as it is written, was taught of God (Isaiah 54:13; John 6:45). After this, when he once had a discussion with certain men who had come to him concerning the state of the soul and of what nature its place will be after this life, the following night one from above called him, saying, "Anthony, rise, go out and look." Having gone out therefore (for he knew whom he must obey), looking up, he beheld one

standing and reaching to the clouds, tall, hideous, and fearful, and others ascending as though they were winged. And the figure stretched forth his hands, and some of those who were ascending were stayed by him, while others flew above, and having escaped heavenward, were borne aloft free from care. At such, therefore, the giant gnashed his teeth, but rejoiced over those who fell back. And forthwith a voice came to Anthony, "Understand what thou seest!" And his understanding was opened, and he understood that it was the passing of souls, and that the tall being who stood was the enemy who envies the faithful. And those whom he caught and stopped from passing through are accountable to him, while those whom he was unable to hold as they passed upwards had not been subservient to him. So having seen this, and as it were being reminded, he struggled the more daily to advance towards those things which are ahead. And these visions he was unwilling to tell, but as he spent much time in prayer, and was amazed, when those who were with him pressed him with questions and forced him, he was compelled to speak, as a father who cannot withhold anything from his children. And he thought that as his conscience was clear, the account would be beneficial for them, that they might learn that discipline bore good fruit, and that visions were oftentimes the solace of their labors.²⁴

²⁴ St. Athanasios the Great, *Life of St. Anthony*, NPNF, 2nd series, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, 1987), pp. 213–214. (PG 26:933C–937B.)

**From the Life of St. Nephon,
Bishop of Constantiana (†4th c.)**
(commemorated on December 23)

Greatly beloved of God because of his humility, St. Nephon became a Spirit-bearing Prophet for the Christian race, witnessing awe-inspiring visions and revelations of the Last Judgment and the terrible trials of the toll-houses which await souls after death.

ONCE WHEN HE was praying and had his gaze turned to Heaven, a divine light shone in front of him. At the same time a white-clad angel, dressed as a deacon, appeared. He was holding a gold censer and censed first in the direction of Heaven, and then Nephon. Suddenly the gates of Heaven opened and the angels of God ascended and descended like bees, transporting the souls of people who had died. The evil spirits of the air were struggling to grab them and throw them down, but the angels resisted violently, whipping them and saving the souls.

Astonished, the saint saw a soul being taken up to Heaven. But as soon as they approached the toll booth of immorality, its leader started to shake and become wild.

"With what right," he was shouting, "do you take that soul which belongs to us?"

And the angels answered him: "Prove to us what authority you have over this man."

"Up until his death," the demon said, "he was wallowing voluntarily in all kinds of indecencies. And not only this, but he also judged others. What crimes more horrible than these do you want?"

"Yes," the angels admitted, "he was a slave to these passions, but he cut them off before he died."

"No! It's not the way you're telling me," the demon squealed. "He died unrepentant. To his last breath he violated the law without ever confessing his sins. He was and still is mine."

Then one of the angels said, "We are not about to believe you, who are entirely wallowing in falsehood. Let's call his angel. He will tell us the whole truth."

They called him, because he was still guarding the body until its interment. As soon as he came, they asked him, "Tell us, brother, did this soul repent for its sins or did it die with them? Tell us the whole truth."

Then the angel answered, "I am neither human nor an impudent spirit to tell lies, but before God I assure you, from the time he became ill, even before he took a turn for the worse, he thought of death. Then he began to cry and confess his sins to God. Continually he would raise his hands toward the Most High asking for mercy. If God wills, He will forgive him. If not, glory to His righteous judgment!"

As soon as the angels heard this, they laughed at the devil. Thus the humble soul was liberated from the snares of its enemies.

In a little while the saint saw another soul being carried up. It belonged to a blasphemous and hard man. The demons were accusing him a lot, reminding him one by one of the improper words and grave curses he used to say to people when he was alive.

The angels said in rebuttal that he had a few rights to salvation. Many times, for example, even though he was thinking of doing something bad, he would immediately repent, reproaching and degrading himself. Often he would sigh bit-

terly and sometimes he would tear. Once in a while he would even give a little charity to the poor. Having this in mind, the angels of light claimed that God would have mercy on that soul. Angered then the demons said: "From his youth he did things that were not right for a Christian. He polluted himself with different sins and, indeed, sodomitic ones. Where shall we place his curses and anger? And the worst, he even committed murder. If therefore he must be saved, then take the whole world and all the sinners of the earth and save them gratis; because we are laboring and getting upset in vain!"

"Keep in mind, wretches, that he cut off all his youthful sins and God forgave him. And if sometimes he did something bad, he cleansed it with repentance. What do you want then, you wild beasts? That this soul be condemned? Impossible, since God forgives the sins people confess tearfully and humbly and do not repeat. 'Anything that becomes visible is light' (Eph. 5:13). The righteous Judge punishes only those sins they take with them."

Thus the angels defeated the spirits of wickedness and entered into the gate of Heaven. Therefore, that creature of God was also liberated from the claws of the demons, and He Who saves freely granted him salvation.

Again the blessed one saw them lifting still another soul that was very devout and God-fearing. She spent all her life in purity, modesty, and a great deal of charity. She showed love toward all. The dragons of the air threatened her, gnashing their teeth. And that poor thing, terrified by their wildness, shriveled up in the bosom of the angels of God, while the angels descending to take other souls kissed her with love.

When that holy soul ascended into Heaven, a large number of good spirits gathered around her, embracing and kiss-

ing her tenderly, and saying joyfully, "Glory to God Who delivered this soul from the dreadful dragon!"

It was a delight to see them. The heavenly powers always do this; they rejoice and celebrate for each Christian who is saved. When they reached the throne of Grace, they brought her to the feet of the Lord Jesus and He permitted her to worship His Father and to be filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Later He turned her over to Michael, the lord of the covenant, to guide her to eternal rest, as indeed it happened.

Down further, however, the servant of God saw the demons dragging a soul to the infernal regions. It was the soul of a servant who had hanged himself. Behind him followed his guardian angel weeping bitterly for his loss. In the midst of his tears he was saying, "Ah, the cunning demons who make people do such evil! There, this servant's master, obeying the demons, would become angry, hit him terribly, and let him starve to death. And this poor soul became desperate, took a rope and hanged himself, offering his life wholly a sacrifice to Satan. Ah, alas! The Almighty gave him to me to guard after his baptism, and the filthy dragon snatched him from me suddenly and devoured him! How will I appear to my Lord in this grieving and bitter state? But also, how will I face my Maker, sorrowful for the loss of this soul?"

While he was painfully saying this with anguish, another angel appeared from Heaven. "Our Father, the Lord of hosts" he told him, "commands you to go to Rome, where this very moment the son of a soldier is being baptized. Take charge of him and guard him through the Holy Spirit given to him at baptism. And I shall punish the master of this servant and teach him not to become angry, nor to hit his servants, nor to let them starve to death."

The angel said this on behalf of God and ascended into Heaven, while the former set out for Rome according to the divine command.

That instant Nephon saw them bringing up a soul with a great deal of commotion. Multitudes of demons were making noise and were attempting to snatch the unfortunate soul. It was the soul of a clergyman who had spent his life in immorality. He even committed murders! He would lie in wait in the street at night and kill the passers-by. Then he would take their clothes and sell them to feed his jesters.

Therefore, as that wretched soul was ascending, it didn't make it through the fourth station; the dragon stretched out his hands with impudence, snatched it from the angels, and cast it down to earth. The demons took it then, lowered it into the abyss, and turned it over to the prince of darkness so that it might remain captive there along with similar sinful souls until the day of the common Resurrection.

As the dark demons were returning again, they were puffed up and put on airs saying amongst themselves, "Look, we even beat the clergy of the Nazarene and trample them under foot!"

Then one of them sadly whispered, "Why are we bragging that we destroyed one unfortunate soul? I can show you a large number of priests who shine with virtue; we can't even touch them."

"If they didn't have the mark of Jesus," the others answered, "and His help all around them, then you'd see our power!"

"And why should we fear the wood on which the Nazarene was nailed? This is an example of complete decadence!"

"It's not the wood, but the terrible lightning which pours forth from it. The bad part is that the lightning which burns

us doesn't come only from the wood, but the same thing happens when the Christians sign themselves with this symbol...."

Then St. Nephon came to himself. Dumbfounded and sad for all he had seen, he thought and said: "Ah, how much misery we, humble and sinful, hide! And then Judgment and the terrible fire come, for all eternity. We must aim for salvation at all costs, forcing ourselves to do good. Only in this way will we please God and not violate His commandments."²⁵

From the Life of St. Daniel of Scetis (†6th c.)

(commemorated on June 7)

Captured three times by barbarians, he struck his third captor with a rock, killing him. His repentance was so great, he traveled to the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Jerusalem and the Pope of Rome, finally returning to the Archbishop of Alexandria, all of whom exonerated him and, seeing his holiness, begged his prayers. He then retired to the eminent monastic settlement of Scetis in the Egyptian desert. He became so famous for his virtues that he was named superior of Scetis, honored throughout Egypt as "a second Abraham and host of Christ."

THERE WAS A MAN who abandoned his sister in Alexandria, left the town, and embraced the monastic way of life on the Mountain. Deprived of his support, she abandoned herself to a profligate life of promiscuity, be-

²⁵ Jeannie E. Gentithes and Archimandrite Ignatios Apostolopoulos, trans., *Stories, Sermons, and Prayers of St. Nephon: An Ascetic Bishop* (Minneapolis, 1989), pp. 79–84.

coming the agent for the destruction of many souls. He was displeased when he heard about this and, for many years, disowned her but, later on, he was accused by some acquaintances of being himself the cause of her ruin and of those who were being destroyed with her. Praying to God to help him, he went into Alexandria and, coming to his sister's gate, sent someone to tell her, "Your brother has come from the desert and is calling for you."

She, who was disporting herself with her lovers with her head and her feet bare, desisted completely the moment she heard her brother's name. Out she came to meet him and embraced him, but when he saw what a state she was in he struck himself on the forehead and said to her, "My lady sister, what has happened to you to make you look with contempt upon God and to hate your wretched soul? Why have you destroyed yourself and many others? Why have you afflicted my old age with grief?" With tears in her eyes she declared, "Ah, what a wretch I am, for I am utterly ruined! But I beg of you, holy one of God, if you know that God will receive me as a penitent, me the prostitute, the polluted one, do not leave me here. For I will be subject to you forever, serving the Lord with all my heart."

He rejoiced on hearing this and said to her, "Go back and get the veil for your head and shoes for your feet, for the way is rough by which we are about to travel."

"As the Lord lives, I shall go with you just as God delivered me into your hands," she replied. "I shall take nothing with me that I gained by my involvement with the Devil. Let us be gone, my lord brother; it is better for

me to suffer the disgrace of an uncovered head rather than to re-enter the Devil's place of work."

Rejoicing even more at these words, he took her with him and set out on the long road into the desert. Here her feet were torn by the rough track and streams of blood flowed from them, but she followed her brother, sprinkling the track all the way with her tears, striking her breast and saying, "Lord, receive my repentance as you accepted the prostitute's."

As they were walking along the track her brother saw some people coming. He said to her, "My lady sister, since these strangers are unaware that you are my sister, go aside a little and hide yourself until they have gone by."

She went aside and concealed herself but, as soon as she sat down, she surrendered her spirit to the Lord. When the people they had encountered had passed by, her brother called to her saying, "Get up, sister; come on, let us continue our journey." But when she did not answer, he turned aside and, following her bloodstains, found her lying dead. "Alas, I was altogether unworthy to save her," he sighed.

In utter despondency he now lay down to sleep on her grave. He dreamt that he saw a person sitting in judgment on high, with many guardsmen standing around him. He heard that ruler saying, "Bring that prostitute here to me" (meaning the *abba's* sister) and in she was led. Now, behold: a black-looking man was standing there, accusing her. With a paper in his hand, he was rehearsing her promiscuities and impurities; the place was suffused with a totally disgusting stench. As for her, she just stood there, a miserable sight, with her eyes cast down. Then the ruler ordered the angel of repentance to be brought in; there entered a pleasant-looking man holding a

paper in his hand. To him the ruler said: "Read out what you witnessed concerning this prostitute," whereupon he began to make known her obedience to her brother, that she followed him in repentance, her head uncovered and her feet unshod, stained with their bleeding.

The black one retaliated, saying, "Do you mean to deprive me of her who was with me, doing my will, for so long, just because she followed you for a tiny part of one day?" At this four men (the ones who were about to bear her off for punishment) put out their hands, grasped her hair, and began to afflict her. The ruler said, "Do not come near to her until her repentance arrives," whereupon there entered a pleasant-looking man with a golden container in his hand; within it were her tears and the blood from her feet. "Bring me a pair of scales and weigh her impurity against her repentance," said the ruler, whereupon her repentance was found to be the heavier. God's love for humankind had triumphed. Then the ruler ordered her to be stripped of the garment she was wearing, after which they put a linen robe on her and handed her over to the angel of repentance, who then put her in a place suffused with light.²⁶

²⁶ Tim Vivian, ed., *Witness to Holiness: Abba Daniel of Scetis* (Kalamazoo, 2008), pp. 87–89.

**From the Life of St. Peter
the Merciful Tax Collector (†6th c.)**
(commemorated on September 22 and January 20)

St. Peter's *Life* is contained in the *Life of St. John the Merciful, Patriarch of Alexandria*, written by Bishop Leontios of Neapolis.

THE BLESSED PATRIARCH Saint John would encourage everyone to perform charitable acts, and oftentimes he would recount soul-saving examples of compassion. In particular, one day, when many people had gathered, he recounted the following very true and admirable story, which he would confirm with an oath that he had heard from a very truthful and reputable person:

"When I was in Cyprus, at my place of business, I had a servant who was faithful and prudent and, having lived a chaste life, he reposed in peace. He had told me that when he was living in Africa, he had a master, a tax collector, named Peter, who was extremely wealthy, but without compassion or sympathy for the poor, until the following wonderful incident happened to him:

"While some poor people were sitting in the sun warming themselves, for it was wintertime, they were counting the houses of those merciful people who had shown compassion on them for the Lord's sake, and they were blessing them; likewise, they deplored and cursed the merciless ones, among whom was the aforementioned Peter, my lord, who was so cruel that he never gave any alms to anyone. Then one of those poor men said to his companions: 'What will you give

me if I make Peter give me alms?' His companions, thinking the thing impossible, accepted his challenge.

"Not to be put off, the beggar went and stood in Peter's doorway. At that same hour it happened that the baker was bringing a basket of freshly baked loaves. The poor man begged for alms, but the wealthy Peter tried to chase him away. The poor man, however, stood his ground and would not leave. Peter became furious and cast one of the fresh loaves at the poor man in order to hit him. The poor man took hold of it and, returning joyfully to his comrades, swore that he received it from Peter's own hands.

"After two days, Peter fell ill and beheld a vision that he was standing before the Judgment Seat of God where scales were weighing all his deeds, both good and bad. There had also assembled a great multitude of fearful demons, bearing in writing all his sins, which they put down on one side of the balance. On the other side, a few bright angels were searching to discover any good work that he might have done. Not finding any, they were grieved, seeing that his sins were so many. His guardian angel then said: 'He has done no good to others, except for one loaf of bread that he once threw at a poor man.' Then the angels placed that bread on the other side of the scales, so that the weight made the scales evenly balanced. The angels then told him: 'Go and do other charitable deeds adding to this loaf, lest you be seized by these gloomy and merciless demons.'

"As Peter rose up from his bed, he understood well the significance of the vision and glorified God for such a benefit, saying, 'Woe to me, the harsh and thoughtless one! If that one loaf that I hurled at that poor man in my anger brought me such benefit, how much more shall I receive if I give much charity in a good mood and with a pure disposition?'

"From that time on, the blessed Peter became so virtuous and benevolent that he would even take off his own clothes to give them to the poor."²⁷

From the Life of St. John the Merciful, Patriarch of Alexandria (†620)

(commemorated on November 12)

by Bishop Leontios of Neapolis

All the saints are distinguished by their immense compassion, but the holy Patriarch John was utterly dedicated to this great virtue. Boundless in his almsgiving, weeping at every encounter with the poor, St. John himself passed from this life in self-emptying poverty, having given all he had for the benefit of the poor. Fragrant myrrh flowed in abundance from his body after his repose to the joy of all the faithful.

THE BLESSED MAN always used to talk much about the thought of death and the departure of the soul so that on several occasions those who went in to him with a haughty bearing and laughing face and bold eyes came out from his presence with humble demeanor and a contrite face and eyes filled with tears. He used to say: "My humble opinion is that it suffices for our salvation to meditate continually and seriously about death and to think earnestly upon the fact that nobody will pity us in that hour nor will anyone travel with us out of this life except our good deeds. And when the angels

²⁷ Ο Μέγας Συναξαριστής της Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας (*The Great Synaxaristis of the Orthodox Church*), vol. 11, November (Athens, 1991), pp. 368–369. (In Greek.)

come hastening down, in what a tumult will a soul then be if it is found unready! How it will beg that it may be allowed a further short span of life, only to hear the words: 'What about the time you have lived, have you spent it well?'

And again he used to say as though speaking of himself, "Humble John, how will you have the strength to 'pass the wild beasts of the brake' (Ps. 67:31), when they meet you like tax collectors? Woe is me, what fears and tremors will encompass the soul when it is called to account by so many keen and pitiless accountants?" And indeed the saintly man had especially noted that which was made known through revelation by St. Symeon, the Stylite; the words were: "When the soul goes forth from the body, as it rises from the earth to heaven there meet it troops of demons, each in his own regiment. A band of demons of arrogance meet it, they feel it all over to see whether the soul possesses their works. A band of the spirits of slander meets it; they inspect it to see whether it has ever uttered slanders and not repented. Again higher up the demons of harlotry meet it; they investigate whether they can recognize their pursuits in it. And while the wretched soul is being brought to account on its way from earth to heaven the holy angels stand on one side and do not help it, only its own virtues can do that."²⁸

Pondering on these things the glorious Patriarch would grow fearful and troubled about such an hour, for he also bore in mind the saying of St. Hilarion²⁹ who, as he was on

²⁸ By God's indwelling grace, the holy angels are immeasurably more powerful than the entire demonic horde. However, as seen in the examples throughout this present edition, at the hour of death the Lord limits the role of His angels to guarding and guiding departed souls, and especially to magnifying the small and relatively insignificant virtuous works a person performed in this life.

²⁹ †371, commemorated on October 21. St. Hilarion the Great, wonderworker and ascetic of the Palestinian desert, was a disciple of St. Anthony the Great.

the point of leaving this life, lost courage and said to his soul: "For eighty years, O humble soul, you have been serving Christ and are you afraid to go forth? Go forth, for He is merciful." And the Patriarch would say to himself: "If he, after serving Christ for eighty years and raising men from the dead and doing signs and wonders, was yet afraid of that bitter hour, what can you, humble John, do or say when you come to face those cruel and pitiless exactors of taxes and tributes? To which will you have the strength to make your defense? To the demons of falsehood, to those of slander, to those of unmercifulness, to those of avarice, to those of malice, to those of hatred, to those of perjury?" And with new doubts rising in his mind he would say: "Oh God, do Thou rebuke them, for the whole strength of man is of no avail against them; do Thou, Lord, give us as guides the holy angels who protect and pilot us. For great is the fury of the demons against us, great is the fear, great the trembling, great the peril of the voyage through this sea of air. For if, when travelling from city to city on this earth, we require a guide to lead us lest we fall into crevasses, or into the haunts of wild beasts, or into impassable rivers, or into pathless and inaccessible mountains, or into the hands of brigands, or into some boundless and waterless desert and be lost, how many strong guides and divine guardians do we not need when we start on this long journey which is everlasting, I mean the exodus from the body and the journey up to heaven?" These were the teachings, full of God's wisdom, that the blessed man gave to himself and to all; these were his daily thoughts and meditations.³⁰

³⁰ Elizabeth Dawes and Norman H. Baynes, trans., *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies of St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Theodore of Sykeon, and St. John the Almsgiver* (Crestwood, 1977), pp. 248-250.

**From the Life of St. Fursey of Ireland,
Founder and Abbot of Burgh Castle Monastery
and Enlightener of East Anglia (†650)**

(commemorated on January 16)

Commissioned less than four years after St. Fursey's repose for the occasion of the translation of his completely incorrupt relics to a permanent shrine in 653, the *Passage of St. Fursey*³¹ begins with the saint's monastic renunciation, recounting how he took up his struggles in his hermitage in Ireland. When he died of a sudden illness, the Lord deemed him worthy, because of his pure life dedicated to the worship of God, of being lifted up among the heavenly angelic choir. Astonished at the ineffable beauty of their hymns to the Lord, he was informed by his angelic escort that he had to return to his body until he should "complete his due task." St. Fursey then found himself once again among those living upon the earth.

When St. Fursey fell mortally ill a second time, however, it was God's will for him to bear witness to the terrible trials that await souls at death:

HE ASKED AND RECEIVED the communion of the holy Body and Blood; and he lived in sickness that day and the next. On the third, at midnight, when many kinsfolk and friends and neighbours were visiting the illustrious man, darkness came suddenly upon him, and his legs were overcome by cold and stiffened. Spreading his hands in prayer, he joyfully welcomed death. For he remembered the most glad

³¹ The *Vita Prima* of St. Fursey, also known as the *Passage of St. Fursey*, was translated by Oliver Rackham from the eighth-century manuscript *Transitus Beati Fursei* of the British Library (*Harley MS 5041*, folios 79–98).

vision, which he had seen before after the same signs; he fell down upon his bed as if overcome by sleep. He heard the horrible voices of a great multitude shouting and demanding that he go out. Opening his eyes, he beheld naught but the three aforesaid, two holy angels set on either side, the third standing armed at his head. In a wonderful manner he beheld the aforesaid holy angels with the appearances and voices of men, and heard their chants with all sweetness of pleasantness.

Then the angel of the Lord at his right hand, consoling him, said: "Fear not; thou hast a defense." And the angels lifting him, he perceived no manner of roof or house, passing through the midst of howling and shouting fiends. He heard one of them saying: "Let us go forth to wage war in the sight of him." Then he beheld a black cloud on the left side, curling in front of him, resolving into an army for war.

Now the bodies of the fiends, insofar as they could appear unto his soul, were filled with ugliness and blackness, long-necked, filled with meagerness and filthiness and all horrible-ness; their heads did swell into the likeness of a casserole;³² but when they flew or did fight, he could see no shape of their bodies but an horrible and flittering shadow. (But who, O prudent readers, knoweth not that even this is done of the unclean spirits to the terror of the soul that beholdeth?) And he could never behold their faces because of the horror of darkness, even as the faces of the holy angels because of the too great brightness.

The fiends did war, casting fiery darts against them, but all these most evil weapons were quenched by the angel's shield. But the adversaries fell back before the countenance of

³² In Latin, *caccabi*, which the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1982) defines as "pan" or "pot," possibly a metaphorical description of the black sootiness of the dark faces of the demons.

the angel that fought, who said as one that reckoneth: "Delay not our journey, for this man is no partaker of your perdition." The adversaries, contradicting and blaspheming, said it was unjust of God that a man consenting to a sinner should have no damnation, since it is written: Not only they that do such things are worthy of death, but they that consent to them that do them. As the angels fought, the holy man reckoned that the shouting of the battle and the crying of the fiends could be heard in all the earth.

And when Satan, conquered, raised up as a bruised serpent his venomous head, he said: "He oftentimes brought forth idle speeches; it was not fitting that he should enjoy the blessed life."

The holy angel said: "Unless thou bring forth his chief offences, he shall not perish because of the lesser."

The ancient accuser said: "It is written: If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses."

The holy angel replied: "Where did he avenge himself or unto whom did he do wrong?"

The Devil said: "It is not written: if ye avenge not; but: If ye from your hearts forgive not."

Said the angel of the Lord: "Let us be judged before the Lord." The conquered enemy replenished his viperine venoms, saying:

"If the Lord be just, this man shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven; for it is written: Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. He hath scarcely fulfilled this word."

The holy angel justifying said: "He had innocence in his heart, but he continued according to the custom of men."

The Devil replied thus: "As he received evil from the custom, so let him receive vengeance from the supreme Judge."

The holy angel said: "Let us be judged before the Lord."

The holy angel battled on, and the adversaries were worsted. Then the holy angel, that was at his right hand, said: "Look thou upon the world."

Then the holy man did look, and beheld a valley of darkness set in the depth beneath him; and beheld four fires in the air, distant from each other by certain spaces. And the holy angel said again: "What be these fires?" The man of the Lord replied that he knew not. The angel said: "These be four fires that burn up the world, after that all sins be forgiven in baptism. The first, after that they have confessed and renounced the devil and his works and pomps; but telling lies in that which they have promised, they burn in the fire of lies. The second is the fire of avarice, which is lighted from lies in promise and from lies in renunciation of the world. The third is the fire of dissension, which is born of avarice. But the fourth is the fire of mercilessness, which ariseth of dissension; and from it are impiety and deceit (whereby the weak are robbed mercilessly), contentions, envying and such like. Each one doth light a fire, because by increase of evil sins grow out of faults."

The fires did increase, and were made into one great fire, which approached unto him. Fearing the threatening fire, he said unto the angel that spake with him: "The fire doth approach me." The angel replied: "Because thou has not kindled it, it shall not burn thee. This fire is permitted to be terrible and great, and it shall try each one according to the deserving of his works, because the avarice of each and every one shall burn in this fire. Like as the body doth burn because of unlawful lust so shall it burn because of due punishment."

Then he saw the holy angel that went before divide the flame of fire into two walls on either hand; and two holy angels on either side defended him from the fire.

He beheld also unclean fiends flying through the fire, waging an horrible war in the midst of the fire. And one of them said: "That servant, which knoweth his Lord's will and doeth it not, was much beaten."

The holy angel replied: "But what was it of his Lord's will that he fulfilled not?"

Satan replied: "It is written: 'The Most High is displeased with the offerings of the unrighteous'; this man hath received gifts from the unrighteous."

The holy angel replied: "But he believed that every one of them had repented."

The Devil said: "He ought to have tested their perseverance in repentance, and thus to have received the fruit thereof. For gifts do blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous."

The holy angel replied: "We are judged before the Lord."

The perfidious Devil, relapsing into blasphemies against the Creator, did break forth and say: "Until now we did esteem the Lord to be truthful."

The holy angel replied: "But what else is He?"

The most impudent fiend said: "Because He promised that every sin that is not expiated on earth shall be avenged in heaven. Isaiah the prophet cried: 'But if ye be willing and hearken unto me, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and provoke me to anger, the sword shall devour you.' This man hath not expiated his sins on earth, nor hath he received vengeance here. Where, then, is the justice of God?"

The holy angel, reproving them, did say: "Blaspheme not, whilst thou knowest not the hidden judgments of God."

The Devil replied: "What is that hidden thing?"

The holy angel replied: "So long as repentance is hoped for, divine mercy doth attend mankind."

Satan replied: "But here there is no place for repentance."

The Angel replied: "Thou knowest not the depth of the mysteries of God: perchance there shall be."

The Devil replied: "Let us part, since there is no reason in judgment."

Another of his henchmen saith: "Yet there remaineth to him a narrow gate, by the which none go in but a few. There we may overcome him: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'"

The Angel replied: "This man did good unto his neighbours."

The adversary replied: "It sufficeth not to work good, unless he hath loved them as himself."

The holy angel replied: "The fruit of love is to work good, for the Lord shall reward every man according to his works."

The dishonest fiend said: "But because he hath not fulfilled the word of God with love; he ought to be damned."

Now the impious multitude fought again, but the holy angels were victorious.

The defeated enemy, as was his wont, burst out into blasphemy, saying: "If God be not unjust, and if lying and transgressions of His word displease Him, this man shall not be free from punishment. For he promised to renounce the world, and contrariwise he hath loved the world, against the Apostle's teaching, which saith: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,' and other scriptures. Neither the words of his own promise have restrained this man, nor the Apostle's decree."

The holy angel replied: "He hath loved the things that are of the world, to be distributed not only unto himself, but unto all the needy."

The most impious Devil said: "In whatsoever manner they be loved, it is against the divine precept and against the promise of Christianity in baptism."

The angels overcame their conquered adversaries, and the devil returned to his cunning accusations, saying: "It is written: 'Unless thou warn the wicked from his wickedness, I shall require his blood at thine hand.' This man hath not warned sinners fitly to penitence." The holy angel replied: "But of this it is written in time: 'The prudent shall keep silence in that time, for it is an evil time.' For when the hearers despise the word, the tongue even of the teacher is hindered, for he seeth that the preaching being heard is despised."

The ancient accuser replied: "He ought to warn even unto suffering, neither to consent nor to keep silent."

Now during all this gainsaying of the fiends a most mighty battle was continuing. In the end, the Lord being the Judge, the angels were triumphant and their adversaries were ground down and defeated. The holy man was surrounded by immense brightness, the choirs of the holy angels chanting together: No labour should seem hard, no time long by which the glory of eternity is gained. All were filled both with joy and sweetness....

St. Fursey was then given instruction from Heaven concerning his life's mission:

"Go thou therefore, announce the word of God to the princes of this land of Ireland, that departing from iniquity they may come by repentance to salvation of souls. Then announce this to the more exalted priests of the holy church,

that the Almighty is a jealous God, if they love the world more than Himself; for they neglect the benefits of the soul, wait upon the rewards of this world, and preach repentance late in time of death; and then, receiving their gifts, they do endure the fire of their torments."

When he had said thus, that most high host of angels was received into heaven. The great fire came near unto blessed Fursey, who was to return unto earth with three angels only. But the angel of the Lord, as before, clave the fire, dividing it in the midst. The fiends did seize a man leaping forth out of the fire, and cast him forth on to Fursey's shoulder, pressing his jaw to his jaw. He recognized the man because he had bequeathed to Fursey his garments on his death. When the man had set fire to Fursey's shoulder and jaw, he was cast back by the angel into the fire whence he came. The angel who walked on the left stood between the blessed man and the fire; the right-hand angel cast him into the flame.

Then the devil, the serpent, repeating his old fallacies, said: "It is not lawful to reject him whom thou didst before accept, and as thou hast accepted his goods, so oughtest thou to be partaker of his punishment."

The angel of the Lord replied: "Not because of greed did he accept it, but because of liberating this man's soul." And the fire ceased....

Instructed by these and other discourses and exhortations, he stood on the roof of the church between the holy angels. Contemplating his body, he could not see the walls of the building nor the multitude of mourners, nor yet the garments of his body. He was commanded by the angel to identify and take back his own body.

Then he feared his carcass, as if unknown, and would not approach, thereunto. To whom the angel replied: "Fear not to

take up this body, which, though infirm, thou mayest assume without any revulsion of sickness nor of repugnant sins. In this tribulation thou has overcome unlawful lusts, so that old sins shall not prevail against thee."

Then he saw that the body was open in the breast. Said the angel unto him: "Thou shalt pour spring-water upon thy reviving body; and thou shalt be able to feel no pain, except only the burn. We shall see well-doing in all thy steps unto the end, and thus shall we take thee up with joy, doing good works." Here endeth the Vision.

Rising as it were from the depth of death, the holy man quietly beheld the multitude of kinsfolk and neighbours, even of clergy, and groaned at the greatness of human foolishness. He marveled at the arduous and difficult passage and the greatness of the reward of them that came unto the seat of blessedness; and he recounted the events in order. And water being poured upon him, the burn between his shoulders and in his face, which he had had from the iniquitous man, did appear clearly. Marvelously that which he had received in his soul alone was made manifest in his flesh.

Coming out thence, he preached the word of God, and announced unto all the people of the Scots that which he had seen or heard. Now there was in him incomparable grace.... For he drove out devils from possessed bodies, and refreshed the poor.

Having preached throughout the British Isles, founding several monasteries, St. Fursey established his last monastery in Peronne, Gaul (France) where he finally reposed in the Lord.

Now his body was kept by the illustrious nobleman Erchynould, and placed in the town whose name is Perrona, by reason of the church which he was grandly building for himself. And because the consecration of the church was thirty days thence, the holy body was kept meanwhile with the greatest attention in a certain place in the porch. And after so many days it was so found unharmed, as if the light were gone out of it that same hour. Reverently was it laid near the altar, according to custom, and there it did remain nearly four years.

Now a little shrine was built on the east side of the altar of the church. And there, after so many years, the immaculate body was conveyed by bishops Eligius and Audoperth, without any putrefaction.

Whereby, unto them that seek a right faith, his merits are bright with divine virtue; by the help of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with the Father and the Spirit liveth and reigneth unto the ages of ages, Amen.³³

From the Life of St. Lazaros of Mount Galesion (†1054)

(commemorated on November 7)

A beacon beaming with graces, St. Lazaros became one of the brightest stars in the Byzantine monastic firmament. At the moment of his birth, a great light filled the house and all the women present at the birthing fled. When they returned, they found the newborn infant facing east with

³³ Oliver Rackham, trans., *Transitus Beati Fursei (The Passage of St. Fursey)*, a translation of the 8th century manuscript of the *Life of Saint Fursey* (Fursey Pilgrims [Norwich, 2007]), pp. 11–27, 43–49. (Text in the original Latin with English translation presented in parallel.)

his arms crossed upon his chest as in prayer. Educated from his youth in the reading of Scripture and the Church's service books, his love of the poor often found him giving away his teachers' goods. Having run away from the distraction of the cities to become a monk in the famous desert monasteries of Palestine, he soon became distinguished from among the brethren for his astonishing asceticism and perfect virtues of obedience, humility, and love.

Following divine inspiration, St. Lazaros took up the difficult monastic path of a stylite a few miles north of Ephesus. Standing day and night upon on a high pillar without a roof, he braved the elements while repulsing the myriad attacks of demons, who would often hurl rocks at him trying to knock him down to the earth. But he continued dauntlessly in ceaseless fasting, vigil, and prayer to the Lord *watching as a sparrow alone upon the house top* (Ps. 101:7). Sleeping no more than a few moments, and taking but a small piece of barley bread and a few mouthfuls of water for his daily nourishment, St. Lazaros's spirit soared ever higher in the *theoria* of the love of God towards mankind. Having been *made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men* (1 Cor. 4:9), in his lofty stance high above the ground, his prayers brought divine protection and favor in all things. God granted him the gift of insight and prophesy, and people of all walks of life flocked to the famous man of God perched atop a pillar, which had become the center of a monastery, to receive his blessing and counsel. He built two more pillars around which two more monasteries flourished, and for more than forty years he dwelt with God alone between earth and Heaven as a flame of intercession for the whole world. After being informed of his departure by the Mother of God, his soul flew into Heaven like a *sparrow that hath found a house* (Ps. 83:3).

A YOUNG LAYMAN honored with the rank of *anagnostes*³⁴ at about the age of eighteen came to the monastery to become a monk. But before being tonsured he was sent by brother Ignatios (who is now our *trapezarios*³⁵) to gather wild leeks and when he had gone to the area of St. Onouphrios, he fell from the cliff and died. The brothers searched for him and when they found him they picked him up and brought him back to the monastery where they laid him on the ground in front of the father. So he was laid out and was the subject of laments by all the onlookers, not because he had died, but rather because of the manner of his death and the sorry way in which his body had been broken by his fall: for his head and his hands and his feet and every bone in his body had been completely crushed and were colored in blood. While the brothers were thus standing weeping over him, the father [St. Lazaros] saw him laid out like that and said with a gentle smile as he looked at the broken body of the brother, "What benefit have you derived from this you wicked Devil? For look, the man you have killed is now numbered among the martyrs while you have fanned the flames of Gehenna for yourself even more!" Some of the brothers who heard this asked him to explain his words more clearly to them. "This man did not go there of his own free will," Lazaros said, "nor did he die because he threw himself off the cliff, but rather he shed his blood out of obedience, for he was killed by the demons." When he saw that they were still dubious about this, he presented a story that corroborated his words:

"There was once a layman who lived a life filled with many evils but, toward its end, he eventually brought to mind

³⁴ One who reads the texts from the Holy Scriptures aloud during the services.

³⁵ The monk in charge of the *trapeza* or dining hall in a monastery.

his death and that terrible and incontrovertible judgment that is coming. So he roused himself and went off to a mountain, on which there was a monastery, to be tonsured as a monk there and to propitiate God by his repentance and tears for the faults he had committed before. However, as he began to climb the path up the mountain, night overtook him almost at once and, as he did not know the way, he sank down on the spot where he had been overtaken by the darkness and went to sleep. While he was sleeping, someone appeared to him, apparently in the habit of a monk, and woke him up. 'Get up!' this figure said, 'Follow me, and I will lead you to the monastery.' The man took him to be one of the brothers from the monastery, and so got up and followed him, without knowing where he was going. But that wicked guide took the man up onto the ridge of the mountain and then pushed him over the cliff and killed him. This much concerning the man was, however, revealed to the superior of the monastery in a dream, for he seemed to see some white-robed figures take the soul of the man who had fallen and start going up to heaven; but then other figures, who were dark in appearance, suddenly attacked them and tried to hold back the man they were carrying and to drag him downward. They were arguing and were shouting at the figures dressed in the white robes: 'Leave him to us, because he's ours! He's been doing our deeds until now and you've got no reasonable excuse for taking him with you. You've got no right to him at all!' At the same time they produced the lists of his sins they were carrying in their hands in writing, and started enumerating them by type. The radiant figures said to the dark ones, 'Yes, it's true; he did do what you say he did. But he renounced that behavior and came to repent of it, and since God seeks the good intention of a person, he has accepted his repentance.' However, the

dark figures began arguing with them again that he had not yet managed to make his confession and in fact had not genuinely repented. But, while this was happening, the superior heard a voice booming out to them from above and saying this: 'That he had repented and left the outside world and forsaken his evil deeds is certainly demonstrated by his action; but that he did not manage to enter the monastery and confess the things he had done and so demonstrate appropriate repentance, that is not his fault but yours, who prevented him from doing so. But I think that his blood, which has been unjustly shed by you, makes up for all the labor and toil that he was going to do in penance for his sins.' At this voice, then, those wicked and mean accusers immediately vanished like smoke, while the angels went rejoicing to heaven with the man's soul.

"The superior of the monastery woke up straightaway, and came to the conclusion that the vision he had seen in his sleep was true and had been shown to him by God. After the dismissal from church, he summoned all the brothers and told them the dream, as it was; since they also agreed that this vision had been revealed by God, the superior at once ordered some of them to go out onto the mountain and search for the dead man's body. These brothers went out and, when they found his body, brought it into the monastery. They performed the proper rites over him according to the rule of the monastery and then buried him in the brothers' cemetery.

"Now," said Lazaros, "if that man, who was answerable for so many sins, received forgiveness from the God who loves men because he had been killed by the Devil who hates them, how can it not be right for this young man here, who did no such thing but died because of his obedience, to be ranked with the martyrs, as I have said he should be?" After the father

had said this, the brothers were fully satisfied and replied, "Yes, it is right, father." Then they carried the brother's corpse out and buried him according to the regulations of the monastery.³⁶

THIS OUGHT NOT to be overlooked either. The brothers once disagreed during a service, for some of them said they had to sing a *theotokion* during the *troparia* of the feasts, while others did not accept this. So they went to the father [St. Lazaros] and asked for instruction as to what should be done. He said, "It is always quite in order to sing the *theotokion*; for, just as the flavor of salt is the most useful of all seasonings, so in all Christian hymnody the praise of the Theotokos is the most fitting and necessary element. If you like, I'll tell you an appropriate story that corroborates what I'm now saying.

"There was once a negligent monk who, for the most part, couldn't have cared less about the spiritual benefits of his actions. However, while he was lazy about these other matters, there was one he didn't neglect and never regarded as trivial: this was that whenever he was singing he would always say a *theotokion* too. For this reason alone he was confident that he would be saved. Indeed, he didn't fail in his hope, for at his death God revealed something like this about him to one of the elders. This man seemed to see the brother's soul being carried by angels and borne up to heaven, but then some black-colored figures suddenly appeared from somewhere and laid hold of it, and started to drag it downward. They said to those carrying it, 'Leave this soul for us to take,

³⁶ Gregory the Cellarer, *The Life of Lazaros of Mount Galesion: An Eleventh-Century Pillar Saint*, trans. by Richard P. H. Greenfield (Washington, D.C., 2000), pp. 219–222.

for he always did our wishes!' While this was happening the elder saw a woman dressed in a purple robe suddenly standing there, who said to those who were dragging down the brother's soul, 'It is true, as you say, that he was negligent and used to follow your wishes, but because of his faith and his great love for me, and because he would never sing anything without also saying my *troparion*, I have now stood as a mediator on his behalf before my Son and God, and He has granted me this soul. For even I may be worthy to save one soul and snatch it from your grasp.' As soon as she said this the wicked ones let the soul be and fled, and the angels went rejoicing to heaven with it."³⁷



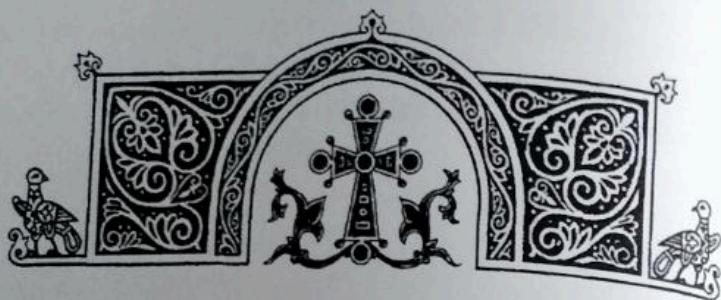
³⁷ Ibid., pp. 222–223.

Chapter Two

The Writings of the Saints

Many are they that war against me from on high.

Psalm 55:2



"It would indeed be meet for us not at all to require the aid of the written word, but to exhibit a life so pure that the grace of the Spirit should be instead of books to our souls, and that as these are inscribed with ink, even so should our hearts be with the Spirit. But, since we have utterly put away from us this grace, come, let us at any rate embrace the second best course."

— St. John Chrysostom

THE THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS of the Orthodox saints contain teachings on spiritual realities imperceptible to the vast majority. Their doctrine was not generated simply through academic learning. By their ascetical struggles, ceaseless noetic prayer, and above all by the grace of God, they passed through purification and arrived at illumination and finally at *theosis*, acquiring knowledge of spiritual realities through revelations given by God.

St. Isaiah of Scetis (†370)

(commemorated on July 3)

Austere ascetic and solitary, praised by St. Barsanuphios the Great as a man of outstanding holiness, St. Isaiah was one of the earliest Egyptian gerondas. He led his disciples

through purification and illumination to *theosis* and his profoundly illuminating writings guided the souls of Egyptian monastics—men and women alike—to the safe harbor of the Heavenly Kingdom.

THOSE WHO OCCUPY themselves with the ephemeral and vain world, if they advance and make gains, do not count the trials which they have endured, but rejoice at the progress which they have made. Can you imagine, then, my brother, what joy the soul of a man who undertakes spiritual work for God, and finishes it successfully, experiences? It is natural for the soul to feel unfading joy, for at the moment of its departure, the good works which it has done will precede it when it ascends into Heaven. At that time the Angels of God will rejoice together with it, as they see it delivered from the powers of darkness. This happens because, when the soul of man departs from the body, the Angels go along with it. However, all of the powers of darkness then hasten to meet it and seek to take hold of it, thereby to examine it carefully and learn whether or not it was engaged in any of their own works. It is not now the Angels who struggle with the demons to protect the soul; but the deeds of the soul surround and defend it, so that the demons cannot touch it. And if the good deeds of the soul defeat the demons, then the holy Angels sing on its behalf, until the soul, with joy and gladness, meets God. At that time, the soul completely forgets all of its good deeds in this vain world, as well as the labors it knew.

Blessed, indeed, is he against whom the leaders of darkness can find nothing. He will find joy, honor, and rest beyond all measure. Let us thus weep with the whole power of our soul before God, that in His goodness He will take pity on us and send aid from on high, by which we might do all to conquer

the leaders of evil, who obstruct our path [towards Paradise – Trans.]. Let us thus, disengaged from the many other pursuits of life, take care with resoluteness of heart to fulfill the Will of God, which will save us from the hands of the demons when they shall come to meet us there above.

Let us remember love for the poor, that this love might save us from greed, when the sin of greed shall come to meet us.

Let us acquire peace with all, the humble and the great, that this might guard us against hate, when it shall come to meet us.

Let us acquire patience before all and in all things, that this might guard us against carelessness, when it shall come to meet us.

Let us love all of our brothers and sisters, without hating anyone or repaying anyone any ill done against us; for this shall guard us against envy, when this demon too shall come to meet us.

Let us love the endurance in humility of our neighbor's word, even if this word should bring upon us hurt and derision; for humility will guard us against pride, when it too shall come to meet us.

Let us seek to honor our neighbor and not to condemn or hurt anyone; for this shall protect us from gossip, when it shall come to meet us.

Let us despise the cares of the world and its honors, that we might be saved from its bewitching evil, when it shall come to meet us.

Let us teach our tongues to be unceasingly occupied with the commandments of God, righteousness, and prayer, that we might be protected from falsehood, when it too shall come to meet us.

All of these foregoing evils impede the soul, while the virtues to which we have attained help it to confront these evils successfully. Now, what prudent man would commit his soul to eternal death, just to be relieved from the labors required to gain these virtues?

Let us do all that is within our power and the power of our Lord Christ, which is great, to help humble ourselves; for our Lord Jesus Christ knows that man is hapless, and thus He has granted him repentance, as long as the soul is in this corruptible body, that he might, until his very last breath, correct himself and flee from sin.³⁸

**St. John Chrysostom,
Archbishop of Constantinople (†407)**
(commemorated on November 13)

Most brilliant star in the firmament of the saints, criterion of truth, composer of the Divine Liturgy, incomparable authority on Orthodox doctrine, the “golden mouth” of the Christian Faith, St. John Chrysostom is one of the most beloved saints of all. Writing about the hour of death, St. John states:

PONDERING THESE THINGS—as well as other similar things that are more unknown, which only those who have arrived there and have experienced understand—some who are lying in bed jump up, wanting to escape but cannot; others grind their teeth; others scratch their cheeks; others roll their eyes around pitifully as they see the strength of their body

³⁸ *The Evergetinos: A Complete Text*, bk. 1 (Etna, 2008), pp. 87–88.

gradually fading, the tongue uttering, and the deposit certainly obtained, the opposing powers standing by, scrutinizing, criticizing, and trying to seize. And then the thief enters and denounces and rends the soul from the body.

Then we will require many prayers, many helpers, many good deeds, and a great protection from angels on the journey through the spaces of the air. If when traveling in a foreign land or a strange city we are in need of a guide, how much more necessary for us are guides and helpers to guide us past the invisible dignities and powers and world rulers of this air who are called persecutors, publicans, and tax-collectors by Holy Scripture.³⁹

St. Amphilochios,
Bishop of Iconium (†394)
 (commemorated on November 23)

Born in Caesarea in Cappadocia, home of the greatest Fathers and teachers of the Orthodox Church, St. Amphilochios was a first cousin of St. Gregory the Theologian and enjoyed lifelong friendships with St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa.

Having completed his studies in rhetoric with great distinction, he left the cares and distractions of the world to dwell in the wilderness as a strict ascetic, devoting himself wholly to God. After many years an angel of the Lord thrice appeared in visions to St. Amphilochios, summoning him to Iconium to be raised to the episcopate. Imbued with divine grace, his prayer healed the physical and spiritual ailments of the members of Christ's flock. A strict Or-

³⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *Περὶ Ὑπομονῆς* (On Patience and Gratitude), PG 60:729 (In Greek.)

thodox theologian, the saint relentlessly confronted the Arian, Macedonian, and Eunomian heresies. He expounded the teaching of St. Basil the Great in the company of St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa and the 150 God-bearing Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council (381). Letters and treatises of St. Amphilochios are preserved which are profoundly dogmatic in content.

In one of his treatises, the saint relates an astonishing revelation of the trial just prior to the moment of death, wherein Christ the Judge Himself defends a monk against Satan's impious accusations. Battling bravely against the passions, this brother would nevertheless continually fall into the sin of the flesh. Immediately he would run to the church and fall down before the icon of Christ in sincere repentance, imploring the Lord with tears to save him from the snares of the enemy. Yet again the next day he would find himself succumbing to the same sin, and again he would run to the church to beg forgiveness from God:

DESPITE THIS, HOWEVER, he did not despair of his salvation, but, returning from his sinful deed, would cry out in the church the same words to God—to the Lord, Who loves mankind—adding the following:

“My Lord, I swear to Thee on my word that I shall no longer commit this sin. Only forgive me, Good and Most Merciful Lord, whatever sins I have committed, from the beginning to this moment....”

One day when all that we have described again occurred, the brother, having fallen to sin, rushed to the church, lamenting, groaning, and crying with anguish, to invoke the mercy of God, that He might have compassion on him and take him from the sin of immorality.

No sooner had he called on God, the Lover of man, than the Devil, that evil of old and destroyer of our souls, seeing

that he could gain nothing, since whatever he accomplished by sin, the brother expunged by his repentance, became infuriated and appeared visibly before the brother. Facing the Icon of Christ, the Devil said to our compassionate Savior: "What will become of the two of us, Jesus Christ? Your sympathy for this sinner defeats me and takes the ground I have gained, since You keep accepting this dissolute man and prodigal, who daily mocks You and scorns Your authority. Indeed, why is it that You do not burn him up, but, rather, tolerate and put up with him? Is it because one day You intend to condemn all of the adulterers and the dissolute, and You will destroy all sinners?"

"Actually, You are not a just Judge. But by whim Your power is sometimes applied leniently and overlooks things. So, while I was cast from the heavens down to the abyss for a little breach of pride, to this fellow here, even though an immoral man and a prodigal, You calmly show Your sympathy, just because he throws himself down in front of Your Icon.

"In what way can You be called a just Judge, then? For, as I see it, You receive individual people with great kindness, but ignore justice in general."

The Devil said all of this, poisoned with great bitterness, whilst there poured forth from his nostrils a black flame.

Having said these things, he fell silent. A voice was heard in response, coming forth from the Divine sanctuary, saying the following: "O all-cunning and ruinous dragon, are you yet not satisfied with your evil and destructive desire to gobble up the world? Now you have even the nerve to try to do away with this man, who has come with contrition to entreat the mercy of My compassion—to devour him, too? Can you offer up enough sins that, by them, you can tilt the balance of justice against the precious blood which I shed on the Cross for

this man? Behold My murder and death, which I endured for the forgiveness of his sins.

"You, when he turns again to sin, do not turn him away, but receive him with joy, neither chastising him nor preventing him from committing sin, out of the hope that you might win him over. Yet I, Who am merciful and love mankind, Who counselled My laudable Apostle Peter to forgive sins seven times seventy (cf. Matt. 18:22), do I not show him mercy and compassion? Indeed—simply because he flees to Me—I will not turn him away until I have won him over. Furthermore, I was crucified for sinners and for their salvation; My immaculate hands were nailed to the Cross, that those who so wish might take refuge in Me and be saved. For this reason, then, I neither turn away nor reject anyone, even if he should fall many times a day and many times return to Me; such a person will not leave My Temple saddened, for I came not to call the righteous, but to call sinners to repent."

During the time that this voice was heard, the Devil was fixed in his place, trembling and unable to run away. The voice then again began to say: "We have heard from all that you say, O Seducer, that I am not just; to the contrary, I am just beyond all. In whatever moral state I find a person, in that state I judge him. Look at this man, who a few moments ago repented, having returned from sin and having fallen at My feet with a sincere resolution to abandon sin, and thereby having conquered you.

"Therefore, I will accept him immediately and save his soul since he did not lose hope in his hard toil for salvation. "Look how much he merits by his repentance before Me, for which he is honored. As for you, let your hatred be shred to pieces and you disgraced."

While this was being said, the repentant brother had thrown himself before the Icon of the Savior. With his face to the ground and lamenting, he surrendered his spirit to the Lord. At the same time that the repentant brother departed to the Lord, a great tempest fell upon Satan, like a fire from Heaven, and devoured him. From this incident, my brothers, let us learn of the limitless compassion of God and of His love of man—what a good Master we have!—that we might never again be disheartened by our sins, but rather look after our salvation with zeal.⁴⁰

**St. Cyril,
Archbishop of Alexandria (†444)**
(commemorated on January 18)

One of the greatest champions of Orthodoxy in the history of the Church, St. Cyril presided over the Third Ecumenical Council as defender of the Faith against the heretic Nestorius.

Included for centuries in the Slavonic service book *The Sequential Service Psalter*, St. Cyril's *Homily on the Departure of the Soul* is prescribed by the Orthodox Church to be read aloud during appointed church services for the edification of the faithful. Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky of Kiev and Galicia, founding First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, writes that when St. Cyril's "especially profitable ... sermon is read during the blessing of many people after Vespers on Forgiveness Day [the last day before Great Lent] ... a large number of people do not leave the church even after the

⁴⁰ *The Evergetinos: A Complete Text*, bk. 1 (Etna, 2008), pp. 8–11.

blessing, but listen with tears to the awesome words of the saint":

WHAT FEAR AND TREMBLING, agony and need the soul will have when it departs from the body. For the hosts and powers of Heaven approach, and the princes of darkness of the opposing powers, the evil rulers of the world, the rulers of the toll-houses and tax-collectors and debt-reckoners of the air. Along with them is the man-slaying devil, who is mighty in evil, whose tongue is like a sharpened sword. The prophet [David] said about him: *The arrows of the mighty one, sharpened with coals of the desert and he lieth in wait as a lion in his den.* That great dragon, the rebel, Hades, opens wide his mouth, the ruler of the power of darkness, who has the power of death and—in a sense—the punishment, who grasps the soul, seizing it and counting all things I have done in deed and word, in knowledge and ignorance, examining iniquities and sins from my youth up until the day of my demise.

What fear and trembling do you suppose the soul has in that day when it sees the fearsome, fierce, cruel, and merciless and wild demons surrounding it like dark Ethiopians, whose mere sight is worse than every torment? When the soul sees them, it is troubled and terrified; it groans and is troubled and contracts. It takes refuge in the angels of God. The soul is embraced by the holy angels. As it passes through the air and is lifted up, it encounters the toll-houses guarding the ascent and holding it back, preventing the ascending souls.

Each toll-house presents its own sins: the one for slander examines all things done by the mouth and tongue: lies, oaths, broken vows, idle talk, babbling, and vain talk; gluttonous abuses and prodigal drinking of wine; uncontrolled and improper laughter; immodest and improper kisses; and lewd songs. But

the holy angels guide the soul, and they also present everything good we have said with the mouth and tongue: prayers, gratitude, psalms, odes, hymns, spiritual songs, scriptural readings, and everything else good we had sent to God through our mouth and tongue.

The second toll-house is for what the eyes have seen from all improper sights and curious and unbridled gazing, and cunning winks. The third toll-house is for hearing and for everything through this sense they have heard from the unclean spirits. The fourth toll-house is for smell, for fragrant oils and hedonistic scents that are only for vulgar women and harlots. The fifth toll-house is for all the evil and awful things committed by the hands through touch. And the rest of the toll-houses are for evils: envy and jealousy, vainglory and pride, bitterness and wrath, irritability and anger, fornication and adultery and masturbation, murder and sorcery, and the rest of the filthy deeds detested by God—which are not to be listed in detail at this time. In short, in such manner each passion of the soul and every sin has its own toll-house and tax-collectors.

So as the soul beholds these things (and more and greater things also), what fear and trembling and shaking do you suppose it has until the decision comes and it is freed? That is the grievous and dangerous hour, full of sighing and lacking consolation until it sees what the result will be.

The divine powers stand by, as well as the faces of the unclean spirits. The former present the soul's good actions through words, deeds, thoughts, and ponderings. The soul beholds this while it stands in the midst with fear and trembling, until by its actions, deeds, and words the soul being criticized is either bound or justified and freed—each person is bound by the cords of his own sins. If the soul is worthy and has lived piously and in a God-pleasing manner, the

angels receive it. It is henceforth free of worries, and it proceeds, accompanied by the holy powers, as it is written: *How joyous are all they that have their habitation in Thee*. At that time the saying will be fulfilled: *Pain and sorrow and sighing have fled away*. Then, having been freed from those evil and filthy and fearsome spirits, it proceeds into that unspeakable joy.

But if it is found to have lived prodigally in negligence, it hears that awful voice: *Let the ungodly one be taken away so that he may not see the glory of the Lord*. Then it will be overcome by days of wrath and affliction and necessity and grief—by a day of murky darkness. Then the holy angels of God leave it, and those Ethiopian demons receive it and strike it mercilessly as they lead it down to earth. After cutting through the earth, they throw it bound with unbreakable chains into a dark and murky land, in the lowest parts, in the deepest jails and prisons of Hades, where the souls of sinners of all time are locked up, just as Jacob said: *To a land, dark and gloomy, to a land of perpetual darkness, where there is no light and no glimpse of human life*, but eternal grief, unending sorrow, ceaseless weeping, uninterrupted gnashing of teeth, and sleepless sighs. There is the constant saying of "woe." There they cry out "Alas! Alas!" and there is no one to help. They cry out and there is no one to deliver them.⁴¹

⁴¹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Ὁμιλία εἰς τὴν Ἐξοδὸν τῆς Ψυχῆς, Ὁμιλία II* (Homily on the Departure of the Soul, Homily 13), PG 77:1073A–1076D. (In Greek.)

**St. Gregory the Dialogist,
Pope of Rome (†604)**
(commemorated on March 12)

Good shepherd of the Church, ascetical pontiff and fiery pillar of prayer, wellspring of compassion spending all his means on feeding and housing the poor, founder of seven Italian monasteries, the great Gregory composed the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts that the Church celebrates throughout Great Lent. Author of profound exegetical homilies on Holy Scripture as well as his famous *Dialogues* documenting the miracles of the Italian Fathers, he was often seen by his closest disciple, Archdeacon Peter, with a dove hovering over his head as he recorded his Spirit-inspired teachings.

THERE ONCE LIVED a youth by the name of Theodore. He was very unruly and followed his brother, who was in fact a monk, to the monastery out of necessity and not out of any personal inclination or desire to do so. If anyone happened to tell him some good word about his salvation, the young man, since he was very disobedient, was not only little disposed to act on the advice, but would not even hear it; nor, moreover, would he agree to become a monk.

Now, it so happened that this young man developed a sore on his thigh from a deadly disease [this is a symptom of the bubonic plague—Trans.] and came near to the end of his life. All of the brothers of the monastery gathered near him. Just as they saw him slowly expire (his body had already become cold and there remained in his bosom only the slightest warmth of life), they began to pray for him persistently and to

ask God, Who loves mankind, to have compassion on him at the hour of the departure of his soul from the body.

Suddenly, as the brothers were praying, Theodore began to cry out in a loud voice and interrupt the prayer of the monks, saying: "Get away from me, move away, for I have been handed over for a dragon to devour me. The dragon cannot consume me entirely because of your presence. He already had my head completely inside his mouth. So give way, that I will not be further tortured and so that what he must do, he can do even more quickly. Since this dragon is intent on eating me, why should I suffer a slow martyrdom?"

When they heard these words, the brothers were struck with terror, and they said to the young man:

"Make the sign of the Cross over yourself."

Theodore answered in a heart-rending cry:

"I want to make the sign of the Cross, but I cannot, since the slime from this dragon is weighing down my hand."

After this response—though Theodore became inanimate—the monks knelt down on the ground and began with fervent tears to pray intensely for the redemption of Theodore from the dreadful dragon. When a period of persistent prayer and supplication by the brothers had elapsed, suddenly the ill Theodore jolted up and yelled with all the power of his lungs:

"My brothers, give thanks to God, for the dragon which had taken hold of me to devour me has fled, and was unable to stay here at all. Now, therefore, I ask that you fervently pray to God that He will forgive me of my sins. After this fearful thing that has happened to me, I am completely ready to repent and to forsake the life of the world."

And, indeed, having come to and having recovered his strength, the young man turned with all of his heart to God and entirely changed his outlook, since he was effectively ad-

monished by the corrective scourge which God had sent him. Having pleased God sufficiently, his soul then departed from his body.

Theodore saw the punishment that follows death and was benefited thereby. Others, however, as we noted previously, see the punishments inflicted by the evil spirits after death while they are still alive and recount these for the sake of our spiritual edification, then immediately die after the narration of the fearful things which they saw. As an illustration of this, I will tell a story.

There once lived a man named Chrysaorios, from among the most notable of this world. To the degree, however, that he added to his wealth, so much more he enriched his passions. Pumped up by vanity, he submitted without resistance to the passions of the flesh, endeavoring to amass many riches and inflamed by the passion of greed.

When, however, the Lord deigned to put an end to the many sins of this man, he allowed Chrysaorios to fall to a life-threatening illness.

Now, when he had come to the last moment of his life, and while his eyes were still wide open, he saw before him frightful and dark-faced spirits, who were there to help escort him to the gates of Hell. He began to tremble and turn pale and was drenched with perspiration; crying out in desperation, terrified, he pleaded for a little time (in order to repent).

He called with deep and agitated cries for his son Maximos, whom I later knew as a monk when I, too, was a monk, saying: "Maximos of mine, come to me. Never have I done you wrong. Save me now with the strength of your faith."

Thereupon, Maximos, upset and weeping, immediately went to him, along with all those who lived in Chrysaorios' house. Though none of them was able to see the evil spirits

which had beset Chrysaorios, they could conclude that they were there from everything that the suffering man was saying and from his pallor and the fear which he showed, since he was turning here and there in his bed from fear of the vexatious spirits and their dark forms. One minute he would turn to the left, only to see in front of him those spirits which he dared not confront. Then he would look away toward the wall, only to see them again standing before him.

So, having despaired of any possibility of escaping from them, he began to cry out: "At least give me time until the morning—a little time until the morning." With these cries his soul departed from the body.

In all of this, it is obvious that Chrysaorios saw all of these things not for his own benefit, but for ours, that we might learn, come to fear, and correct our ways. For of what benefit to Chrysaorios was the appearance of evil spirits before his death or the reprieve which he sought, yet did not receive?⁴²

St. Anastasios the Great, Abbot of Mount Sinai (†700) (commemorated on April 21)

Withdrawing into stillness on the holy mountain of Sinai, St. Anastasios was initiated by the Holy Spirit into the depths of noetic prayer and divine mysteries. Seeing the young St. John Klimakos, he prophesied that St. John would one day succeed him as abbot of the monastery on Mount Sinai, which indeed came to pass. He once offered himself to brutal Saracens who were torturing their Christian slave. The slave was set free and St. Anastasios took his

⁴² *The Evergetinos: A Complete Text*, bk. I (Etna, 2008), pp. 65–67.

place, wearing his chains. As recompense, the Lord gave his true servant so much grace that the great Anastasios was forced to beg Christ to hold back the torrents of His effulgent gift that so overwhelmed him.

Battling heresy through his writings and public debate, St. Anastasios became a pillar of fire in the desert guiding the Orthodox away from the Monophysite error. The account of these spiritual discussions and the collected Patristic texts used by the saint form the central part of *The Guide*, which remains one of the most respected and famous of all Orthodox dogmatic tomes.

WHEN MAURICE BECAME king of the Christians, there was a chieftain of thieves around Thrace, cruel and inhuman, such as he even rendered the roads there impassable. After several soldiers and thief-chasers repeatedly tried but failed to catch him, the devout king Maurice heard of it; and sending a youth, he conveyed to the arch-thief his own personal safeguards. As if by a divine energy, the thief was cut to the heart by the word of the king; and shedding the way of life of the thieves, came down meekly like a lamb and fell to the king's feet with confession.

After a few days, the thief fell gravely ill with high fever and was lying in the hospital called "Samson's." And having drunk freely, he fell into a frenetic stupor. After sobering up and having come to himself, as it was getting late at night and as he saw himself burdened, he turned to the all-compassionate God with tears, confessing his sins and seeking forgiveness, saying:

"O merciful Master, I do not seek anything alien to Thee; for as Thou granted to one of the thieves before me, may Thy mercies likewise work wonders on me the thief, and accept Thou my weeping at the hour of my death, as I lie in this bed.

And as Thou didst accept those who wrought little, having come after the eleventh hour, accept Thou my few tears, purifying me and baptizing me in them; for I seek nothing other than forgiveness as my baptism. For there is no time left, as the exactors of payment for my evil deeds are approaching. But do not deny me this good, nor treat me with contempt. My iniquities have followed me to the setting of my life, for countless are my debts. But as Thou didst accept Peter's very bitter weeping, accept also mine, O Friend of man, pouring these tears on the writ of my sins, and by the sponge of Thy compassions blot out my innumerable transgressions."

Confessing this and much more over several hours, and wiping the tears with his kerchief, he gave up the spirit, as those sleeping near him recounted. A court physician, visiting that hospice and sleeping in his quarters, at the very hour the thief expired, saw in a dream many Ethiopians approaching the thief's bed, having in hand many papers with the thief's sins written on them; also, two splendid men were following them. Then they brought scales, and when the Ethiopians placed all the papers they had against the thief, one side went down; the other was high up in the air. Then the radiant angels said: "Do we not have anything here?" One of them said to the other: "What could we have? It is hardly the tenth day since he came from his murders and his thievery; what good do we seek from this?" And as he was saying this, he searched in the bed to find something good there. And having found the kerchief with which the thief had wiped his tears, he said to his companion: "Truly, this is the kerchief of his tears. Let us put this on the other side of the scales, along with God's mercy, and, perhaps, something good may come out of it."

They had hardly put this on the upraised side of the balance, when it was weighed down heavily and all the manu-

scripts on the other side were scattered. And with one voice the angels cried out: "The Master's love for man won out!" And upon receiving the soul of the thief, they took it with them, while the Ethiopians fled ashamed.

Seeing this, the physician woke up immediately, dressed and came running to the guesthouse. And upon coming to the bed of thief, he found his body warm, but his soul had departed to the Lord, while the kerchief was on his eyes full of tears. And when he learned from those sleeping nearby about the confession of the thief to God, he took the kerchief and went to the pious king, showing it to him and relating what he had seen in his dream and heard from the people sleeping nearby, saying to the king: "O most pious king, we give God our thanks. We had heard of a thief saved by confession at the Cross of the Heavenly King, and we have now seen a thief saved by confession during your reign."

And what we have heard, we believe to be true. But it is good to anticipate the fearful hour of death and prepare ourselves by means of repentance. For, tell me, how many are snatched suddenly without being able to speak, weep, or leave a will? And who is it that promised that you will find tears to bring to God after that hour? Therefore, let us not delay or wait for death in order to confess to God. Rather, let us overtake His compassion by confession. For I have not written this in order to enervate your souls, but rather to arouse them; not to make you more indolent but keener; that having contested well in the arena of fasting and been crowned the winner, may we be vouchsafed the remission of sins and the kingdom of heavens; by the grace and love for man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom, together with the Father and the Holy and

life-creating Spirit, belong all glory, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.⁴³

St. Boniface of Credition, Holy Martyr, Archbishop of Mainz, and Enlightener of Germany (†754)

(commemorated on June 5)

Having entered a monastery in Exeter at the age of seven, while advancing in stature and virtue, apostolic zeal kindled a great desire in St. Boniface to become a missionary. With the blessing of Pope Gregory II, he left his homeland to proclaim the Gospel to the German people shrouded in the dark night of pagan idolatry. Founding monasteries at Amoneberg, Fritzlar, Ohrderuf, and finally at Fulda, which was the largest numbering four hundred monks, he was raised to the rank of bishop and then archbishop.

Struggling to uphold the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church, he established six bishoprics in order to unite the land and took part in the first great Germanic ecclesiastical council. Despite his advanced age of seventy-five years, St. Boniface again pressed on further into pagan northern Germany to spread the Gospel. In the middle of the act of baptizing a number of converts, St. Boniface and fifty-two of his companions were massacred by an enraged barbarian horde. Thus with the sword stroke that split his skull, the enlightener of the German peoples was crowned with the beatitude of martyrdom.

⁴³ St. Anastasios the Great of Sinai, *Ὁμιλία εἰς τὸν Στ' Ψαλμόν* (Homily on Psalm 6), PG 89:1112A–1116B. (In Greek.)

St. Boniface's *Letter II* presents a remarkable *theoria* of the toll-houses, specifically revealing the interplay of the passions/demons and the virtues/angels during the proceedings of the trial.

TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN and best-loved lady, Eadburga, praiseworthy for her long perseverance in the observance of the monastic life, Winfred [St. Boniface's name before his monastic tonsure], one of the least in Christ Jesus, sends most affectionate greetings.

You have asked me, my dear sister, to describe to you in writing the marvelous visions of the man who recently died and came to life again in the convent of the Abbess Milburga, as they were revealed to him and were related to me by the venerable Abbess Hildelida. And now, thanks be to Almighty God, I am able to fulfill your wish more fully and more accurately because I myself spoke recently with the aforesaid resurrected brother when he returned to this country from beyond the seas. He then related to me in his own words the astounding visions which he saw in the spirit while he was out of the body.

He said that the extreme pain from a violent illness had suddenly freed his spirit from the burden of his body. He felt like a man seeing and wide-awake, whose eyes had been veiled by a dense covering and then suddenly the veil was lifted and everything made clear which had previously been invisible, veiled, and unknown. So with him, when the veil of the flesh was cast aside the whole universe seemed to be brought together before his eyes so that he saw in one view all parts of the earth and all seas and peoples. And angels of such pure splendor bore him up as he came forth from the body that he could not bear to gaze upon them. With joyful and harmoni-

ous voices they sang: "O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure."

"They carried me up," he said, "high into the air, and I saw a mighty fire surrounding the whole earth, and flames of enormous size puffing upon high and embracing, as it were, in one ball the whole mechanism of the world, had not a holy angel checked it by the sign of the holy cross of Christ. For when the sign of the cross was made over against the threatening flame, it faded in great part and died away. I suffered intolerably from the heat, my eyes smarting and smitten by the glare of flashing spirits until an angel, splendid to look upon, laid his protecting hands upon my head and saved me from all injury by the flames."

He reported further that in the space of time while he was out of the body, a greater multitude of souls left their bodies and gathered in the place where he was than he had thought to form the whole race of mankind on earth. He said also that there was a crowd of evil spirits and a glorious choir of the higher angels. And he said that the wretched spirits and the holy angels had a violent dispute concerning the souls that had come forth from their bodies, the demons bringing charges against them and aggravating the burden of their sins, the angels lightening the burden and making excuses for them.

He heard all his own sins, which he had committed from his youth on and had failed to confess or had forgotten or had not recognized as sins, crying out against him, each in its own voice, and accusing him grievously. Each vice came forward as if in person, one saying: "I am your greed, by which you have most often desired things unlawful and contrary to the commands of God." Another said: "I am vainglory, by which you have boastfully put yourself forward among men."

Another: "I am falsehood, whereby you have lied and sinned." Another: "I am the idle word you spoke in vain." Another: "I am sight, by which you have sinned by looking upon forbidden things." Another: "I am stubbornness and disobedience, whereby you have failed to obey your spiritual superiors." Another: "I am sluggishness and neglect in sacred studies." Another: "I am the wandering thoughts and useless notions in which you have indulged too much both in church and elsewhere." Another: "I am drowsiness, by which you were overcome so that you were late to make your confession to God." Another: "I am the idle errand." Another: "I am negligence and carelessness, which made you indifferent to the study of theology," and so forth.

Everything he had done in all the days of his life and had neglected to confess and many things which he had not known to be sinful, all these were now shouted at him in terrifying words. In the same way the evil spirits, chiming in with the vices, accusing and bearing witness, naming the very times and places, brought proofs of his evil deeds. He saw there, also, a certain man upon whom he, while still numbered among the living, had inflicted a wound and who, he said, was still living, but now was brought in as a witness to his own misfortune. The bloody and open wound, even the blood itself, cried out against him, charging him with the crime of bloodshed. And so, with his sins all piled up and reckoned out, those ancient enemies declared him guilty and unquestionably subject to their jurisdiction.

"On the other hand," he said, "the poor little virtues which I had displayed unworthily and imperfectly spoke out in my defense. One said: 'I am obedience, which he has shown to his spiritual superiors.' And one: 'I am fasting, whereby he has chastened his body against carnal desire.'

Another: 'I am true prayer, which he has uttered in the sight of God.' Another: 'I am the service of the weak, which he has shown by kindness to the sick.' Another: 'I am the psalm, which he chanted before God to atone for an idle word.' And so each virtue cried out for me in excuse for the corresponding sin. And those angelic spirits in their boundless love defended and supported me, while the virtues, greatly magnified as they were, seemed to me far greater and more excellent than could ever have been practiced by my own strength...."

He related also that there came to this assembly the soul of a certain man who had died while holding the office of abbot, a soul which seemed to be of rare beauty. The evil spirits seized upon it, claiming it as belonging with them. But one of the angel choir replied: "I will quickly show you, miserable spirits, that this soul is certainly not in your power." Thereupon a great troop of purified souls broke in and said: "This was our elder and our teacher, and through his instruction he won us all to God; at that price he was redeemed, and clearly he is not in your power." So they joined with the angels in their fight against the demons, and with the help of the angels they snatched that soul away from the power of the evil spirits and set it free. Then an angel spoke in reproachful words, saying: "Now then, know ye and understand, ye wretched spirits, that you captured this soul unfairly, so away with you into everlasting fire!" Now, when the angel had spoken thus, the evil spirits broke into weeping and howling, and in a moment, as in the twinkling of an eye, they hurled themselves into the pits of glowing fire described above; after a brief interval, emerging again, they began anew their arguments about the merits of souls....

Then, finally, the blessed angels directed the man who had seen and heard all these things in the spirit while he was set

free from his body, to return into his body at once. He was not to hesitate to tell all that had been revealed to him to believers and to those who should question him with a pious purpose, but should refuse to talk to those who scoffed at him.... He should declare all his spiritual visions to a certain priest named Begga and afterward proclaim them before men according to Begga's instructions. His own sins, which had been charged against him by impure spirits, he was to confess and expiate according to the judgment of that priest and, as directed by angelic precept, he should confide to the priest that he had already for many years, for the love of God and without knowledge of any man, worn an iron girdle about his loins....

However, by the angels' command, at daybreak he entered again into his body just as he had left it at cockcrow.... I have written down these things at your earnest request as he told them to me in the presence of three pious and most venerable brethren, who are known to be trustworthy witnesses and vouchers. Farewell, and may you live the life of angelic virginity, and reign forever with good report in heaven.⁴⁴

St. Symeon the New Theologian (†1022)

(commemorated on March 12 and October 12)

Shining brilliantly as luminaries of the spiritual firmament, only three saints in all the Church have been honored with the title "theologian": the holy Apostle John the Theologian, the beloved disciple of Christ; the holy hierarch St. Gregory the Theologian; and our holy father

⁴⁴ St. Boniface of Crediton, *The Letters of St. Boniface* (New York, 1976), pp. 25-27, 29-31.

Symeon. Reaching the heights of spiritual knowledge not by academic theological education but through holy obedience, St. Symeon acquired direct experience of the Light Who is Christ. Receiving without measure the living waters, the superabundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit's grace, he penned his *Hymns of Divine Love*, one of the most precious testimonies of a saint's intimate experience of union with God in the Uncreated Light.

The great Byzantine God-seer and holy theologian Symeon writes expressing his fear of the opposition of the demons who will accuse him at the hour of death. St. Symeon's great humility as he appeals to God for protection is remarkable:

AND SO NOW look at me, God,
 Now be moved with compassion, One Alone,
 now have mercy upon me! Behold, my strength has left me,
 I have approached old age, Savior, unto the gateway of death.
 The prince of the world comes wishing to inspect
 my works and practices, the shameful and the impure,
 the executioners stand ready looking at me harshly,
 and they await the command to take and pull down
 my wretched soul into the perdition of hell.
 And so You Who are compassionate by nature,
 Who alone are benevolent,
 Who are the all-merciful Lord, then have mercy on me,
 and do not bear a grudge against me, nor abandon me,
 do not give place against me to my treacherous enemy
 who each hour overwhelms me with threats,
 who howls against me, gnashing his teeth,
 and who says to me: "How do you have confidence,
 and how do you hope to escape from my hands,
 just because you leave me and go to Christ,

and only just now cheat my commands?
 But there is no way that you will escape, for where will you go?
 You will never be able to run through me at all....
 I who raised battle against all the saints,
 and many died, how do you have confidence
 and expect to get past me, you who are utterly weak?"
 Hearing this, Master, my God and Creator,
 my Maker and Judge, You Who have authority
 over my soul and body as the sculptor of both,
 I tremble and utterly dread, I shudder all over, a wretch....
 So I ask, Master, thus I call upon You then
 to give to me also Your compassion, my Savior,
 when my soul goes out of my body, to be able
 with a single breath to put to shame all
 who are against me Your servant, all who intend to attack me,
 and so that I can pass over unharmed, protected by the light
 of Your Spirit, and stand before Your judgment seat,
 having Your divine grace present to me, Christ,
 sheltering me and rendering me wholly without shame.⁴⁵

GIVE YOURSELF TO ME also now, so I may take my fill of You,
 so I may kiss You and embrace Your unspeakable glory....
 For I have great need of this, and this is everything,
 for if even now You are seen by me,
 if even now You are moved with compassion,
 for if even now You illuminate and mysteriously teach me,
 and You both shelter and protect me with Your mighty hand,
 and You are present and You chase away and destroy the demons,
 and You subject all things to me, and provide me with everything

⁴⁵ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Divine Eros, Hymns of Saint Symeon the New Theologian*, Hymn 42 (Crestwood, 2010), pp. 302–303, 305.

and You fill me with all good things, O my God,
 but none of this is of use to me, if You will not grant that
 I pass the gates of death without shame.
 If the prince of darkness were to come and he did not
 see Your glory with me, and he were not utterly ashamed,
 if the dark one were not burned up by Your unapproachable Light,
 and all the opposing powers with him
 were not turned away when they see the sign of Your seal,
 and I also were not to pass through with confidence
 in Your grace, whole and without trembling,
 and I were not to approach
 and to prostrate myself before You,
 of what use to me are the things that now happen in me?
 Truly none, but they kindle the fire for me all the more.
 For I am hoping to be both Your servant and friend
 by participation in Your goods and eternal glory....
 and that I should receive the prizes, Savior,
 that You have promised to those, Christ, who believe in You,
 then I also shall be happy and I will praise
 You, the Father, and Son, and the Holy Spirit,
 truly one God forever and ever. Amen.⁴⁶

St. Neilos of Sora,
Founder of the Sora Skete, Russia (†1508)
 (commemorated on May 7)

Entering monastic life early and tonsured while still a youth, St. Neilos joined the renowned monastery of St. Cyril of Belozersk. Having studied the monastic life of hes-

⁴⁶ Ibid., Hymn 28, pp. 216–218.

ychastic stillness and noetic prayer by experiencing it first hand on the Holy Mountain of Athos, St. Neilos brought this wealth of spiritual knowledge to his native Russia. Introducing the ancient monastic way of life of the skete (a small group of monks dwelling together in separate cells in community), he and his monks lived alone in fasting, vigilance, and prayer, coming together on the Lord's day for the Liturgy. St. Neilos's austerity in asceticism rivaled the angels in their sleepless praise of the Lord; indeed, the man of God never laid down to rest, but instead propped himself up with two sticks. Having received the gift of the prayer of the heart and becoming an elect vessel of divine grace, he wrote concise and insightful treatises on the spiritual life before departing in peace to the heavenly mansions.

ALAS, DARKENED SOUL, your departure from the body draws nigh. Until when will you not turn from the evil ones? Until when will you languish in despondency? Why do you not contemplate the terrible hour of death? Why do you not quail before the terrible judgment of the Savior? What will you answer, how will you respond? For here stand your deeds, indicting you and accusing you. Hence, soul, while you have time, draw away from shameful deeds, take up the good life, hurry, anticipate, and cry out with faith: "Lord, I have sinned vilely before You; but I know Your clemency, Lover of Man: therefore I fall and pray to Your goodness, that Your mercy will come upon me, Master, as my soul is troubled and pained over its departure out of my wretched body, lest the counsel of the wicked Adversary shake it and confine it in the darkness for my past sins, unknown and known, in this life. Be merciful to me, Master, so that my soul will not behold the dark gaze of wicked demons, but that Your radiant angels will

take it. Having the authority to forgive sin, forgive mine, so that I repose; and so that my sin, which I have committed through the infirmity of our nature, by word, deed and thought, knowingly and unknowingly, shall not be before You; so that I be found before You upon the dismantling of my body, not having any filth in the image of my soul, and so that the dark hand of the prince of this world, who would pluck me down into the depth of hell, will not take me, a sinner. Rather stand before me and be my Savior and Protector."⁴⁷

**St. Theophan the Recluse,
Bishop of Tambov and Vladimir (†1894)**
(commemorated on January 10)

Theologian, professor, and hierarch, St. Theophan retired into his monastic cell as a recluse where he spent twenty-seven years in fervent prayer, yearning for all humanity to come to the love of Christ. His highly accessible and instructive writings are favorites among Orthodox monastics and laity alike.

TAKE THE *Lives of the Saints* for the month of March and read the story of how blessed Theodora endured the toll-houses.... This is the story I advise you to read with close attention. It is very instructive. It will guide you toward self-knowledge and instill within you a renewed conviction in the force of tearful repentance and Confession.... Blessed Theo-

⁴⁷ St. Neilos of Sora, *Nil Sorsky: The Authentic Writings*, trans. and ed. by David M. Goldfrank (Kalamazoo, 2008), pp. 199–200.

dora encountered the same things which every soul encounters. The Apostle called the demons the principalities of the air. They are evil and obtrusive: Would they let a soul pass, when it is to ascend to the Divine Throne, without attempting to seize it or at least to disturb it with their terrors? ... Do not desire to be worldly-wise, but take this story to heart, and undertake to correct all your imperfections in accordance with its teaching.⁴⁸

IT IS SAID that every second someone dies in the world. Every second, somewhere a soul, detached from the body, goes up to where it shall accept God's decision about itself. A second is a very small moment of time. If we were not confined to our bodily senses, we would be able to see almost incessantly the appearance of light or dark lightning-like streaks in the air, symbolizing ascending souls, precisely as Anthony the Great saw Abba Ammon ascending together with the angels. And souls do not go alone: they are always led to God by the angels, and the demons are continually trying to block their way. Therefore, incessant movement takes place in the invisible world, across the space separating the earth from the heavens!

Physical science reveals nothing in the atmosphere except for air with some incidental strata of other atmospheric bodies, while Divine Revelation states that this is the area of aerial powers, of the spiritual wickedness in high places (cf. Eph. 2:2; 6:12), who sleep neither day nor night in their effort to harm us. The demons encountered in the course of our lives hide in secret, like a beast waiting to catch its prey, attacking

⁴⁸ St. Theophan the Recluse, *The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned to It* (Safirov, 2003), pp. 153–156.

the soul suddenly. And therefore after our departure they do not stand aside, but pursuing and chasing after us they look for any way to snatch the soul from the hands of the guardian angels. They cannot snatch it unless there is something of their own in us (cf. Jn. 14:30), that is, something from that which we renounced in holy Baptism.

And if there *is* something it means trouble—something similar to prohibited goods. At customs houses, they confiscate illegal goods and charge a penalty. But there, in the air, goods are not collected, but, instead, they take the entire soul as it is. And although people would be glad to offer a bribe, what could they possibly give in exchange for their soul (cf. Matt. 16:26)?

So, how shall we proceed? This is the way: all of these prohibited goods we shall cast out before the hour in which we will pass through the toll-houses. They are thrown out by repentance, through turning away from sin, and with spiritual mourning.

The prayer of the Church is also powerful, accompanying the newly reposed. There is nothing more powerful on earth for Christian souls. But in order for this prayer to have a salvific effect on us, it is required that we would have something in which it could take root. Thus engrafted, it could then start from inside the soul to fire arrows, repulsing the attacking enemies. What is this thing, this something? The best is to have faith aided by love, but if not this, then feelings of repentance according to one's faith in the Lord.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ St. Theophan the Recluse, «Созерцание и размышление: Краткие поучения» ("Rumination and reflection: concise teachings") in *Духовное наследие святителя Феофана Затворника* (*Spiritual Heritage of Saint Theophan the Recluse*) (Moscow, 2007), pp. 67–70. (In Russian.) Translation by Olga Zatushevskaia.

When St. Theophan's own sister was about to die, he wrote the following letter on February 12, 1874, to her husband, the archpriest of the village of Chernavskaya. Noteworthy is St. Theophan's emphasis on the tremendous benefit a soul receives from the personal prayers of loved ones during the forty-day period after death:

IN THE DECEASED there soon begins the ordeal of passing through the toll-houses shortly after their departure. Now she will really need your help. Turn yourself to this thought then and you will hear her cry to you for help. You need to direct all your attention and all your love to her in this matter.

I think that this will be the most valid testimony of your love for the deceased: if from the moment of the departure of her soul you leave all the concern about her body to others, seclude yourself as much as possible, and plunge yourself into prayer for her in her new condition and her new, unforeseen requirements. Having begun this way, you must cry incessantly to God to help her during the first six weeks⁵⁰ and beyond. In the account of Theodora, what the angels took from the sack to free her from the tax-collectors was the prayers of her Elder. Your prayers will have the same effect. Do not forget to do as I ask. It will be of assistance to her. But to bemoan and lament makes little sense.⁵¹

PLEASE GO THROUGH the whole series of divine truths from God's eternal existence to your very end, and stop

⁵⁰ I.e., the crucial forty-day period from death in which the liturgical prayers of the Church and the personal prayers of loved ones help the soul immensely in its new condition.

⁵¹ St. Theophan the Recluse, *Собрание писем, Письмо 159* (Collected Letters, Letter 159) release 1 (Moscow, 1898; reprint: Moscow, 2000), pp. 180–182. (In Russian.) Translation by Olga Zatushevskaya.

specifically at this last event, your own death, and the ensuing decision....

Do not merely ponder upon this as a simple thought, but rather grasp this with full understanding and with the feeling that it has already come upon you. So you descended onto your death bed, and then the angels came to take your soul. What will they say? The demons will also approach you, and what will they cry out? What will be the outcome of this dispute?

Then the journey to the throne of God the Judge will begin. It is necessary to go through the toll-houses. The tempters, the demons, will produce their records and will describe your actions. What is to be revealed? When the demons used thoughts to push us to sin, they stroked us on the head saying that this is nothing, and the other does not matter, but then after death they will denounce and accuse us and rend us from the angels' hands. This will continue up to the entrance of the Court. And there is nothing worse than these toll-houses.

Angels truly are trying to protect us, but sometimes they have nothing with which to defend us. St. Anthony the Great saw a terrible giant, stretched above the clouds, with outstretched hands across the horizon. The souls of the dead were ascending up to Heaven. Those who ascended above his hands he gnashed his teeth at in annoyance, and those kept below, who could not ascend, he dashed them with his hand down into the abyss. Alas! And who can count all the terrors that one will meet there!

And there will be the trial. What could we possibly say to justify ourselves or offer even the slightest apology? What if we hear then: "Guilty! Bind him and throw him into the out-

er darkness!" Please set all of this deep in your heart, and remember it often.

There is no greater cure for negligence than remembering the suddenness of death. But also there is no thought as far away from us as this one. Everything here is due to the enemy who hides the memory of death from us.⁵²

In a letter written on May 19, 1893, to certain Christians who turned away from sectarian sophistry, St. Theophan explains how to pray for parents who died outside of communion with the Orthodox Church, the state of souls of reposed sinners, and, excerpted here, about purgatory and the toll-houses:

THERE IS A PERSONAL TRIAL following one's death which determines the fate of sinners. But the final decision will be given on Judgment Day. Until then they are only waiting for this terrible moment, terrified and suffering. You ask: What is purgatory? Purgatory is an opinion of the Roman Catholic faith. It is the place where impure sinners are being cleansed. Purification is accomplished through torments corresponding to their sins. Everyone with any sinful filth comes there. The Orthodox Church does not believe in this teaching, but believes instead that those who died with repentance and in communion, but did not have time to acquire corrective deeds of repentance, these souls are helped by the prayers

⁵² St. Theophan the Recluse, «Подробное наставление о пути спасения. Письма к присяжному поверенному Митрофану Рафаиловичу Корякину в Задонске» ("Detailed teaching about the way of salvation: Letters of St. Theophan the Recluse to the Barrister Mitrophan Raphaelovitch Korjakin in Zadonsk") in *Собрание писем, Письмо 185 (Collected Letters, Letter 185)* release 1, (Moscow, 1898; reprint: Moscow, 2000), pp. 209–210. (In Russian.) Translation by Olga Zatushevskaya.

of the Church and the almsgiving done for them.... They live in hope, and not in agony; in other words, they are not being tortured....

What are the toll-houses? This depicts the personal trial after death when someone's entire life is reviewed with all his sins and good deeds. The sins could have been atoned for by opposing good deeds and repentance. Find *The Lives of the Saints* for the month of March. In this book under the date of March 26th is the description of the passage of St. Theodora through the toll-houses. The toll-houses are for all reposed sinners. Only perfect Christians are not delayed at the toll-houses, but rather ascend straight to Heaven like streaks of lightning.⁵³

St. John of Kronstadt (†1908)

(commemorated on December 20)

Astonishing wonderworker, arch-pastor of all Russia, boundless font of compassion for the poor, as a preeminent liturgist standing before God, St. John supported the whole world on the fiery pillar of his prayer of love for all people.

THE EXISTENCE OF the toll-houses after death is proven by the current state of souls bound by their sins. A soul

⁵³ St. Theophan the Recluse, «О чистилище и мытарствах: Два письма к обратившейся от сектантских мудрований» ("About purgatory and the toll-houses: Two letters to those who turned away from sectarian sophistry") in *Собрание писем, Письмо 479 (Collected Letters, Letter 479)* release 3, (Moscow, 1898; reprint: Moscow, 2000), pp. 128–131. (In Russian.) Translation by Olga Zatushevskaya.

tortured by sin also desires to ascend to God, but the dark forces, to whom we have sold ourselves through sin, do not allow this.⁵⁴

WHEN YOU PRAY for the repose of the soul of the departed, force yourself to pray with your whole heart, remembering that to do so is your essential duty, and not only that of a priest or ecclesiastic. Represent to yourself how necessary repose is to the departed one, and how greatly he (or she) needs the prayers of him (or her) of the living, being a member of the one body of the Church; how the demons are contesting his (or her) soul from the angels, and how it trembles, not knowing what its eternal destiny will be. Our prayer of faith and love for the departed means much in the Lord's sight.⁵⁵

IN THE MATTER of God's providence for men, and in accordance with the requirements of reason, there must be mediators between men and God from the spiritual world (as men occupy the medium between the spiritual and material worlds), who may guide us to the heavenly kingdom—namely, the angels. There is an astonishing gradation and order with the Lord in all His works. Everywhere in His kingdom the lower are guided by the higher; hence the necessity of guardian-angels for Christians redeemed by the blood of the Lord. Besides this, the angels themselves are full of love for us and rejoice over the conversion of one sinner; but love is active, and the Lord has given perfect freedom to their noble and useful activity, as we see from the Holy Scripture. Guard-

⁵⁴ St. John of Kronstadt, *Дневник, том 3: 1859–1860* (*Diaries, vol. 3: 1859–1860*) (Moscow, 2005), p. 265. (In Russian.) Translation by Olga Zatushevskaya.

⁵⁵ St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ* (Jordanville, 1994), p. 521.

ian-angels are indispensable for men, owing to the craftiness of the evil spirits. Men themselves do not see them, for men are very infirm in the spiritual life. Therefore, besides the grace of God, we require a person, or persons, full of this grace, wise, firm by their nature: and such are the angels. Besides this, after man departs this life, there must be witnesses of his deeds against the demons.⁵⁶

St. Justin Popović of Ćelije, Serbia (†1979) (commemorated on June 1)

First as a seminarian in Belgrade where he had St. Nikolai Velimirović as his mentor, and later as a tutor in Bitolj where he taught together with St. John Maximovitch (later Archbishop of San Francisco), St. Justin plumbed the depths of Orthodox theology. “Woe to all thought that isn’t transformed into prayer!” he declared. Living through the brutality of the Second World War and the communist era, suffering persecution for his undaunted confession of Orthodoxy, St. Justin is contemporary Serbia’s most honored and beloved holy theologian.

In St. Justin’s *Orthodox Church Dogmatics*, one of the most highly respected works that clearly articulates Orthodox doctrine, his chapter *Ecclesiology: The Particular Judgment* clearly expresses the teaching of the Church.

IT IS NATURAL that God, Who is the Creator, Savior, and Enlightener, is also the Judge. For as the Creator He gave life to us; as the Savior, He saved us from sin, death, and from

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

the devil; as the Enlightener, He has given us every means for sanctification, salvation, and *theosis* in the Church; as the Judge, He reviews, assesses, and values how we used our lives, which He gave to us, and how we used the means for salvation that He left us within the Church.

According to the teachings of the Holy Revelation, the Last Judgment of the world belongs to our Lord Christ, since He is the Savior of the world. The Holy Scriptures say that God *has entrusted all judgment to the Son* (John 5:22). Our Lord Christ will execute this judgment over the world at His Second Coming because He will then come "to judge the living and the dead." And that will be the final judgment. However, even before that, the Lord performs a preliminary judgment over every man as soon as he dies and his soul leaves this world for the other world. This judgment is called the Particular Judgment. At this Particular Judgment our Lord assigns the soul its allotment in the afterlife until the general resurrection of the body that will take place at the Second Coming of our Lord Christ.

At the Particular Judgment the Lord assigns a partial and preliminary blessedness to the righteous soul, and a partial and preliminary torment to the sinful soul. However, God takes into account the overall moral state of the soul at the time of death: the complete content of the soul with which the soul has passed into the afterlife. Here, during his lifetime, man's relationship to the Triune Divinity, to our Lord Christ's struggle for the salvation of mankind, and to His Theanthropic Body—the Church—is crucial in every respect.

The story about the rich man and Lazarus clearly shows that immediately after death the judgment over the soul of every man follows, after which the soul proceeds either to a place of blessedness and joy, or to a place of torment and sor-

row (cf. Luke 16:23–25). Either one or the other place is assigned according to the life led on earth.

The essential teachings on the aerial toll-houses have been expressed by Saint Cyril of Alexandria (+444), full of Godly wisdom, in his famous writing *Homily on the Departure of the Soul*. [St. Justin then excerpts a large section of the homily.]

The most complete teaching on the aerial toll-houses is found in the *Life of St. Basil the New* (+944). Blessed Theodora, the disciple and benefactress of Saint Basil the New, received his blessing to describe her post-mortem experience—her death and her passing through the aerial toll-houses—to his virtuous disciple, Saint Gregory. [St. Justin then excerpts a large section of text from the *Life of St. Basil the New*.]

The exceedingly Christ-loving heaven seer, the holy Apostle Paul, who was taken up to the third Heaven, taken into Paradise itself, and who saw the mysteries of the afterlife during his own lifetime, described and clearly taught about the Particular Judgment: *man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment* (Hebrews 9:27). He points that out when he speaks of the rewards which are received immediately after death for all the evan-gelistic struggles here on earth. The manifold unfathomable way in which the Particular Judgment is conducted plunges into the shoreless abyss of an ocean of the countless heavenly mysteries of God. For the sake of our salvation the mystery of the Particular Judgment has been partially revealed to us by God through the Holy Apostles and the Holy Fathers because, through their God-pleasing lives, they had become intimate with God, "indigenous to God." With their Christ-like mind [*but we have the mind of Christ* (1 Cor. 2:16)] they penetrated that heavenly mystery, inasmuch as it can be revealed to human nature without harming the overall plan of the God-man's dispensation for our salvation.

According to everything they impart about it, it is clearly seen that upon the departure of the soul from the body, the soul is met by bodiless spirits, by both holy angels and evil spirits, and they accompany the soul on its way through the various judgment domains, where the soul gives an account of its entire life on earth, that is, of all its thoughts, feelings, desires, words, actions, and deeds. This forms the basis upon which the soul is then assigned to its portion in the afterlife and its world. Many are the holy traditions and testimonies on this subject. We will mention only some of them.

The toll-houses are like customs offices which the souls of the reposed are confronted with as they ascend towards the throne of the Heavenly Judge. At these toll-houses, evil spirits stand, exacting customs or a ransom for the sins the soul has committed. This custom, this ransom, consists of good deeds in opposition to the sins that were committed. The terms "toll-houses" and "tax collector" (or custom-booth and custom-collector) have been borrowed from Jewish history. The Jews called those people toll collectors who were designated by the Romans to collect taxes. While doing this job, the tax collectors used all possible means for their own gain. The tax collectors were situated at special custom booths, commercial stations, and they charged for transported goods. These commercial stations were called toll-houses. Christian writers used this term designating aerial toll-houses as those places located in the air between the earth and the heavens. Here, the evil spirits detain the souls of the newly reposed during their ascent to the Lord's throne, investigating their sins, and accusing them of all manner of sins in order to throw them into Hades.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ St. Justin Popović, *Догматика Православне Цркве* (*Orthodox Church Dogmatics*), vol. 3 (Belgrade, 1978), pp. 709–726. (In Serbian.) Translation by Sr. Mihaila Vavić.



From Holy Hierarchs, Gerondas, and Clergy

Metropolitan Makarios Bulgakov of Moscow and Kolomna (†1882)

Good shepherd and erudite theologian, Makarios, Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna from 1879 to 1882, was a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In 1841, he graduated from the Kiev Ecclesiastical Academy where he served as dean from 1850 to 1857. The Metropolitan is considered one of the three major church historians of the Russian Empire, along with St. Philaret Gumilevsky and Yevgeny Golubinsky.

Metropolitan Makarios's *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* is one of the most complete and well-respected Russian Orthodox theological works, adapted by the Holy Synod for use as an official textbook. He devotes ten pages to the subject of the toll-houses (vol. 2, pp. 528–538), quoting extensively from Saints Cyril of Alexandria, Ephraim the Syrian, Athanasios the Great, Makarios the Great, John Chrysostom, Maximos the Confessor, and numerous additional sources, including the service books of the Orthodox Church.

From *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2
 "The depiction of the particular judgment:
 the doctrine of the toll-houses"

HOLY SCRIPTURE DOES NOT set forth how the particular judgment takes place. But the figurative depiction of the judgment, based primarily on Holy Tradition and in concord with the Holy Scriptures, we find in the doctrine of the toll-houses, which has existed in the Orthodox Church from antiquity.

The essence of the doctrine of the toll-houses can be seen in the homily of St. Cyril of Alexandria *On the Departure of the Soul*, which is usually printed in one of the books of the Church, *The Sequential Psalter*. Let us borrow from its primary themes. [Metropolitan Makarios then cites a substantial extract from St. Cyril's homily.]

It is unmistakable therefore: a) that the toll-houses represent the unavoidable path that each human soul, evil or good, takes during its transition from this temporal life to the eternal portion; b) that each soul at the toll-houses, during this transition, in the presence of angels and demons, before the eye of the all-seeing Judge, progressively and in detail is interrogated regarding all its deeds, both evil and good; c) that as a result of this cross-examination, this detailed investigation of every soul concerning its previous life, good souls, having been acquitted at every toll-house, will be carried up by the angels into the heavenly dwellings; but the souls of sinners, detained in one of the various toll-houses, having been accused of wickedness, upon sentencing by the unseen Judge, are dragged by demons to their dark dwelling-places. Thus, the toll-house is nothing other than the particular judgment, performed on human souls invisibly by the Lord Jesus Himself through the ministry of the

angels, and admitting the evidence of the accusers of our brethren (Rev. 12:10), who are the evil spirits. This is the judgment during which the soul is reminded of all its deeds which are objectively appraised in its presence, and after which the verdict is determined.

"And it is meet," says St. Basil the Great, "that the divine judgment of God would not be tyrannical, but rather that it be more like those common courts with human judges, and the accused is given an opportunity for defense, in order that a person, seeing his case clearly presented to him, and while defending his case should consent to the incontrovertible judgments of God, agreeing that they were brought upon him exceedingly justly, and also when being pardoned he could see that forgiveness is given to him in accordance with law and order."⁵⁸

This doctrine of the toll-houses, as set out by St. Cyril of Alexandria, existed in the Church before and also after St. Cyril, in all succeeding centuries. Before St. Cyril of Alexandria, it is found very frequently, as a commonly-known doctrine, in the writings of Holy Fathers and teachers, in particular of the fourth century. [Metropolitan Makarios then sets forth extracts from the writings of numerous saints, omitted here for brevity and contained in *The Departure of the Soul Master Reference Edition*.]

We know also that the doctrine of the toll-houses is contained in the *Lives of the Saints* and in the most holy hymns and prayers of the Orthodox Church.... Such continuous, perpetual, and universal use in the Church of the doctrine of the toll-houses, and especially among the teachers of the fourth

⁵⁸ See St. Basil the Great, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 57.

century, offers indisputable evidence that it had been transmitted to them from teachers of the prior centuries and is based on apostolic tradition.

This is natural because the doctrine of the toll-houses is in complete agreement with the Holy Scriptures. [Metropolitan Makarios then cites the Gospel parables in Luke 16:22 and 12:20.] In addition Holy Scripture teaches that the angels in general are ministering spirits sent forth to help those who will inherit salvation (cf. Heb. 1:14). It teaches that they feel concern for us throughout our lives (cf. Ps. 90:10–11) and are our intercessors and guides, especially the Guardian Angel given to each person at baptism (cf. Matt. 18:10). Therefore, it is quite to be expected that these benevolent spirits do not deprive us of their help especially at the important moment of our death, and that they will not refuse to accompany our souls, guiding and also fortifying them during the fearsome passage, entirely unfamiliar to us, from this tangible life into the eternal realms. Conversely, Holy Scripture teaches that all activities of evil spirits are continually directed to our destruction (cf. Eph. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Thess. 3:5) and that our adversary the devil, with his underlings, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter. 5:9). Would he miss this most convenient opportunity to do whatever is possible to accomplish the devastation of our souls in the moment of their separation from the body?

It is said that, on separation from the body, a person's soul making its way into the upper world through the ethereal space continually meets fallen spirits there. And the word of God witnesses that the air is, as it were, filled with the spirits of wickedness in the heavenly spheres (Eph. 6:12)—indeed, filled not physically, but spiritually—and that their ruler is a ruler of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), and that, therefore,

man's soul, as soon as it departs from the body, inevitably comes into their region.

It is evident that acting as toll-collectors and tormentors, these dark spirits stop the soul at various toll-houses during its path to Heaven, reminding it by degrees about its various sins, and trying in every way to denounce it. Yet the good angels escorting the soul at the same time recollect the opposite of its sins, namely its kind deeds, and strive in every way to vindicate it....

It appears that God does not perform a private judgment directly upon the soul of a man when it separates from the body but allows it to suffer torment by the evil spirits who act in some way as if they were the instruments of His terrible justice. Simultaneously the good angels are employed as instruments of His goodness. At the time of the end of the world when the Lord will appear in all His glory to judge the living and the dead, He will not Himself directly execute everything related to the Last Judgment, but *the Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth* (Matt. 13:41–42). What then is surprising about the fact that He performs the particular judgment not directly, but through His serving spirits, of course all the while Himself being invisibly present at this court, as the Omnipresent One?

Similarly, since it is acknowledged that before the Judgment of all mankind, when even the fallen spirits themselves will receive their final due (cf. Jude 6), God allows them to act against man while still on the earth (cf. Job 1:12; 1 Peter 5:9), and sometimes uses them as His instruments of righteous wrath against sinners, as angels of destruction (cf. Ps. 77:49; 1 Cor. 6:5), why then should it seem peculiar if He allows them

to be the same sort of instruments of His righteousness also during the particular judgment of the souls of men, using His good angels at the same time as instruments of His goodness?

However, one must note that, as in general with all depictions of matters of the spiritual world, inevitably there are features which are presented more or less physically, anthropomorphically, for those of us who are clothed in flesh. Therefore, in particular, they also inevitably occur in the detailed teaching on the toll-houses through which the human soul passes upon separation from the body. And therefore we must keep firmly in mind the instruction that the angel gave the Venerable Makarios of Alexandria, when he had just begun informing him about the toll-houses: "Accept earthly things here as being the weakest representation of heavenly things." It is necessary, therefore, to consider toll-houses not in the coarse or sensual sense, but, as much as it is possible for us, in a spiritual sense, and not be tied to particulars which have been presented differently by various authors and in numerous stories of the Church, while preserving the unity of the basic idea regarding the toll-houses.⁵⁹

Geronda Ephraim of Arizona (†2019)

Former Abbot of Philotheou Monastery, Mount Athos;
Founder of St. Anthony's Monastery, Florence, Arizona

Guided into the spiritual life from his youth by his virtuous mother's reverent example, during the Second World War Ioannis (the future Geronda Ephraim) strug-

⁵⁹ Metropolitan Makarios of Moscow, *Православное Догматическое Богословие* (*Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*), vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1883), pp. 528–538. (In Russian.)

gled valiantly as the provider for his family's daily necessities during the terrible years of famine and poverty. As an altar boy in their parish church in Volos, he was counted worthy, together with the serving priest, of a stunning vision of Saint Basil the Great during the Divine Liturgy. Aflame with longing for God, and with his mother's wholehearted blessing, he left Volos for the Holy Mountain of Athos at the age of nineteen to live under the guidance of the great teacher of noetic prayer, Saint Joseph the Hesychast. Because of his perfect obedience, Saint Joseph tonsured him after only nine months, and subsequently the young monk Ephraim was counted worthy of wondrous gifts of grace.

After Saint Joseph departed for the next world, many monks and aspirants yearning to be led on the monastic path gathered around the young Geronda Ephraim. As the number of his disciples grew, he was invited to settle along with his monks at Philotheou Monastery. From there he was entreated in succession by the holy Athonite monasteries of Xeropotamou, Konstamonitou, and Karakalou, which were at that time greatly in decline, to repopulate them with his own monks. Having undertaken the spiritual direction of these monasteries, he has been credited, together with his spiritual brothers who also lived under Saint Joseph, with the renewal on the Holy Mountain of hesychasm—the true essence of the Orthodox Tradition, which was in danger of disappearing.

Beginning in 1989 Geronda Ephraim established a remarkable seventeen monasteries in the United States and Canada, taking up residence in 1997 at St. Anthony's Monastery in Florence, Arizona. In answer to his intercessions numerous miracles have occurred, supporting and strengthening the faithful who seek his prayers at decisive moments in their lives. Deeply cherished by his countless spiritual children, over the course of more than fifty years

of eldership, Geronda Ephraim has served both the faithful and the surrounding communities through the great evangelical monastic mission entrusted to him by the Lord.

WE ALL WILL GO through this torment of death. That which is in our hands, in our control, with the help and the grace of God, is to make ourselves ready to receive this hour with our soul prepared as much as possible, for this will dismiss the fear and dread of death.

As the sacred troparia of the funeral service and the counsels of the Holy Fathers relate, during that dreadful hour the demons come to terrorize, menace, and threaten the soul. They try to drive the soul to despair, to deprive it of the hope of salvation by presenting our God as very dreadful and inexorable. Those who have departed from this life know what the demons say. Merely by seeing them, the soul becomes beside itself because, after all, what does it have to say? What can it utter? Who will help it? It is thinking that it is alone because it loses its sense of the surroundings.

The soul takes comfort only when the angels of God draw close, when the big brothers come to help it. There it turns its eyes, there it turns its gaze with all its strength to receive help, and it implores, crying out: "Save me! Rescue me from the demons!" The angels certainly give courage with their presence, but the great courage and the hope for redemption comes first from the help of God and then from the quiet conscience.

The conscience is the thing that will play the most important role. If the conscience does not condemn the soul, the confidence and the hope that God and the angels will protect it increases. But when our conscience condemns us at that moment, the taste of the dreadful eternal damnation begins.

May God be merciful to every human soul at that dreadful hour! The departing soul will not be able to escape from the grip of the demons if its deeds were serious and deadly. It will be difficult to be disentangled from them and make the ascent upwards.

When the soul is saved or in an undecided case, the angels will pick it up and guide it towards the Righteous Judge. Ascending, it passes through the aerial toll-houses which represent every destructive sin. It will go through an examination of every passion and weakness, and if it is caught responsible, there it will stop at whatever toll-house it is snagged.

But if the soul weathers them all, then it will worship the Master Christ. And then, according to the Orthodox Tradition of our Church, it will visit with its guardian angel the holy dwellings in the Kingdom of God. It will tour Hades and then all the places it lived during all the years of its life. And on the fortieth day it will finish this entire journey and will return before our Christ to hear the decision. Think of the fear and terror of the soul, who on the one hand is delighted seeing the Kingdom of God and on the other hand is thinking: "Will I attain it? Will I come to stay here? I do not know." When it is guided and sees Hades it is thinking: "What if I come here? Woe and alas to me! What if the torment will be for years? No, hell will be eternal..." And then visiting the places of its life, there it will see many things. Wherever the soul sinned it will be ashamed to look; wherever it was virtuous it will be delighted. But during this entire interval the soul will know within itself and understand whether God's decision will be positive or negative. All this is the great truth of our Orthodox Church.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Geronda Ephraim of Arizona, *The Dreadful Hour of Death, Homily 68*; recorded at Philotheou Monastery, Mount Athos, November 30, 1984. (In Greek.)

EVEN THOUGH WE HAVE in front of us the belief in eternity, we are in the dark; that is, we live as if we are not going to end up in the eternal life. The tempter has taken away from us the conception that we could leave this life within a few minutes of time and face eternity, that is, the conception that we are about to meet the fearful, the dreadful, the cold, the bitter event of death. We believe that we will go through the aerial toll-houses, those bands of demons that are between Heaven and earth. We will go through these demons that have written in their books all our sins, our thoughts, our reflections, our sentiments, the sins of our five senses. They have written everything with the details of the day, the hour, the moment, and with whom. Everything is there with every detail. They will brandish them in front of our eyes, and we will see them and say, "But how did I do all these things?"

And then, if we get by and escape the toll-houses, we will meet our Judge, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was crucified for us. We will see the holes of the nails, we will see the wound in His side, we will see the crown of thorns, and He will say to us, "Behold what I endured for you, immortal soul; all of these things were for you, for your salvation. Let Me see what you did for Me, what you did for My love." Woe to us, when we present Him with idle conversations, criticism, indifference, waste of time, filthy acts, and foolishness in thoughts, words, and deeds.⁶¹

⁶¹ Geronda Ephraim, *On Saint Joseph the Hesychast, Homily 62*; recorded at Philotheou Monastery, Mount Athos, April 21, 1984. (In Greek.)

Hieromartyr Daniel Sysoev of Moscow (†2009)

Father Daniel Sysoev's life in Christ as a bold confessor of the Faith began in his youth when his atheist teachers failed in their attempt to force him to deny Christ publicly and become a Marxist.

Graduating from the Moscow Theological Seminary and furthering his studies with the Moscow Theological Academy, as a priest of the Orthodox Church of Russia, Fr. Daniel centered his life in Christ on both liturgical devotion and active missionary labors. While serving at the Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Yasenevo, Moscow, he worked in the missionary-education and rehabilitation centers for the victims of totalitarian cults, pseudo-religious, and occult groups. In May of 2000, Fr. Daniel was awarded a Letter of Commendation by the Holy Orthodox Synodal Department of Religious Education and Catechesis.

On November 19, 2009, Fr. Daniel was hearing confessions in the altar of his parish church. A Muslim fanatic burst in and shot him four times in front of the altar. Patriarch Kyrill I of Moscow proclaimed Fr. Daniel a confessor of the faith and a martyr for the cause of evangelical preaching.

ABOVE THE EARTH is the kingdom of Satan. Above the earth is the realm of the spirits beneath the heavens, a place where the devil rules. Sacred Scripture speaks frankly about this, calling it "spiritual wickedness in high places...." (Eph. 6:12) The Heavens to this day are obedient to God, and are occupied by good, blessed spirits.... The temptation that strikes before death is a temptation to become despondent....

We know that right after someone has left the body, he will have to enter a state that is quite unpleasant for him; he will have to encounter evil spirits. As we know, our relations with them are, I hope, not good. We would very much not want to have good relations with them. Thus, upon encountering the evil spirits, we will have to engage them in battle.... What should we do? We need to turn off all of our thoughts. Teach yourself that, and without fail memorize the requisite technique: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner. Most-holy Lady Theotokos help me. O Lord, through the power of the Honorable Cross, protect me. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen." Cast aside all arguments; even if they are the very most persuasive ideas, they come from Satan, and are intended to drive you to despondency and destruction. This is a preliminary, probing attack; the strongest attack will come right after your death, and thus it is essential that you prepare yourself for it....

It is especially important to strive to commune on the actual day of your death, for according to ancient tradition, confirmed by experience, one who has worthily communed of the Body and Blood of the Lord cannot be attacked by Satan, for he has Christ with him.... I once happened to be called to visit a certain dying woman. I had heard her Confession about a month and a half earlier.... I arrived, and saw the following awful picture: She is lying in bed, her eyes literally bulging from their eye sockets, the eyelids not visible at all. Her arms flailing at something right and left, she cries out, "I am afraid, afraid, afraid." I say, "Nadezhda, do you want to receive Communion?" "I do," she says, and falls silent. That was in fact the last thing she ever said. I communed her of the Body and Blood of the Lord, and immediately she calmed down,

smiled, and reposed. This was an attack by the demons of the toll-houses, followed by a demonstration of God's mercy. We need to pray about that....

Of course, at the hour of death it is vital to gather together and talk with your family and relatives, and then to be by yourself, so that you can be with God in prayer. Someone near and dear to you can sit nearby, in silence. You can ask someone to read the Holy Gospels aloud. Such reading has enormous power: at the time of your death, it can ready the soul for its fate.... Quite often before death one's [inner] eyes gradually begin to open. He begins to see the other world. Often, he is visited by relatives and by Angels of God, or by evil spirits.... If a priest is present, you should ask him, or someone close to you, to read the *Canon for the Departure of the Soul*....

The Guardian Angel, of course, meets the person after his death.... When the person is taken up into the air, he encounters the barriers of the princes of darkness, which are ordinarily referred to as "toll-houses...." The toll-houses are the final attempt to tempt and harm people. They are unavoidable, because you have to pass through their realm. The question is, how unavoidable are they? As I said, one who communed is immediately lifted up to Heaven, and by-passes the toll-houses, while the demons scatter in all different directions....

At Holy Trinity St. Sergius Lavra, there was a certain well-known hierodeacon who reposed in 1960. Fr. Tikhon [the spiritual director of the Lavra] related that the hierodeacon served Liturgy, communed, consumed the Holy Gifts in the Chalice, and went to rest in his cell. He fell asleep and never woke up again. Then, right in his cell, Fr. Tikhon prayed that the deacon's fate beyond the grave be revealed to him. On the fortieth day, the deceased hierodeacon appeared to him, happy and radiant with joy. Then Fr. Tikhon asked him, "How did

you get through the toll-houses?" He replied, "You know, through the power of Holy Communion, I sailed right by them." Do you understand? That is your best defense....

Everyone except those who have confessed certainly fall into those traps of the toll-houses. Theodora's account describes twenty, while other sources list a different number. In essence, they are where our sins are examined. How? At that moment, the evil spirits pull out all their notes they have made, and call to mind one's sins and use them to harm the soul, and to establish their right to take it away. Remember, however, that they will be unable to find a single sin that has been confessed. They can remember sins being committed, but they will find no material proof of them. Therefore, you should go to Confession as often as possible....

If you remember the life of Blessed Theodora, you know that upon finding herself in the world beyond the grave, she saw that she held a certain kind of gold, certain prayers. She was helped by the prayers of her spiritual father, Venerable St. Basil the New. Accordingly, we have to remember that prayers help a great deal—both the prayers of the righteous, and those of ordinary people.

Thus as you ascend to the Heavens, pray to God without ceasing. Try not to talk to the demons; let your Guardian Angel speak for you, while you ask forgiveness. If you should see a certain sin, ask that it be forgiven you. Remember, not all of the sins they call out are yours. Do not forget that the demons are liars. They will try to impute to you someone else's sin. At that moment, your memory is returning, and you need to ask God to renew it, and you need to say, "Lord, forgive me, I have hoped in Thee, in Thy protection do I put my hope O Lord, on Thy hope, in Thee, do I hope O Lord." Do this because hope in God's mercy will help. It is also good to bring to

mind a certain Virgin known as the Unassailable Wall. Do you know her name? It is Mary, Virgin Mother of God. Remember that she is in truth an Unassailable Wall, who protects people....

Now, what happens after someone has been taken up to the toll-houses? He goes through them. I hope that you have gone through successfully. If you were unsuccessful, remember that one who has wound up in Hades can be prayed out of there if he had kept unharmed his faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If he did not believe in the Holy Trinity, he cannot be prayed out of Hades....

The Word of God places much greater emphasis on the Judgment Day than on the toll-houses. Is that not so? Why? Because it is the most important event of all. Going through the toll-houses is only the entrance examinations for the institute. Judgment Day is the decision, absolute and eternal, of your fate, with no right to appeal.⁶²



⁶² Fr. Daniel Sysoev, *Instructions for the Immortal, or What to Do if You Still Die* (Moscow, 2013), pp. 11, 12, 33, 35, 41–42, 47–48, 64–68, 71, 74, 80, 87.

Chapter Three

Iconography

*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood,
but against principalities, against powers,
against the rulers of the darkness of this world,
against spiritual hosts of evil in heavenly places.*

Ephesians 6:12



THEFORE, HOLDING FIRM in thought to the preservation of the ordinances of the Church, through which salvation has come to us as a kind of keel or foundation... it seems to me a calamity that the Church should... decline in the smallest degree from perfection, thus bearing a disfiguring mark in the midst of a face so exceeding fair, thus harming the whole by the slightest injury to its beauty. For what is small is not small, if it produces something big, so the slightest disturbance of the tradition of the Church that has held sway from the beginning is no small matter, that tradition made known to us by our forefathers, whose conduct we should look to and whose faith we should imitate....

Therefore I entreat the people of God, the holy nation, to cling to the traditions of the Church. For just as the removal of one of the stones of a building will quickly bring ruin to that building, so the removal, ever so little, of what has been handed down.⁶³

– St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*

⁶³ St. John of Damascus, *Defense Against Those Who Attack the Holy Images in Three Treatises on the Divine Image*, first treatise (Crestwood, 2003), pp. 20, 58.

“The whole earth is a living icon of the face of God.”

– St. John of Damascus

The depiction of sacred images in Orthodox iconography greatly surpasses mere “religious art.” At the beginning and end of each church service, our Lord Jesus Christ and His All-Holy Mother, together with the angels and the saints, are venerated through the sacred icons which the congregation lovingly honors with devout bows and reverent kisses. At home, icons provide the Christian with a center of focus for private worship in personal prayer. A constant comfort in tribulations, they continuously remind us to strive for a virtuous life. As an ascetical aid, icons depicting the trial at death instantly recollect a mind distracted by the cares and concerns of life, beneficially redirecting one’s focus to the inevitable rendering of accounts. In this way, the remembrance of the unavoidable judgment catapults the soul into prayer to Christ our merciful Judge.

Two periods of iconoclasm erupted attempting to eliminate icons and their veneration in the Church. The first period was brought to an end by the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787, which officially upheld the veneration of icons while denouncing the heretical iconoclasts after more than a century of devastation and mayhem. The Council was definitively upheld in 842 by the holy Empress Theodora,⁶⁴ bringing an end to the second period of widespread destruction of icons in Orthodox nations. As a result of this ruinous heresy, the deep significance of the Orthodox ven-

⁶⁴ (†c. 870, commemorated on February 11) St. Theodora’s incorrupt relics are treasured in the cathedral on the island of Corfu, Greece.

eration of holy images was underscored by both the Ecumenical Council and the Church's establishment of the annual celebration of "The Sunday of the Restoration of the Holy Icons" on the first Sunday in Great Lent, also known as "The Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy."

The Orthodox depiction of the particular judgment on the field of Last Judgment iconography

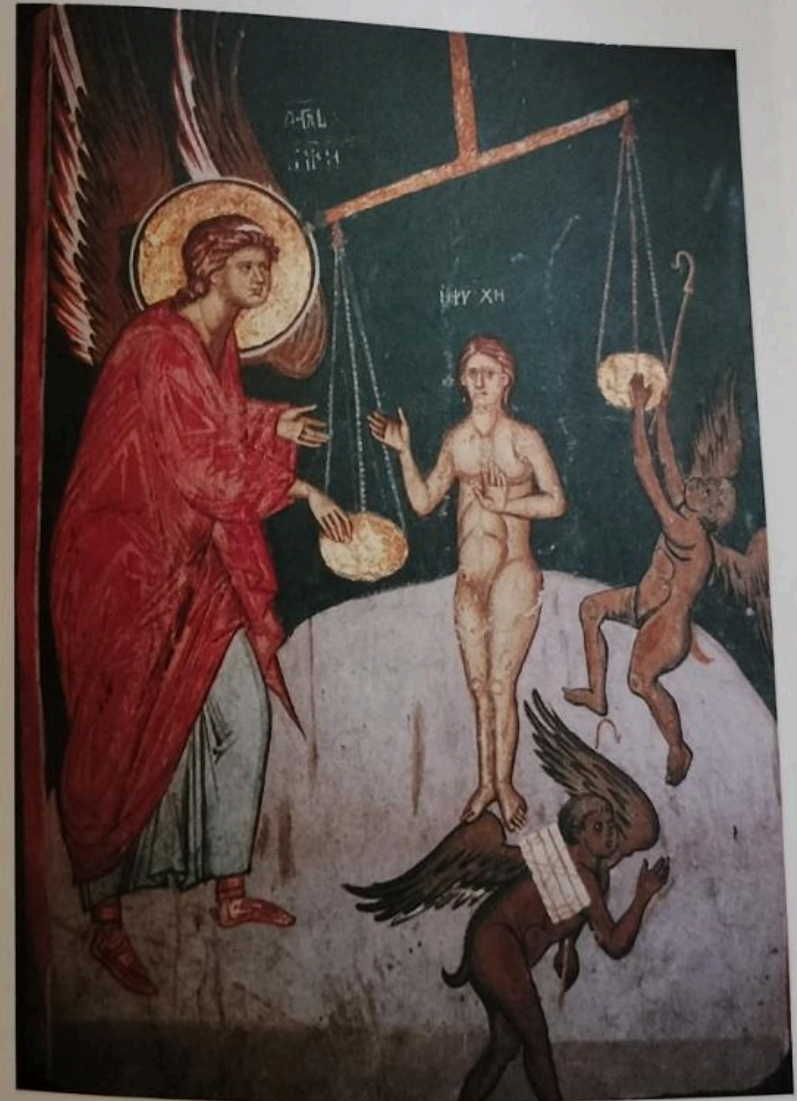
As early as the second century in the Priscilla catacomb in Rome, precedents to the Byzantine Last Judgment depiction can be found which illustrate the various Judgment Day narratives from the Gospels, such as the parable of the Shepherd separating the sheep from the goats and the parable of the Ten Virgins. The inspired iconographers of the Church highlighted the great importance of this sacred Judgment image by painting it on a monumental scale. Often covering an entire wall or even several walls of the narthex of a church, the enveloping scene immersed viewers in the Judgment setting, bringing their conscience, recollection of sins, and supplications for salvation into play. Iconographers also imbedded within the Judgment monolith several scenes not directly depicting the Last Judgment but relevant to the impending conclusion of time and the individual's eternal state, such as the depiction of the trial of the soul at the hour of death. Representing the essential elements of the particular judgment, angels with a balance defend against the demons' prosecution of the soul that stands trial in the court of the Lord. In later depictions, the balance is placed directly in the hand of the Lord, whereby the Judge's presence in the court is made visible.

The *Florilegium* of Last Judgment Iconography

The particular judgment is one of many events depicted in Last Judgment iconography which occur before the Day of Judgment. The core of the composition is derived from the Judgment Parable in the Gospel of St. Matthew (cf. Matt. 25:31–46), but it also depicts the twelve apostles sitting on thrones judging the nations (cf. Matt. 19:28), as well as distinct events like the angel rolling up the scroll of the heavens (cf. Rev. 6:14) and the rushing river of fire (cf. Dan. 7:10). However, one also sees scenes such as Lazarus and the Rich Man (cf. Lk. 16:19–31), the Good Thief entering Paradise (cf. Lk. 23:43), souls in the Bosom of Abraham (cf. Lk. 16:22), and the dying on their deathbeds giving up their souls into the arms of angels or demons, which are images of the state or condition of the soul immediately after death and prior to the Last Judgment.

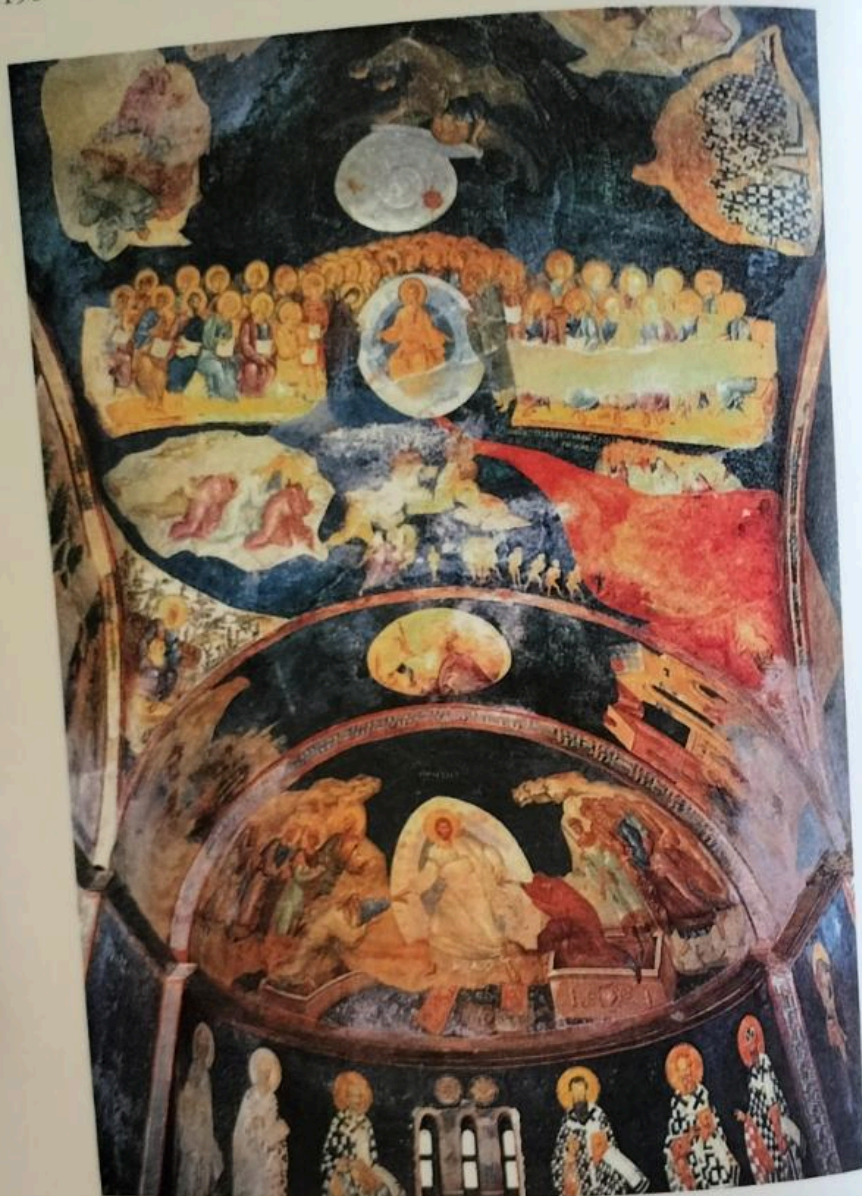
The assemblage of Scriptural motifs and their inclusion in the continually developing Last Judgment scene sets the precedent for the later Rus' addition of the toll stations on the serpent that is bruising the heel of Adam (cf. Eph. 2:2, 6:12; Isa. 3:12; Gen. 3:16). The fullest revelation of the particular judgment to the Orthodox Church is contained in the tenth-century *Life of St. Basil the New*, which directly enriched the Orthodox iconographic depiction of the trial. An ascending series of toll-houses with a simple listing in a word or two of the sins examined at each station, the help of the holy angels sheltering infant-like souls in their arms, and the fierce frenzy of the demonic horde—such vivid details would have been the primary source of knowledge of the trials for the illiterate majority of Orthodox faithful at the end of the Middle Ages.

Whether in awe-inspiring towering compositions or miniature illuminations enhancing penitential canons and psalters, the Gospel proclamation resounds in the hearts and minds of those who gaze upon the sacred images of the judgment of souls: *Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!* (Matt. 4:17).



The Balance of Justice

Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1350



The Last Judgment (and Resurrection)

Chora Monastery, Constantinople, 1320



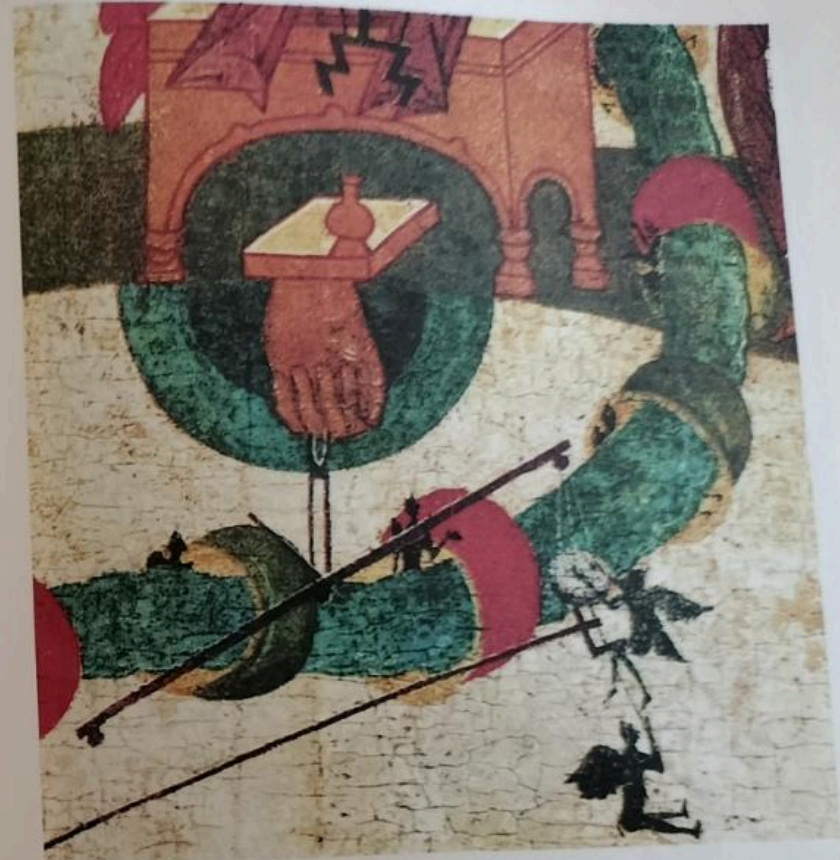
The Last Judgment (details)

As a soul stands trial beneath the balance, two angels carrying the records of its good deeds add their scrolls to the scale pan on the right of the Judge enthroned above. A black demon (far right) leads the souls of unrepentant sinners into the river of fire.



The Last Judgment

Novgorod school, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, mid-15th c.



Detail of the Toll-houses

The Novgorod–Tretyakov “prototype” Last Judgment icon with toll-houses. A giant serpent bruising the heel of Adam (cf. Gen. 3:16) terminates in tormenting fire where the devil holds the prey of sin in his clutches. Twenty red and green bands on the body of the snake, each hiding a demon peering out, ready for action, represent the twenty stations of the toll-houses. An angel spears a demon hanging on the balance. The balance is suspended by the hand of the Lord which proceeds from the throne of His glory (cf. Matt. 25:31). A precious iconographic treasure combining aesthetic harmony with theological precision, the Novgorod–Tretyakov icon was an exemplar for generations of icons which followed.



Photographs courtesy of St. John of Rila Monastery

St. Theodora & the Toll-houses

Exterior fresco, St. John of Rila Monastery, Bulgaria, 1850



The Toll-house of Gluttony (detail)

Bulgaria's most celebrated monastery boasts an impressive fresco of the toll-houses. This great exterior masterpiece, which was cleaned and restored in 2008, adorns the inner courtyard of the monastery. See all twenty toll-house images in detail online at www.thedepartureofthesoul.org.



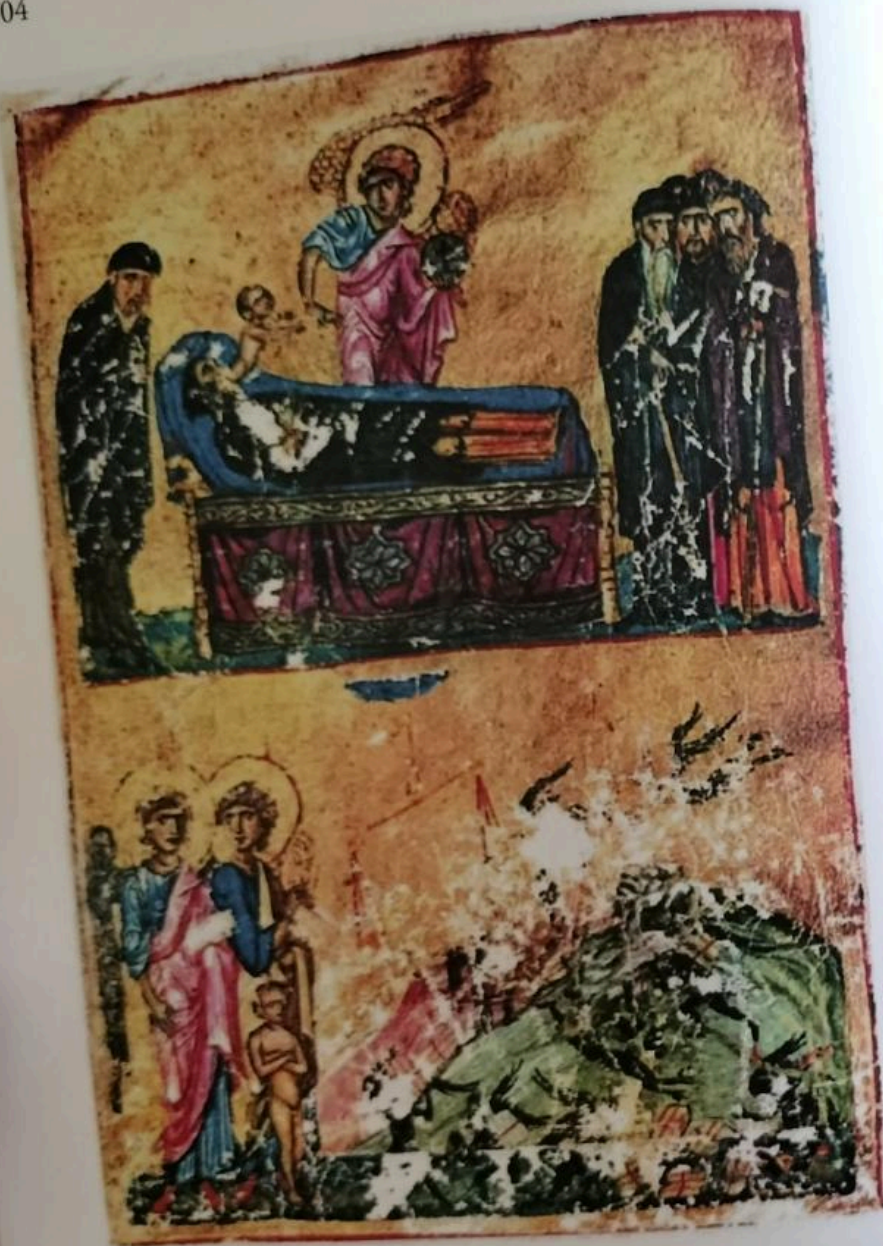
St. Theodora's Passage through the Toll-houses

From the monolithic masterwork fresco at the Kiev Caves Lavra, painted by Hieromonk Alvian, the head of the painters' studio at the Lavra in the late nineteenth century: the ascent of St. Theodora's soul through the toll-houses presented in individual iconographic scenes. A panoramic reproduction of this image can be found in the St. John of Kronstadt Church in St. Petersburg.



The Near Caves of the Kiev Caves Lavra, Ukraine, 1872

At the top: with angels and demons present, death comes to sever Theodora's soul from her body. Her elder, St. Basil the New, meets her soul and gives a bag of his golden prayers to her guardian angel to help her pass through the toll-houses. The panoramic fresco depicts the trial of St. Theodora's soul at each of the twenty toll-houses, numbered and labeled in golden lettering.



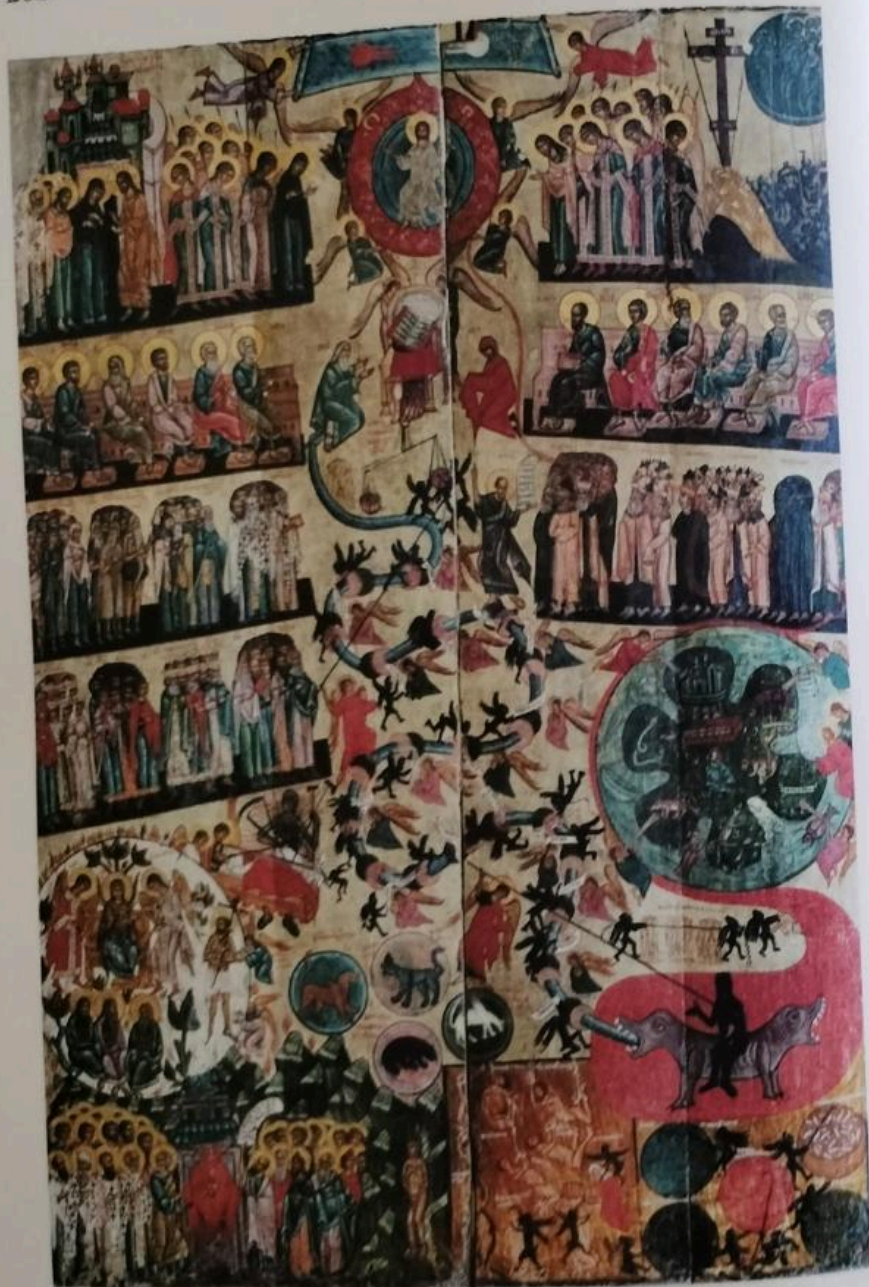
The Particular Judgment

Psalter, Dionysiou 65, fol. 11v, Dionysiou Monastery, early 12th c.



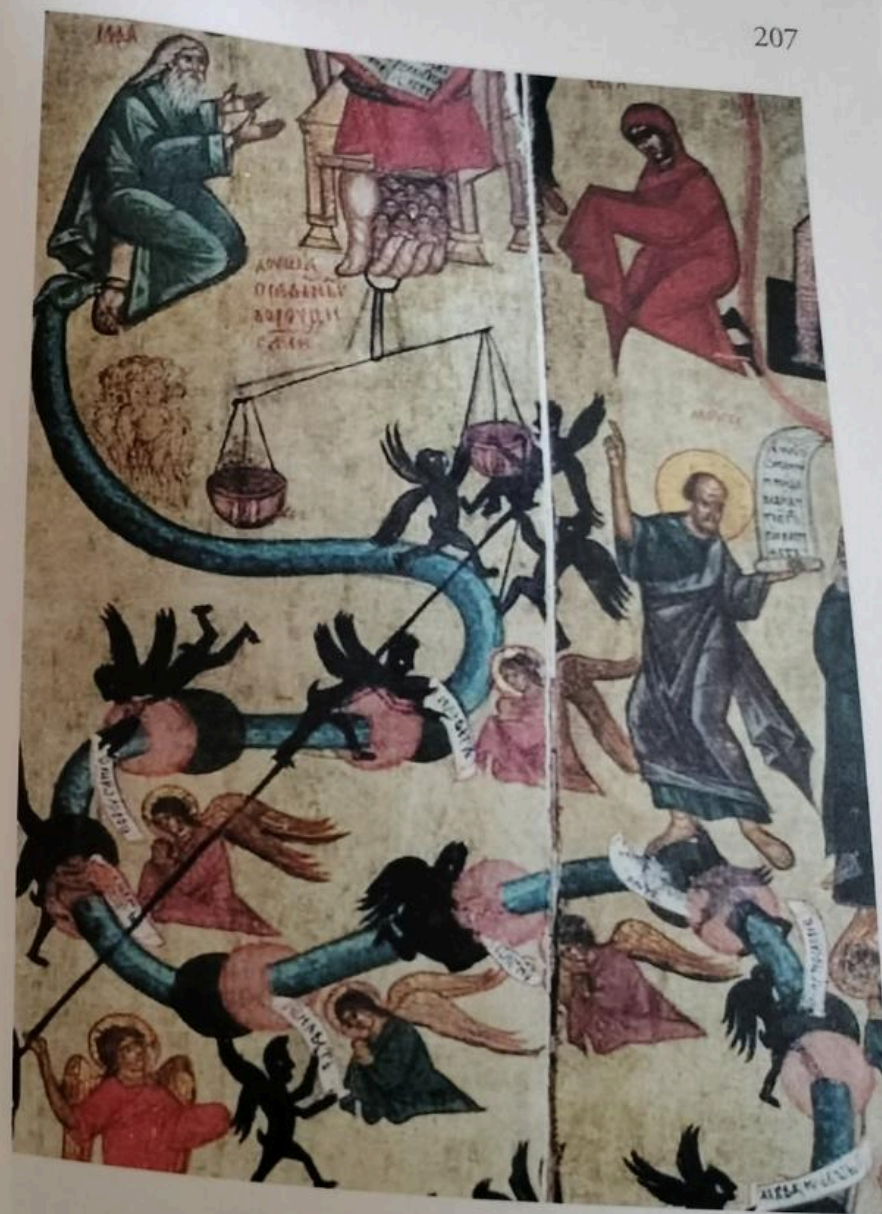
The Particular Judgment (detail)

The Dionysiou Psalter contains the earliest extant image of the particular judgment outside of a Last Judgment scene. The top half of folio 11v shows an angel receiving the soul of a dying monk. In the lower half of the page, two angels carrying scrolls with the good deeds of the naked soul are challenged by the fury of a mass of demons with scrolls on which presumably a rather different record of events has been inscribed. In spite of the great pile of the demons' scrolls, the mercy of God prevails: the scale hanging down from the heavens, symbolized by a blue hemisphere, leans to the right of the Omnipresent Judge, indicating His verdict for salvation.



The Last Judgment

Mshanets (National Museum, Lviv), second half 15th c.



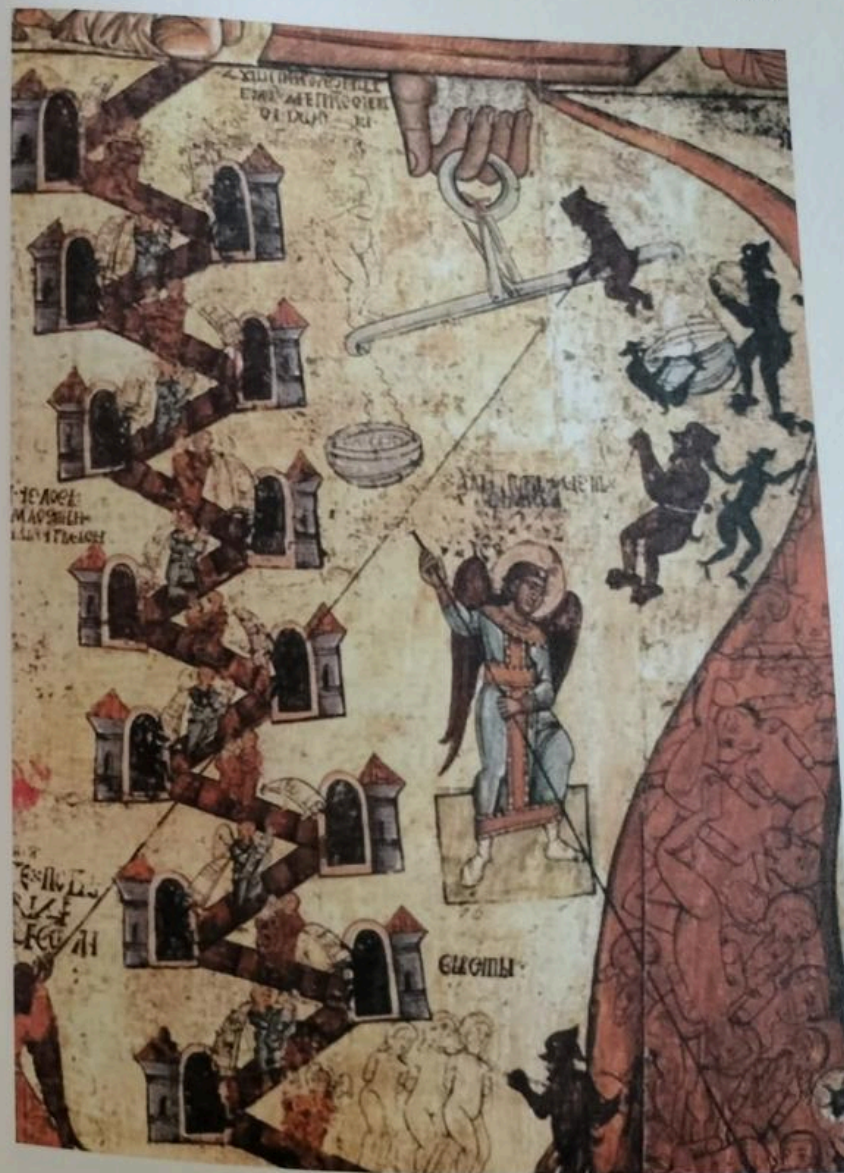
Detail of the Toll-houses

Angels shelter souls in their arms while evil demons brandish parchments with the name of each toll-house.



The Last Judgment

Dolyna (National Museum, Lviv), 1560s



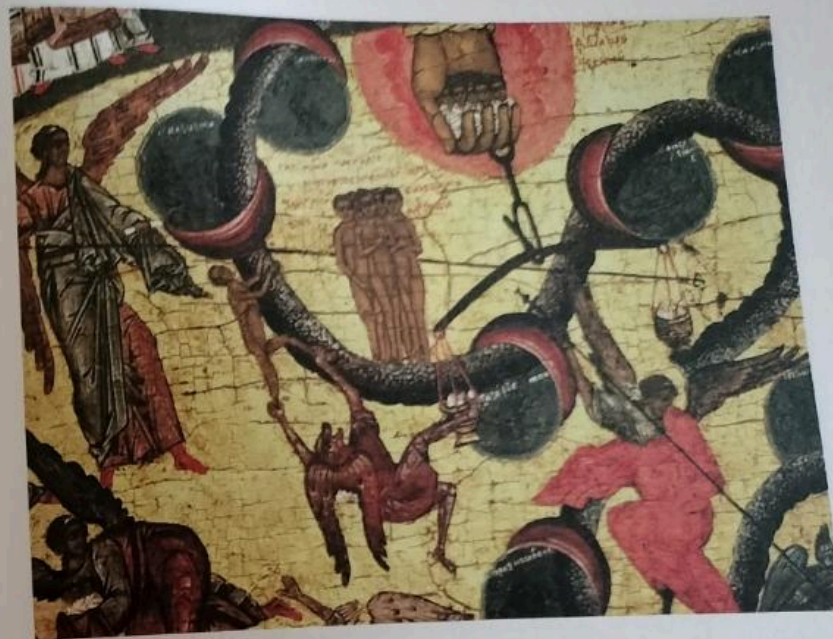
Detail of the Toll-houses

The earliest extant icon to depict an ascending zigzag pathway of toll-houses. Next to the toll-houses flows the river of fire. Above, saved souls huddle in the Lord's hand which holds the balance.



The Last Judgment

Annunciation Cathedral, Solvychegod, Arkhangelsk Oblast, 1579



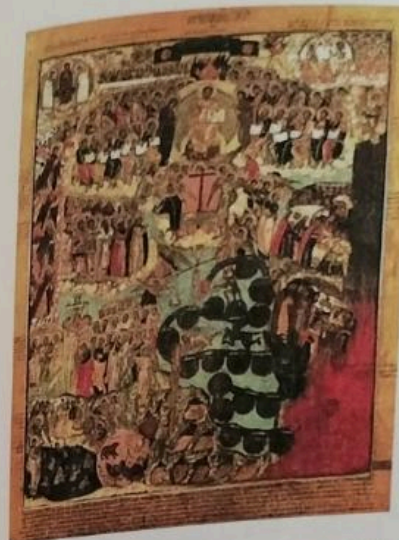
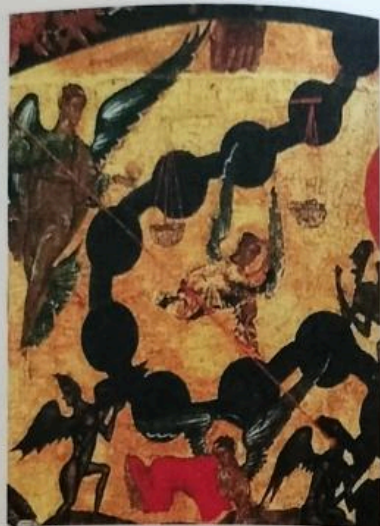
Detail of the Toll-houses

Created for the Annunciation Cathedral by an iconographer of the Pskov Caves Monastery, this masterwork icon is now treasured in the Solvychegodsk Museum of History and Art. Each of the twenty toll-houses ascending on the serpent has the name of the sin to be scrutinized by the exactor demons lurking inside. Some of these evil tax-collectors sit upon stools in their stations waiting for prey. The hand of the Lord holds the balance scale tilting to His right indicating the verdict of salvation. No fewer than a dozen souls are swaddled and resting peacefully in His palm. Not so for the naked and trembling souls still on trial: a demon grasps one of their number by the feet, trying to wrest him down into torments. But the holy angels vigorously defend the souls in their charge. Some carry the departed souls in the folds of their garments through the trial, while others spear the demons who try to upset the balance of justice. A masterpiece combining exquisite artistic accomplishment with traditional Orthodox theology.



The Last Judgment – Detail of the Toll-houses

Novgorod Yaroslavl Art Museum, mid-16th c.



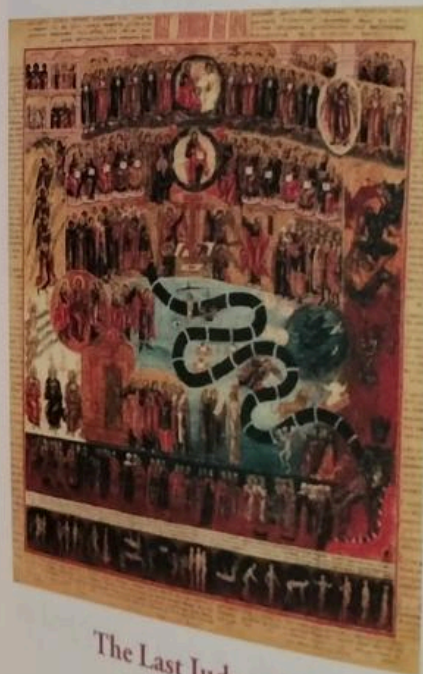
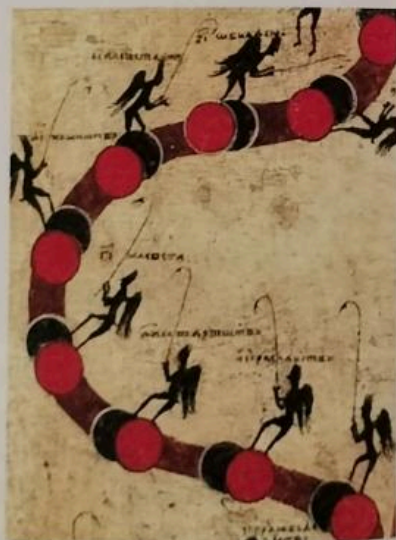
The Last Judgment – Detail of the Toll-houses

Yaroslavl region, 1650



The Last Judgment – Detail of the Toll-houses

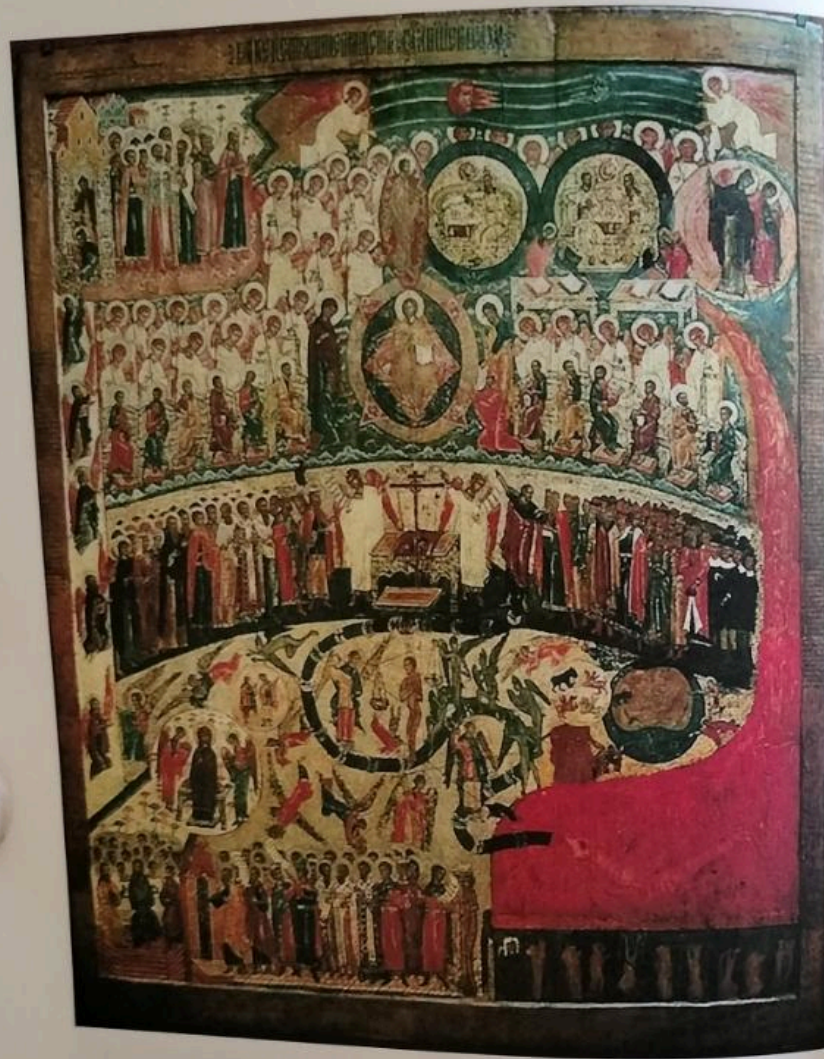
Novgorod (Novodevichy Convent of the Resurrection, St. Petersburg), 16th c.



The Last Judgment – Detail of the Toll-houses

circa 17th c.

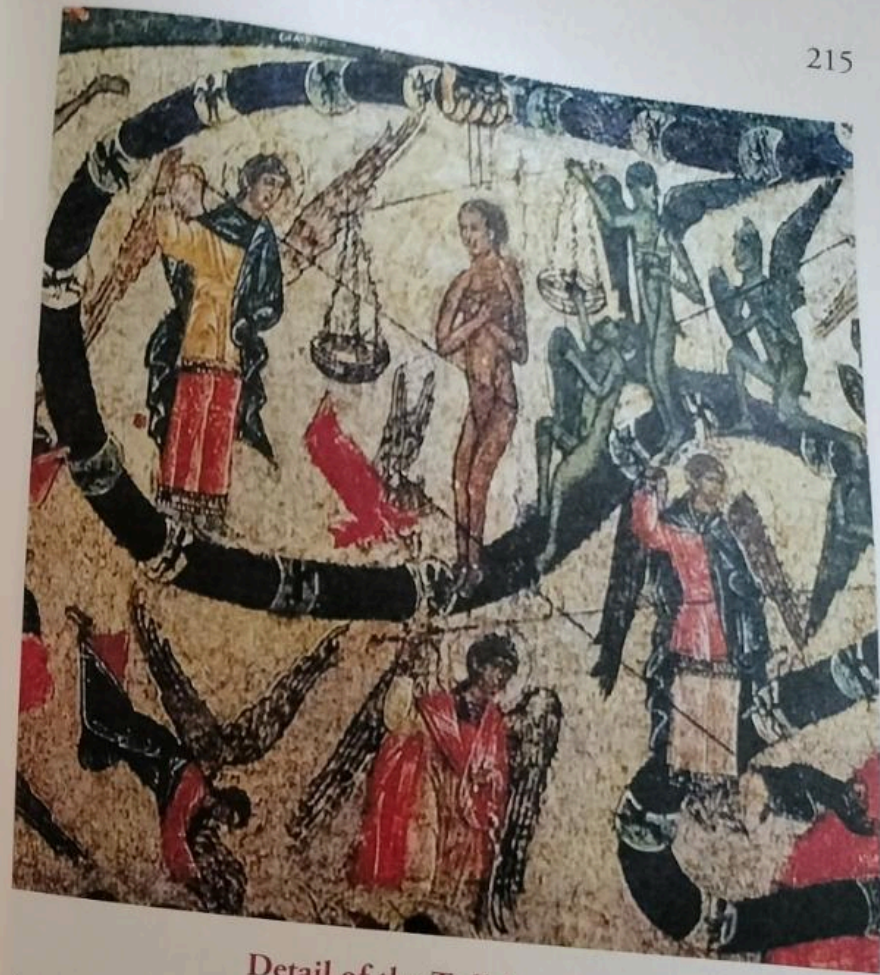




The Last Judgment

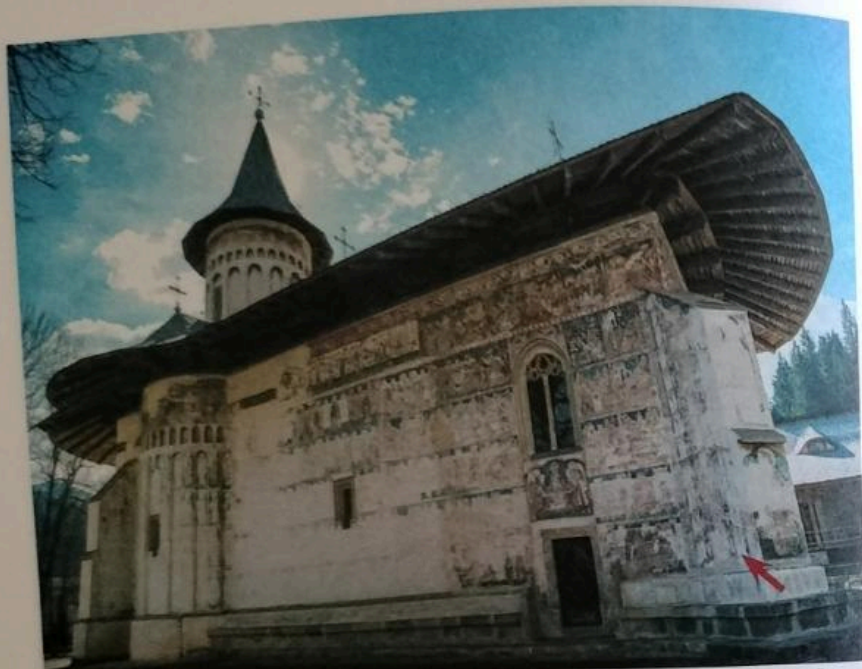
Moscow school, collection of the Louvre Museum, Paris, 17th c.

This beautiful icon depicting the toll-houses is housed in the all-famed Louvre Museum in Paris. Aesthetically arresting with its unusual pastel colors and the expressive features of the figures depicted, this masterpiece perfectly preserves the Orthodox Church's teaching on the trial at death. A soul is stopped in



Detail of the Toll-houses

its ascent to the throne of God, standing trial at one of the bands housing tax-collecting demons. The hand of the Lord above holds the balance while angels assist in the defense. The heavenly choir glorifies God above while the terrible fire rages below. Whoever stands before one of these awe-inspiring icons feels compelled to deeply contemplate their own eternal abode: one or the other awaits us all.



Photograph courtesy of Cristian Jurau

Voroneț Monastery

Katholikon of St. George, 1547

The most famous of the painted monasteries of Romania, Voroneț Monastery was constructed in 1488 by St. Stephen the Great, and in 1547 Metropolitan Grigorie Rosca of Moldavia had the exterior walls covered with frescos. Voroneț's Last Judgment fresco extends across the entire western façade of the katholikon. This monumental mural (see the next two pages) depicts the hand of the Lord holding the balance over a soul. The soul begs the angels' help while watching the frenzy of fiends climbing onto the left scale pan and clamoring for a judgment of condemnation. Scrolls of sinful deeds are loaded onto the balance while unrepentant sinners are led away in chains. The twenty-foot-tall fresco of the toll-houses (indicated above by an arrow) depicts pairs of angels guarding souls against demons in toll-booths arranged ten to a side in a tower formation. Having successfully passed through the trials, the soul at the top climbs the final stairs to venerate the most merciful Judge.



The Last Judgment

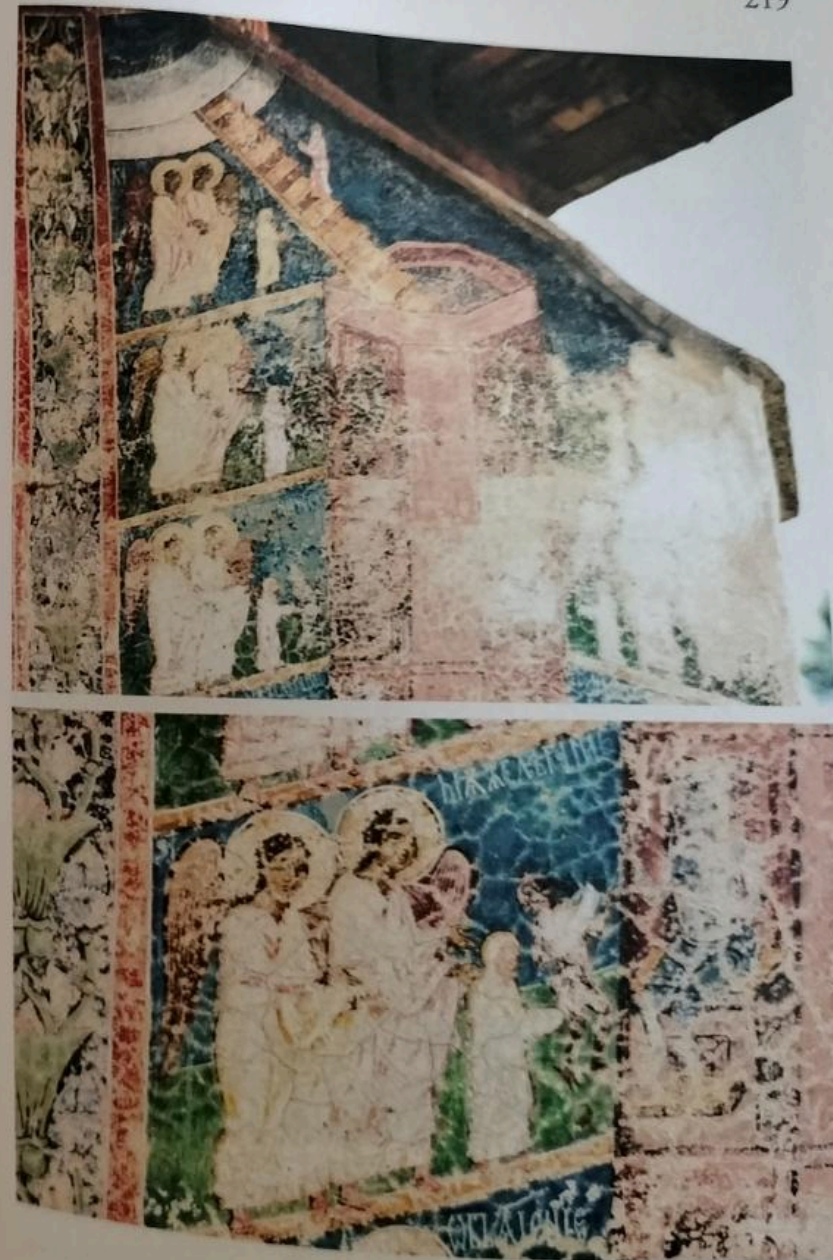
Western façade of the katholikon, Voroneț Monastery



Photograph courtesy of Cristian Jurau

The Toll-Houses

Northern façade of the katholikon, Voroneț Monastery, 1547



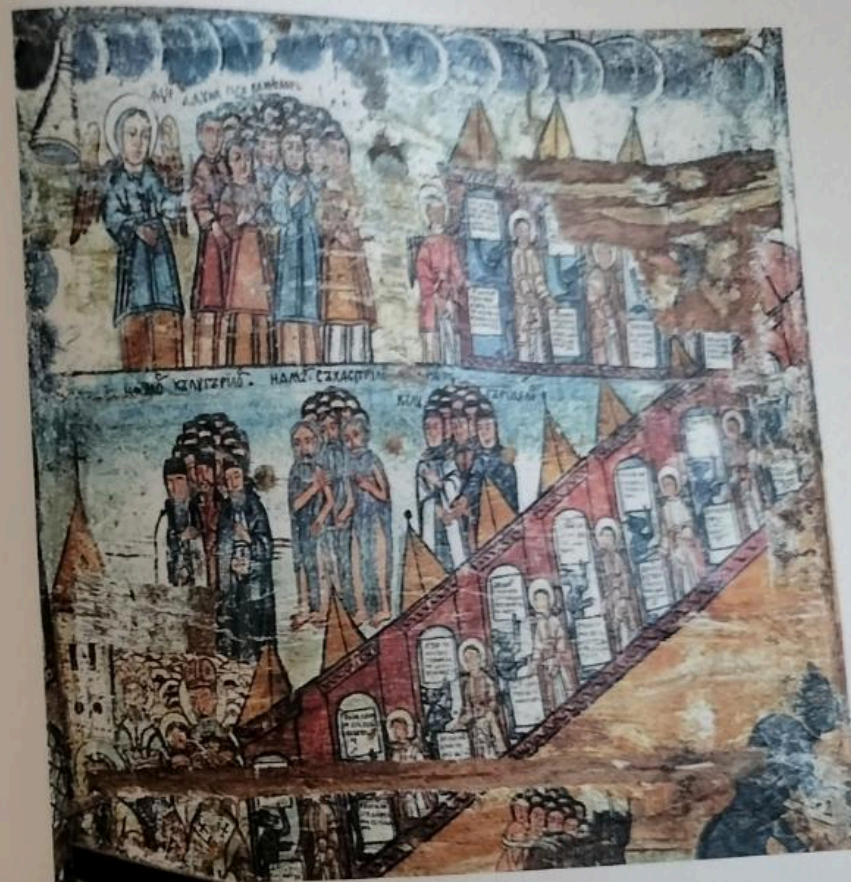
Photographs courtesy of Cristian Jurau

Details of the Toll-houses

See the Voroneț toll-house tower in detail at
www.thedepartureofthesoul.org.



Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos
Călinești-Căieni, 1630

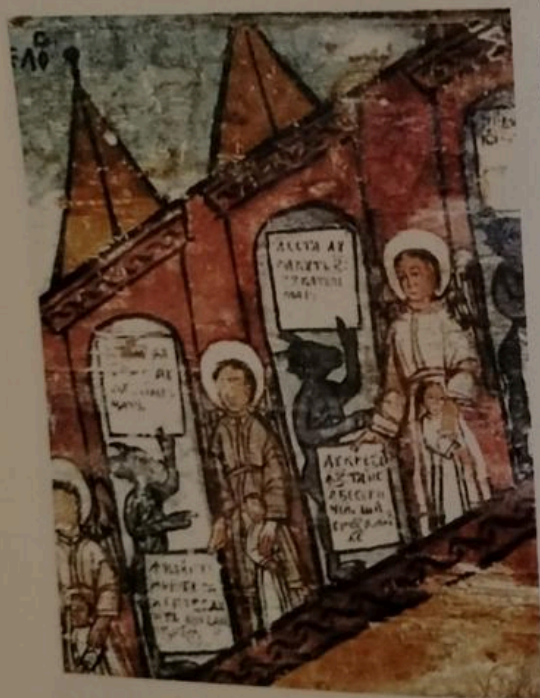


The Toll-Houses

Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos, eastern wall of the narthex
Călinești-Căieni, 1754

Moldavian master iconographer Alexandru Ponehalschi's rendition of the toll-houses in an ascending slope. At the first two toll-houses the "dialogues of the scrolls" between the demons and angels begin: "This soul did not go to church on every Sunday and holiday," claims the demon—"This soul prayed at home and Christ forgave him," is the angel's reply. "This soul did not obey his father and mother"—"This soul took care of his old parents in his house until death." At the

third and the fourth toll-house only the inscriptions written on the angels' scrolls have been preserved: "This soul has confessed and gave alms and Christ forgave him"; "This soul has confessed and a memorial service was made after his death." At the fifth toll-house the texts are completely destroyed, while at the sixth only the description of the soul's good deeds has been preserved: "This soul fasted on Fridays and



Detail of the Toll-houses
Călinești-Căieni

Wednesdays and Christ forgave him." The next pairs of good and bad deeds are recorded: "This soul committed seven great sins"—"This soul believed in the seven sacraments of the Church and Christ the Lord forgave him." "[The woman and man] have been separated"—"Before death this soul confessed and repented." "This soul swore falsely and on his brother [...]"—"This soul made one hundred liturgies." The demon further accuses the soul: "This soul has devoured [people's living(?)] and killed them," but the angel defends him: "This soul fasted for seven years and much [ascetical labor...(?)]." At the eleventh tollhouse the accusation reads: "The priest who has married another woman," and the angel responds: "He ended

the relationship with her and repented." At the last toll-house only the description of the good deed is visible: "This soul was redeemed from all his sins upon his repentance."



Detail of the Toll-houses

Călinești-Căieni

We would like to thank Dr. Raluca Betea, author of *The Trial of the Soul: Post-Byzantine Visual Representations of the Tollbooths in the Romanian Churches of Maramureș*, for permission to publish her translations of the inscriptions of the Călinești-Căieni image and her photographs of the Ieud Deal mural.

Chapter Four

*On Commemoration and Prayer
for the Departed*

Blessed are the merciful for they shall find mercy.

Matthew 5:8



"What can we do for our loved ones?"

When a lone traveler prepares to journey to a distant and unknown country, he learns from the example of experienced travelers that he must obtain certain indispensable items in order to arrive successfully at his destination. A ticket must be purchased; a passport is essential; a guide who knows the way perfectly must be hired. And so it is with every soul who prepares to embark on the most awesome journey to the other world. The hour of departure is the hour of death and the intended final destination is the Kingdom of Heaven. The sojourning soul must be prepared. Just as tickets and passports and guides are needed in order to find one's way unhindered in this world, so it is necessary for the soul to depart through the gate of death with certain "documents," as it were, or it will be detained and unable to safely cross the border and enter Christ's Kingdom.

For a guide, let us—every Orthodox Christian—have a spiritual father who knows the way from experience and to whom we have entrusted our spiritual lives in unhesitating obedience. Let us purchase our ticket with the currency of repentance and a sincere desire and effort to be cured of our sinful habits in order to rise from our falls by the grace of God. And if we truly desire to quickly flee from all danger on this final journey, let us purchase an "express" ticket by the

most thorough confession possible to our spiritual father of all the sins we have committed since our youth up to the present day.

The value of confession is inestimable. While we will certainly feel the immediate benefit of a sincere and complete confession, its greatest value will only be fully understood by our souls after death when we see our demonic accusers thwarted, incapable of hindering our ascent.

And let our passport be our frequent communion of the holy and life-giving Mysteries. Let Christ's Body and Blood be the signature and seal allowing us free passage through the toll-houses. Prudently preparing ourselves in this way, we may truly hope to reach the Heavenly Kingdom which God so graciously prepared for all those who love Him and keep His commandments.

All of these things we can still do for ourselves while we are here in this world. But the question is often asked: "What can we do for those who are already in the next world? If someone fails the trials of the air and descends into Hades, how can we help them?" The answer is filled with great hope in the mercy of God.

The Holy Orthodox Church's primary purpose is the healing of the souls of the faithful through their struggle to attain illumination and *theosis* and thus acquire the Holy Spirit while still living in this world.⁶⁵ Our Church yearns for all of its members to become saints. For those who receive this gift of the Holy Spirit and persevere in His love to the end, the primary mission of the Church is fulfilled in them. Their passage through the toll-houses is assured, having al-

⁶⁵ See for example St. Seraphim of Sarov's conversation with Nikolay A. Motovilov on the acquisition of the Holy Spirit in *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 1 (Platina, 1996), pp. 63–111.

ready acquired the Kingdom of God within themselves. In a manner of speaking, it is as if they have already arrived at the destination before their departure.

But the Church's second greatest purpose is to help souls to escape torment and attain the eternal life in Heaven. The liturgical and Patristic examples below illustrate the Orthodox Church's maternal concern over unfortunate souls who, being led astray by sin, depart from this life having failed to perfectly keep the commandments, thereby putting themselves in great peril. On behalf of these souls wounded by a life of sin, who were unable to fully manifest their repentance and who are suffering and in jeopardy, yet long for God's love to save them, the Church now begins a service of powerful supplications to God.

Great hope lies in the fact that the Holy Spirit, the Life of the Church, is Himself the inspiration of the very prayers and supplications in the liturgical services offered up to the Holy Trinity on behalf of the dead. He is also the Bestower of the theorias granted to the saints regarding the great benefit of the Church's prayers for those in Hades.

"Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee, because of all, and for all."⁶⁶ God in His infinite love and boundless goodness will do everything possible to save a soul. But His mercy wants us, the members of His Church, to do all that we can as well. In this is the fulfillment of the second great commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Matt. 22:39). And through this charity we greatly benefit our own souls as well, something which we will fully experience at the time of our own departure to the next world.

Below are many examples from the holy liturgical services of the Orthodox Church whose supplications on behalf of the

⁶⁶ From the *anaphora* of the Divine Liturgy.

departed soul begin even in the hour before death when, as often occurs, the trial of the soul begins. They are hymns of hope for the departed faithful, filled with confidence in God's mercy:

*From the Canon for the
Departure of the Soul:*

By thy deep compassion
and many tender mercies,
O Sovereign Lady, being so
inclined by nature, stand by
me in this dread hour, O in-
vincible Helper.⁶⁷

At the awesome moment of death, a service is immediately offered by a priest at the bedside of the departed, and the first supplication for the immortal soul's eternal rest rises to God:

*From the Office of the Departure
of the Soul from the Body:*

With the souls of the
righteous departed, give
rest to the soul of Thy servant,
O Savior, preserving it in the
blessed life which is with Thee,
O Lover of Mankind.⁶⁸

Through the action of grief mingled with the power of love, the heartfelt prayers of family and friends will likewise continually arise together with the Church's services like fra-

⁶⁷ *Great Book of Needs*, vol. 3 (South Canaan, 2002), p. 75. See also Appendix B below, the *Canon for the Departure of the Soul*.
⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

grant incense providing great benefit and comfort to the soul during its final and most difficult journey.

The *Psalter* is then appointed to be recited continuously over the body until the funeral service begins.

In the funeral service, over one hundred supplications are offered up asking for repose, pardon from sins, and the attainment of the eternal good things for the soul who is now undergoing fierce trials.

From the Funeral Service:

Mercifully vouchsafe, O Good One, that he who from the transitory, unstable things of corruption hath passed over unto Thee, may dwell with joy in the heavenly mansions, O God, being justified by faith and by grace.⁶⁹

Him who singeth Thy majesty divine; him whom Thou hast taken away from earth, receive Thou, making him a child of the light, and cleansing him from the gloom of sin, O exceeding-merciful One.⁷⁰

O thou who savest those who fix their hope on thee, the Mother of the Sun

⁶⁹ I. F. Hapgood, trans. and ed., *Service Book*, (New York, 1906), p. 381.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

that knoweth no setting, O Progenetrix of God: With thy prayers entreat, we beseech thee, the God exceeding good, that unto him who hath now been translated He will give repose where the souls of the righteous rest. Manifest him an heir of good things divine, in the courts of the just, unto everlasting memory, O All-undefiled One.⁷¹

The Bishop or the principal Priest saith, thrice:

Eternal be thy memory, O our brother, who art worthy to be deemed happy and ever-memorable.

And the Choir singeth:
Memory eternal! (*Thrice.*)⁵⁴⁹

Although the funeral service is completed with the interring of the body of the deceased, a series of memorial services are to follow in the days ahead:

From the Great Book of Needs:

According to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, the soul passes by the dread toll-collectors at that time when the body lies without breath and dead, and therefore is in

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

great need of the help of the Church. Therefore, in order to ease the soul's passage to another life, immediately after his death, over the grave of an Orthodox Christian there is begun prayer concerning the repose of the soul that has fallen asleep—the singing of the *Panikhida*, which is a translation from the Greek, signifying “All-night Singing,” that is, supplication fulfilled in the course of the whole night. Its composition is in imitation of Matins. In addition, the *Panikhida* is sung on the Third, Ninth and Fortieth days after death, as well as on the anniversary of death.

The Church celebrates the commemoration of the deceased on the *Third Day* after death in honor of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on the Third Day and as an image of the Most-holy Trinity.

On the *Ninth Day* after death, the Church celebrates the commemoration of the deceased in honor of the Nine Ranks of Angels who, as ministers of the Heavenly King, stand before Him, praying for mercy for the departed....

The Church has directed that a commemoration of the departed be served on the *Fortieth Day* after death, that the soul of the departed, having ascended the holy mountain of the heavenly Sinai and being found worthy of the sight of God, has attained to its promised blessedness and has been settled in the heavenly abodes with the Righteous. The Church celebrates the commemoration of them that have fallen asleep on the anniversary of their deaths, as well....

The anniversary of the death of a dear one is always remembered, even if this be by means of the heartfelt commemoration by his beloved relatives and friends. For an Or-

thodox believer this is the day of new birth, that is, eternal life.⁷²

In the memorial service we find continual supplications for the departed:

For the remission of the sins of those who have departed this life in blessed memory, let us pray to the Lord: *Lord, have mercy.*

For the ever-memorable servants of God, [name(s)], for their repose, tranquility and blessed memory, let us pray to the Lord: *Lord, have mercy.*

That He will pardon them every transgression, whether voluntary or involuntary, let us pray to the Lord: *Lord, have mercy....*

That they may present themselves blameless before the dread throne of the Lord of glory, let us pray to the Lord: *Lord, have mercy.*⁷³

Incomparable is the benefit of the commemoration of the departed for forty consecutive Divine Liturgies begin-

⁷² *The Great Book of Needs*, vol. 3 (South Canaan, 2002), pp. 353–354.

⁷³ I. F. Hapgood, trans. and ed., *Service Book*, (New York, 1906), p. 564.

ning immediately on the day of death. The help a soul receives when it is commemorated at the *proskomidi* cannot be measured.

The liturgical commemoration in the departed soul's parish church, a familiar haven of comfort where family and friends gather to pray for their loved one's salvation, is an inestimable treasure. But if the local parish usually celebrates only the Sunday Liturgy, names of the departed along with offerings on their behalf can also be given immediately to one or more of the various monasteries or parishes which celebrate the complete cycle of services, and especially the Divine Liturgy, on a daily basis. Thus during the forty-day period before the soul finally appears before the awesome judgment seat of Christ to hear the dread verdict, there will be a continual commemoration in the Divine Liturgies—a gift of indescribable value and of the utmost importance.⁷⁴

When you can do good, defer it not, because alms delivers from death (Tob. 4:10)

— St. Polycarp of Smyrna

Everything we do as alms for our dearly departed—every act of charity and kindness we offer on their behalf—is carefully noted by our most kind and merciful God. Whether we bring gifts to churches for the performance of the services, or

⁷⁴ One of the largest monasteries in North America commemorates on average approximately 60,000 names nightly during the Orthros service while the serving priest performs the *proskomidi*. The monastery celebrates the maximum possible eight consecutive forty-day Divine Liturgies annually. Thus, almost half a million names of both the living and the departed Orthodox faithful are commemorated in a forty-day Liturgy every year. By illustrating this living and sacred tradition, we encourage relatives and friends to participate in this essential offering for the salvation of the souls of their loved ones.

give alms to the poor, or visit and comfort those who are suffering with illnesses, or assist the elderly and incapacitated, or dedicate our time to helping anyone in any way we can, offering our gift with prayers to God on behalf of the soul of our beloved departed, all of this will greatly benefit our loved ones. It will also benefit our own soul both now and especially when the time comes for our own departure to the next life. Then the holy angels will have our offerings as good works to hold up in our defense, in order to answer the demonic accusations we will have to face as we ourselves are passing through the toll-houses.

Cited below are many examples from the writings and *Lives* of the saints illustrating the importance of commemorating the deceased in the Divine Liturgy, as well as the great benefit of heartfelt personal prayers for those who have departed to the next life.

From the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Book VIII

The Bidding Prayer for the departed

XLI. Let us pray for our brethren that are at rest in Christ, that God, the lover of mankind, who has received his soul, may forgive him every sin, voluntary and involuntary, and may be merciful and gracious to him, and give him his lot in the land of the pious that are sent into the bosom of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with all those that have pleased Him and done His will from the beginning of the world, whence all sorrow, grief, and lamentation are banished.

*How and when we ought to celebrate the memorials
of the faithful departed, and that we ought then to give
somewhat out of their goods to the poor*

XLII. Let the third day of the departed be celebrated with psalms, and lessons, and prayers, on account of Him who arose within the space of three days; and let the ninth day be celebrated in remembrance of the living, and of the departed; and the fortieth day according to the ancient pattern: for so did the people lament Moses, and the anniversary day in memory of him. And let alms be given to the poor out of his goods for a memorial of him.

St. Cyril,
Archbishop of Jerusalem (†386)
(commemorated on March 18)

Defender of the Church against the impious blasphemy of Arius and Julian the Apostate, great ascetic and man of miraculous prayer, deposed and exiled three times by the heretics, St. Cyril steadfastly championed the Orthodox Faith.

WE COMMEMORATE ALSO those who have fallen asleep before us, first, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, that at their prayers and intervention God would receive our petition. Afterwards also on behalf of the holy Fathers and Bishops who have fallen asleep before us, and in a word of all who in past years have fallen asleep among us, believing that it will be a very great advantage to the souls, for

whom the supplication is put up, while that Holy and most Awful⁷⁵ Sacrifice is presented.

And I wish to persuade you by an illustration. For I know that many say, what is a soul profited, which departs from this world either with sins, or without sins, if it be commemorated in the prayer? Now surely if, when a king had banished certain people who had given him offence, their connections should weave a crown and offer it to him on behalf of those under his vengeance, would he not grant a respite to their punishments? In the same way we, when we offer to Him our supplications for those who have fallen asleep, though they be sinners, weave no crown, but offer up Christ, sacrificed for our sins, propitiating our merciful God both for them and for ourselves.⁷⁶

St. John Chrysostom,
Archbishop of Constantinople (†407)
(commemorated on November 13)

LET US THEN not make wailings for the dead simply, but for those who have died in sins.... Let us weep for these and let us assist them according to our power; let us think of some small assistance for them, small though it be, yet still let us assist them. How and in what way? By praying and entreating others to make prayers for them, by continually giving to the poor on their behalf. This deed hath some consolation.... Not in vain did the Apostles order that the remembrance should be made of the dead in the dreadful Mysteries.

⁷⁵ Perhaps in the sense of "reverent fear" or "awe-filled."

⁷⁶ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments* (Crestwood, 1995), pp. 74-75.

They know that great gain resulteth to them, great benefit; for when the whole people stands with uplifted hands, a priestly assembly, and that awful Sacrifice lies displayed, how shall we not prevail with God by our entreaties for them? And this we do for those who have departed with faith....⁷⁷

**From the Life of St. Brendan the Voyager,
Founder and Abbot of Clonfert Monastery, Ireland (†578)**
(commemorated on May 16)

After St. Patrick and together with St. Bridget of Kildare, St. Brendan is the most beloved of all Orthodox saints of Ireland. A monk of powerful intercession before God, St. Brendan attracted many disciples and founded several monasteries, the most famous being at Clonfert which became one of the greatest monastic centers of learning until the sixteenth century. St. Brendan received many holy visions and performed wondrous miracles.

ONE DAY two of Brendan's company were conversing, and he was listening to them, and this is what they were saying: "Can the soul of a sinner," said they, "be rescued from hell by the prayers and alms deeds of their surviving friends?" Then said Brendan to them: "Listen to me. One day we were sleeping on the sea, one lay brother alone being awake. He saw a cloud black, dark, menacing, hideous and dreadful, coming towards us from the horizon of the ocean. The *whilom laic* [former layman] came to me at once," said Brendan, "and spoke thus: 'Great fear has seized me,' said he;

⁷⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians*, NPNF, 1st series, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, 1994), pp. 196–197. (PG 62:203–204.)

and he continued: 'Arise quickly (and look) at this great cloud that is coming towards us. And dost thou hear the appalling voice in it?'

"When I had arisen, I saw the hideous cloud with the form of a man in it, black and dark like an extinct cinder, or a cormorant. And this wretched form was continually howling and weeping for the extremity of his torment; and then he said to me: 'I entreat thee,' said he, 'by Jesus Christ, the Son of the King of Heaven and earth, to pray the Lord for me for these three days, for there is no one more tormented than I, owing to the greatness of my sins.' And with this utterance he darted from us. Then we all arose forthwith, and besought the Lord for him. He came back after three days, and his body was bluish black, and his lamentation less, and he said once more that we should beseech the Lord for him another three days; and with that utterance he departed.

"At the end of a week he returned, with a white cloud about him, and his body all radiant like the summer sun. And this white cloud had seven different kinds of glorious music sounding in the midst of it, and they were sweeter than all the many melodies of the world. Then he gave thanks to God, and said: 'Now,' said he, 'the Saviour of the human race is calling me to His own kingdom.' Then I said," continued Brendan, "'Who art thou, and what is thy name?' 'I am Colman,' said he, 'the worst monk of all monks.' Then leaving his blessing with the brethren he thereupon went to heaven with attendance of angels.

"Then," said Brendan, "my monks besought me to make a prayer for them, for they saw the profit of it to yonder monk. But they did not get me to do this, till at a later time Michael the archangel came to me, and said to me: 'God has heard thine intercession,' said he, 'search and peruse the di-

vine scriptures, and make collected prayer out of them, which may preserve and protect the men of the world from hell and its many pains....'

"So it is clear from this," said Brendan, "that it does profit the dead for their surviving friends to sing their requiem."⁷⁸

St. Gregory the Dialogist,
Pope of Rome (†604)
 (commemorated on March 12)

THE HOLY SACRIFICE of Christ, our saving Victim, brings great benefits to souls even after death, provided their sins can be pardoned in the life to come. For this reason the souls of the dead sometimes beg to have Liturgies offered for them [i.e., their commemoration in the Divine Liturgy]....

St. Gregory, grieved by a monk who after his death was found to have hoarded money against the Gospel commandment and monastic vow, commanded that no memorial service or commemoration in the Divine Liturgy be held for him, in order to serve as an example for the rest of the brethren.

Thirty days later, I began to feel strong compassion for the deceased Justus. As I considered with deep anguish the penalty he was enduring, I thought of a way to relieve him of his suffering. With this in mind, I called Pretiosus, the prior, and said to him sadly, 'Justus has now been suffering the tor-

⁷⁸ Charles Plummer, trans. and ed., *Bethada Náem Nérenn: Lives of Irish Saints*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1922), pp. 88-89.

ments of fire for a long time and we must show him our charity by helping as much as we can to gain his release. Beginning today, offer the holy Sacrifice for his soul for thirty consecutive days. Not one of these days is to pass without a Divine Liturgy being celebrated for his release.' The prior obediently accepted the instructions and left.

Days passed, and being busy with other affairs, I lost count of them. Then, one night, Justus appeared to his brother Copiosus, who asked him at once why he came and how he was. 'Up to this moment I was in misery,' he said, 'but now I am well, because this morning I was admitted to communion....'

St. Gregory then counted the days and found them to be exactly thirty since he commanded monk Justus's name to be commemorated in the Liturgy.

I believe that ... deceased persons, too, can be absolved from sins through the Divine Liturgy, provided their sins are pardonable. But remember, the benefits of the holy Sacrifice are only for those who by their good lives have merited the grace of receiving help from the good deeds others perform in their behalf.

The safer course, naturally, is to do for ourselves during life what we hope others will do for us after death. It is better to make one's exit a free man than to seek liberty after one is in chains. We should, therefore, despise this world with all our hearts as though its glory were already spent, and offer our sacrifice of tears to God each day as we immolate His sacred Flesh and Blood. This Sacrifice alone has the power of

saving the soul from eternal death, for it presents to us mystically the death of the only-begotten Son.⁷⁹

St. John of Kronstadt (†1908)

(commemorated on October 19 and December 20)

He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. The Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. He can forgive even the departed every sin committed by them in word, deed, or thought. *He is the resurrection, the life and the repose of His departed servants....* Would you ask anything of Him for the living and for yourself? *Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*⁸⁰

HOW DO WE MAINTAIN connection with the spiritual world, with the heavenly Church? By calling upon them in prayer; by keeping the festivals instituted in their honour; and by the Church services. For the Church is one, under one Head—Christ. How do we maintain connection with the departed? By means of prayers for them, especially when united with the offering of the bloodless sacrifice. How do we maintain union with living Christians and with all men? Again, by means of prayers for them all in God's temple and even at home. Thus we maintain connection with those in heaven, upon earth, and in hades. Great is the Christian faith!⁸¹

⁷⁹ St. Gregory the Dialogist (the Great), *Dialogues*, FOTC, vol. 39 (Washington, D.C., 1983), pp. 266, 269, 272–273.

⁸⁰ St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ* (Jordanville, 1994), p. 83.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

WHEN YOU PRAY for the repose of the soul of the departed, force yourself to pray with your whole heart, remembering that to do so is your essential duty, and not only that of a priest or ecclesiastic.... [The departed soul] needs prayer—your prayer now—because it cannot pray fruitfully any longer itself; the soul of the departed also requires the rest which you can implore for it by means of your ardent prayer, joined to works of charity for the benefit of that soul, and especially by the offering of the bloodless sacrifice on its behalf.⁸²

PRAY TO THE LORD for the repose of the souls of your departed forefathers, fathers and of others, daily in the morning and in the evening, in order that the remembrance of death may live in you, and that hope in the future life, after death, may not be extinguished in you, and that your spirit may be daily humbled by the thought of the transitoriness of your life.⁸³

St. John Maximovitch,

Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco (†1966)

(commemorated on June 19)

ONCE HAVING SAFELY PASSED through the toll-houses and having bowed down before God, the soul spends the next thirty-seven days visiting the heavenly habitations and the chasms of hades, not knowing where it will find itself, and only on the fortieth day is it assigned its place of waiting

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 521–522.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 543.

until the resurrection of the dead. Some souls find themselves with a foretaste of eternal joy and blessedness, while others—in fear of eternal torments, which will begin in earnest after the Dread Judgment. Until that time, changes in the state of the soul are still possible, especially through offering for their sake the Bloodless Sacrifice (commemoration at the Divine Liturgy), and likewise through other prayers.

The importance of commemoration at Divine Liturgy is demonstrated by the following incident. Before the opening of the relics of Saint Theodosius of Chernigov (†1896), the priest who had re-vested the relics sat down exhausted near the relics and dozed off. As he was sleeping the hierarch appeared to him and said, "Thank you for laboring on my behalf. I also ask that when you serve the Liturgy, you commemorate my parents," and he gave their names, Priest Nikita and Maria. "How is it that you, a holy hierarch, are asking my prayers, when you stand at the throne of Heaven and grant people God's mercy?" asked the priest. "That is true," replied the Saint, "but the offering at the Divine Liturgy is more powerful than my prayers."

The departed likewise benefit from memorial services and prayers at home on their behalf, and also from good deeds performed in their memory, as, for example, alms-giving and donations to churches. But they benefit most especially by being commemorated at the Divine Liturgy. There have been many appearances of the dead and other occurrences which confirm what great benefit lies in commemorating the departed. Many who died repentant but were unable to manifest this during their life, were released from torment and received repose. In church, prayers are always offered for the repose of the departed, and even on the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit, in the kneeling prayers at Vespers, there is a special

petition for those "who are held in hades." Each of us, desiring to show his love for the departed and to be of real help to them, can best do this by praying for them, and especially by commemorating them at the Divine Liturgy, when those particles taken out [of the Lamb] for the living and the dead are placed into the Blood of the Lord with the words, "Through the prayers of Thy saints, wash away, O Lord, with Thy precious Blood the sins of those commemorated here." We can do nothing greater, nothing better for the departed than to pray for them, offering their names for commemoration at the Divine Liturgy. They are always in need of this, but especially during those forty days, when the soul of the deceased makes its way to the eternal mansions. The physical body no longer feels anything, it does not see its close ones who have gathered, it does not smell the fragrance of the flowers, it does not hear the graveside soliloquies. But the soul senses the prayers offered in its behalf, and it is grateful to those who offer them and is spiritually close to them.

Relatives and dear friends of the departed! Do what is needful for them and what lies in your power. Rather than expending money on the external adornment of the coffin and grave, spend it on helping the poor, in memory of your close ones who have fallen asleep, and on churches, where prayers are offered on their behalf. Show mercy to those who have fallen asleep; attend to the good of their soul. That path awaits all of us. How great will be our desire then to be remembered in prayer! Let us be merciful to the departed. As soon as someone passes away, straightway call a priest, so he can read "The Office at the Departure of the Soul," which is appointed to be read over every Orthodox Christian immediately after his repose. Make every effort to arrange for the funeral to be served in a church and, until the funeral, to have

the Psalter read over the deceased. The funeral need not be elaborate, but it must not be abbreviated; think not of yourself and your own comfort, but about the deceased, with whom you are parting forever. If in the church there are several deceased at the same time, do not object to having a joint funeral service. It is better that a funeral be served for two or more deceased at once, for the prayers of all their close ones gathered together will be yet more fervent than if the services were conducted in succession and the services abbreviated owing to lack of time and energy; because each word of prayer is for the departed like a drop of water to a thirsty man.

Likewise, it is essential to make immediate arrangements for the forty-day memorial, that is, the daily commemoration of the departed at the Divine Liturgy during the first forty days. Usually, in churches where there are daily services, those whose funerals were served there are commemorated over the course of these forty days and longer. But if the funeral is served in a church which does not have daily services, those close [to the deceased] must arrange for a forty-day memorial in a church which does. It is good likewise to send for commemoration the name of the departed to monasteries and to Jerusalem, where there are constant prayers at the holy places. But it is important that the forty-day memorial begin immediately after the person dies, when the soul is particularly in need of prayer, and for that reason to begin the commemoration in the nearest place where there are daily services. Let us look after those who precede us into the other world, and do for them all that we can, remembering that *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Archpriest Peter Perekrestov, trans., *Man of God: St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco* (Richfield Springs, 1994), pp. 144–146.

Epilogue

Geronda Ephraim of St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery Florence, Arizona

*For if we would judge ourselves,
we should not be judged.*

1 Corinthians 11:31



“Death must find us ready.”

— Geronda Ephraim of Arizona

AFTER DEATH, ETERNITY FOLLOWS. Every person at a certain moment will abandon his body on the earth and proceed with his soul to eternity, to the life that has no end. Man’s soul will remain without the body until the Second Coming of Christ, at which time the bodies of both the righteous and the unrighteous will be resurrected in order to be judged. It is a fact that after death, man’s soul is separated from the body and lives in a unique state.

For this reason, we should—and I first—seriously take into account this reality and regulate our life accordingly. Let us correct our lives in order to avoid eternal Hell and instead acquire (through God’s mercy and compassion) the Kingdom of Heaven. We must take a long, hard look at our salvation and realize that it is not a game; it is not something we can ignore; it is not a joke.

Let us stare our salvation straight in the eyes, no matter how alarming and disconcerting it is. Let us correct our life. Let us thank God from the depth of our heart, and let us offer Him praise and doxology because we are still alive and we can amend the matters related to our soul and prepare ourselves. We do not know, as we see in practice, the day, the hour, or

the moment of our departure from this world. Let us do our prayer rule. Let us not neglect our vigil. Let us not be sluggish when it comes to attending church and the Liturgy. Let us love one another, because love is God, and “he who abides in love, abides in God and God in him” (1 Jn. 4:16). Who loves God? He who keeps His commandments. The first and foremost commandment is to love God; the second, to love our neighbor and brother.

Let us condemn and humble ourselves before God. Let us humble ourselves before our Crucified Christ and beseech Him for forgiveness. Let us correct ourselves so that our petition for His Divine Blood to wash and cleanse us, and for His death to become life for us may be fulfilled. We must thank God from the depth of our heart for keeping us alive until now and granting us time to correct ourselves.

We leave from this world and we go to the other world. The afflictions of this world, because they are temporary and short-lived, are insignificant compared to the reward for these pains which is given in the other world. However, they frequently appear to us as very heavy, unbearable, and never-ending. This reveals our human weakness and also the work of the devil, who presents things to us in a different way to surely lead us to despair and the hopeless thought that the torments will never end. But they do end, and often in a moment of time. And immediately, with the closing of our eyes, in front of us opens the *theoria*, the reality of the spiritual world. While before we were seeing people, immediately now, in a moment, we see spirits either bright or dark, either angels or demons.

As soon as the eyes of the flesh close, the eyes of the soul open instantly and the person sees those things that he could not see previously with the eyes of the body. Death is the bridge that transports us from this world to the other.

We must undertake the right struggle, the correct confronting of this reality that we are here temporarily and we are departing to the other world for eternity. Here we perceive Christ with the feeling of our soul. There, if the mercy of God saves us, we will see Him face to Face.

The soul that struggles, that persists, that believes with unshakable faith in the existence of God, in the other life, in the days of grace, feels that she is armed with the weapons of the light, of grace, of divine eros. She feels as if she is standing before the throne of God ready to do battle against those who oppose Him Whom she worships and champions. Sometimes she also feels dressed as the bride of the Heavenly Bridegroom, adorned with the beauty of Heaven and possessed of the love and the yearning for when she will be united eternally with the Heavenly Bridegroom.

May our good God enlighten each one of us and give us the strength to settle and arrange any outstanding debts. Let us exert ourselves; let us not be negligent. The present life is not a time for negligence and procrastination.

No one is sinless except our Holy God. No holy person left the earth without some small sin; however, this did not impede their salvation and holiness. Incidental mistakes do not detract from a person's holiness. This is why only God is sinless. The great Fathers advise us to depart having committed as few sins as possible. Insignificant sins do not hinder our salvation. For when the scale pan is full of virtue, it will tip the scale, and these small sins will be tossed into the air.

May God, through His infinite mercy, permit all of us to be found together in the joy and bliss of His eternal Kingdom.⁸⁵
Amen.

⁸⁵ Geronda Ephraim, *The Art of Salvation* (Roscoe, 2014), pp. 359–369, with additions from Geronda Ephraim's unpublished homilies given at the Holy Monastery of Philotheou on Mount Athos.

Appendix A

Verses from Holy Scripture

*Verses from Holy Scripture
relating to the departure of the soul*

The following Scriptural verses together with the patristic commentaries explaining their meaning as referring to the toll-houses can be found in chapter one of *The Departure of the Soul Master Reference Edition*.

From the New Testament

- **John 14:30:** Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the ruler of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me.
- **Luke 12:20:** But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night they will require thy soul: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?
- **Luke 12:58:** When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he should drag thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the exactor, and the exactor cast thee into prison.
- **Luke 16:22–23:** And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.
- **Luke 18:1–8:** And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city;

and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.

- **Ephesians 2:2:** Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.
- **Ephesians 6:12:** For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual hosts of evil in heavenly places.
- **Ephesians 6:13:** Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.
- **Colossians 2:15:** And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.
- **Hebrews 9:27:** And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.
- **1 Peter 5:8:** Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.

- **Jude 1:9:** Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

From the Old Testament

- **Isaiah 3:12:** My people, the tax-collectors scourge you, and the creditors rule over you.
- **Psalm 7:1–2:**
O Lord my God, in thee have I put my hope:
save me from them that persecute me, and do Thou deliver me:
Lest at any time like a lion he seize my soul,
when there is none to redeem me, nor to save.
- **Psalm 21:20–21:**
Deliver my soul from the sword;
and my only-begotten
from the hand of the dog.
Save me from the lion's mouth.
- **Psalm 118:80:**
Let my heart be blameless in Thy statutes
that I may not be put to shame.
- **Psalm 123:4–5:**
Our soul hath passed through a torrent;
then had our soul passed through
the water that is irresistible.
Blessed be the Lord Who hath not given us
to be a prey to their teeth.

Appendix B

The Canon for the Departure of the Soul

The Canon for the Departure of the Soul

(The Canon of Supplication to our Lord Jesus Christ and the Most-Holy Theotokos, the Mother of the Lord, at the Parting of the Soul from the Body)



A work of St. John Mauropous,
Metropolitan of Euchaita

The Priest begins: Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

The Reader continues: Amen. O Heavenly King ... and the Trisagion. Our Father....

Priest: For Thine is the Kingdom....

Reader: Amen. Lord, have mercy (12 times). Glory ... now and ever.... Come, let us worship....

Then the Canon, Plagal Second Tone:

Ode One

Irmos: When Israel passed on foot through the deep, as if on dry land, upon seeing Pharaoh their pursuer drowned, they cried aloud: Let us sing unto God a song of victory.

Refrain: Most-holy Theotokos, save us.

Like raindrops that diminish in the summer's course, my few and evil days already, little by little, are passing away. O Sovereign Lady, save me.

By thy deep compassion and many tender mercies, O Sovereign Lady, being so inclined by nature, stand by me in this dread hour, O invincible Helper.

Great fear now seizes my soul with unspeakable trembling, and it is afflicted as it is about to go forth from the body. Comfort it, O Most-pure One.

Glory....

Make known thy mercy unto me, O thou pure and renowned Refuge for sinners and them that are contrite, and deliver me from the hands of demons, for many dogs have surrounded me.

Now and ever....

Behold, the time for help! Behold, the time for protection! Behold, O Sovereign Lady, the time for which, day and night, I fell down and warmly entreated thee.

Ode Three

Irmos: There is none so holy as Thou, O Lord my God, Who hast exalted the horn of Thy faithful, O Good One, and hast established us upon the rock of Thy confession.

Foreseeing this day from afar, O Sovereign Lady, and always considering as if it had come, with warm tears I prayed: Do not forget me.

Noetic roaring lions have surrounded me, seeking to carry me away and bitterly torment me. Do thou crush their teeth and jaws, O pure One, and save me.

As an organ of speech being utterly crushed, and with tongue bound and voice stopped, I beseech thee with a broken heart: O my Salvation, do thou save me.

Glory....

Incline thine ear unto me, O Mother of Christ, my God, from the summit of thy great glory, and hear my final groaning, O good One, and give a hand unto me.

Now and ever....

Turn not away from me thy many compassions, shut not away thy deep love for mankind, O pure One. But stand by me now, and in the hour of judgment do thou remember me.

Ode Four

Irmos: Christ is my power, my God and my Lord, the precious Church sings in a manner befitting God, crying out with a pure mind, keeping festival in the Lord.

Accepting the contrition of my heart, do thou appoint now, O good One, a stream of tears as a washing away of sins, for I have established hope in thee, O good One, that thou shalt deliver me from dreadful, fiery torment, for thou thyself art a fountain of grace, O Birthgiver of God.

As an unabashed and infallible refuge for all that are in need, O all undefiled Sovereign Lady, be thou for me a defender in the hour of trial.

As the wings of a sanctified dove, stretch forth thy most-pure and all-honorable hands, and shelter me under their protection and shelter, O Sovereign Lady.

Glory....

Count me worthy to pass, unhindered, by the persecutor, the prince of the air, the tyrant, him that stands guard in the dread pathways, and the false accusation of these, as I depart from earth.

Now and ever....

Behold, terror has come to meet me, O Sovereign Lady, and I am afraid of it. Behold, a great struggle awaits me, in which be thou unto me a helper, O Hope of my salvation.

Ode Five

Irmos: With Thy divine light, O Good One, illumine with love, I pray Thee, the souls of them that rise early in the morning unto Thee, that they may know Thee, O Word of God, as the True God, Who calleth us out from the darkness of sin.

Do not forget me, O good One, neither turn away thy face from me, thy child. But hear me, for I am afflicted, and attend unto my soul and deliver it.

You that are my kinsmen according to the flesh, and you that are my spiritual brethren, my friends and usual acquaintances, weep, groan and lament, for, behold, I now am departing from you.

No one delivers me now, and, in truth, no one helps me. But, do thou help me, O Sovereign Lady, that as one helpless, I not become a captive in the hands of my enemies.

Glory....

Having entered, O you, my holy Angels, stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Incline your noetic knees, and cry out, with lamentation, unto Him: "Be merciful, O Creator of all, unto the work of Thy hands, O Good One, and cast it not away.

Now and ever....

Having bowed down to the Sovereign Lady, and the most-pure Mother of our God, pray that she will incline her knees with you, O Angels, and will incline Him to mercy. For as His Mother and Nourisher, she will be heard.

Ode Six

Irmos: Beholding the sea of life surging with the storm of temptations, and running to Thy calm haven I cry unto Thee: Raise up my life from corruption, O Greatly-merciful One.

My mouth is silent and my tongue speaks not, but my heart cries out. For that fire of contrition which devours inwardly is kindled, and with unspeakable tones calls upon thee, O Virgin.

Look down on me from above, O Mother of God, and mercifully attend now unto the visitation that has come upon me, that, gazing on thee, I may depart from the body with rejoicing.

The rending of the bonds, the sundering of the natural law that holds the whole fleshly composition together, causes me anguish and unbearable necessity.

Glory....

Do thou translate me, O Sovereign Lady, in the sacred and precious arms of the holy Angels, that sheltered by their wings, I not see the impious, foul and dark form of the demons.

Now and ever....

O All-pure Chamber of God, count me worthy of the heavenly, supersensual Chamber, and kindle thou my smoldering and dimming light with the holy oil of thy mercy.

At the conclusion of the Sixth Ode:

Lord, have mercy. (*thrice*)

Kontakion, Plagal Second Tone:

My soul, O my soul rise up. Why art thou sleeping? The end draws nigh and soon thou must make account. Arise, therefore, that Christ God may spare thee, for He is everywhere present and fills all things.

Ikos:

The devil was wounded with suffering, seeing the healing of Christ openly and health flowing to Adam from Him, for, having received a calamity, he lamented and cried out to his friends: "What shall I do unto the Son of Mary? He that is of Bethlehem is killing me, for He is everywhere present and fills all things."

Ode Seven

Irmos: An Angel made the furnace sprinkle dew on the Holy Youths, but the command of God consuming the Chaldeans prevailed upon the tyrant to cry out: Blessed art Thou, O God of our fathers.

The night of death, dark and moonless, has overtaken me still unready, sending me unprepared on that long and dreadful journey. Let thy mercy accompany me, O Sovereign Lady.

Behold, in truth, as it is written, all my days have passed away in vanity and my years in vain pursuits, and, truly, deadly and bitter snares have entangled my soul, and they compass me round about.

Let not the multitude of my sins be victorious over thy many tender mercies, O Sovereign Lady. But let thy mercy encompass me and cover all my transgressions.

Glory....

They that shall lead me hence have come, holding me on every side. But my soul shrinks back and is afraid, full of great rebelliousness, which do thou comfort, O pure One, by thine appearance.

Now and ever....

I have found no one to grieve with me in my afflictions, or to give comfort, O Sovereign Lady, for both my friends and acquaintances have now abandoned me. But do thou never forsake me, O my Hope.

Ode Eight

Irmos: From the flame Thou didst sprinkle dew upon the Godly Ones, and didst burn the sacrifice of a righteous man with water. For Thou doest all that Thou wilt, O Christ. Thee do we highly exalt unto all the ages.

As the Mother Who lovest mankind of the God that loveth mankind, do thou attend with calm and merciful eyes, when

my soul takes leave of the body, that I may glorify thee unto all the ages, O Holy Theotokos.

Do thou count me worthy to escape the hordes of bodiless barbarians, and rise through the aerial depths and enter into Heaven, that I may glorify thee unto the ages, O Holy Theotokos.

O thou that gavest birth to the Lord Almighty, when I come to die, do thou banish far from me the commander of the bitter toll-gatherers and ruler of the earth, that I may glorify thee unto the ages, O Holy Theotokos.

Let us bless the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord.

When the last great trumpet sounds at the fearful and dread resurrection of judgment unto all that shall arise, do thou remember me then, O Holy Theotokos.

Now and ever....

O lofty Palace of Christ, the Master, having sent thy grace from above, do thou now go before me in the day of affliction, that I may glorify thee unto all the ages, O Holy Theotokos.

Ode Nine

Irmos: It is not possible for men to see God, upon Whom the ranks of Angels dare not gaze. But through thee, O All-pure One, didst the Word Incarnate reveal Himself unto men, Whom magnifying together with the Heavenly Hosts, we call thee blessed.

O, how shall I look upon the unseen? How shall I endure its dread sight? How shall I dare to open my eyes? How shall I

presume to look upon my Master, Whom I have never ceased to grieve from my youth?

O holy Maiden, Mother of God: Look thou mercifully on my humility, accept this my compunctionate and final prayer, and make haste to deliver me from the tormenting, eternal fire.

Having defiled the holy temples, and having left the defiled bodily temple, my soul entreats thee, O all-pure Temple of God, O Maiden and Virgin Mother, that it may escape the outer darkness and cruel fire of Gehenna.

Glory....

Seeing the end of my life draw nigh and considering my unseemly thoughts and deeds, O all-pure One, the arrows of conscience cruelly wound my troubled soul. But, mercifully incline thyself to me and be thou my Protectress.

Now and ever....

The Son gavest Himself, out of mercy, for us—the Son of God and King of the Angels, the Pre-eternal Man that proceeded forth from thy pure blood. Do thou conciliate Him, O Maiden, on behalf of my suffering soul that is cruelly torn from my wretched body.⁸⁶



⁸⁶ *The Great Book of Needs*, vol. 3 (South Canaan, 2002), pp. 75–82. Reproduced with kind permission of the publisher.

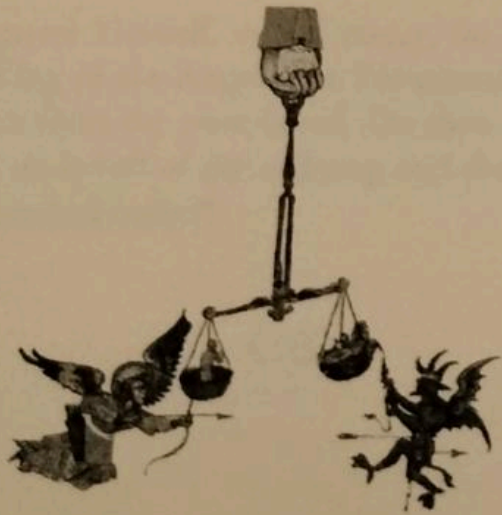


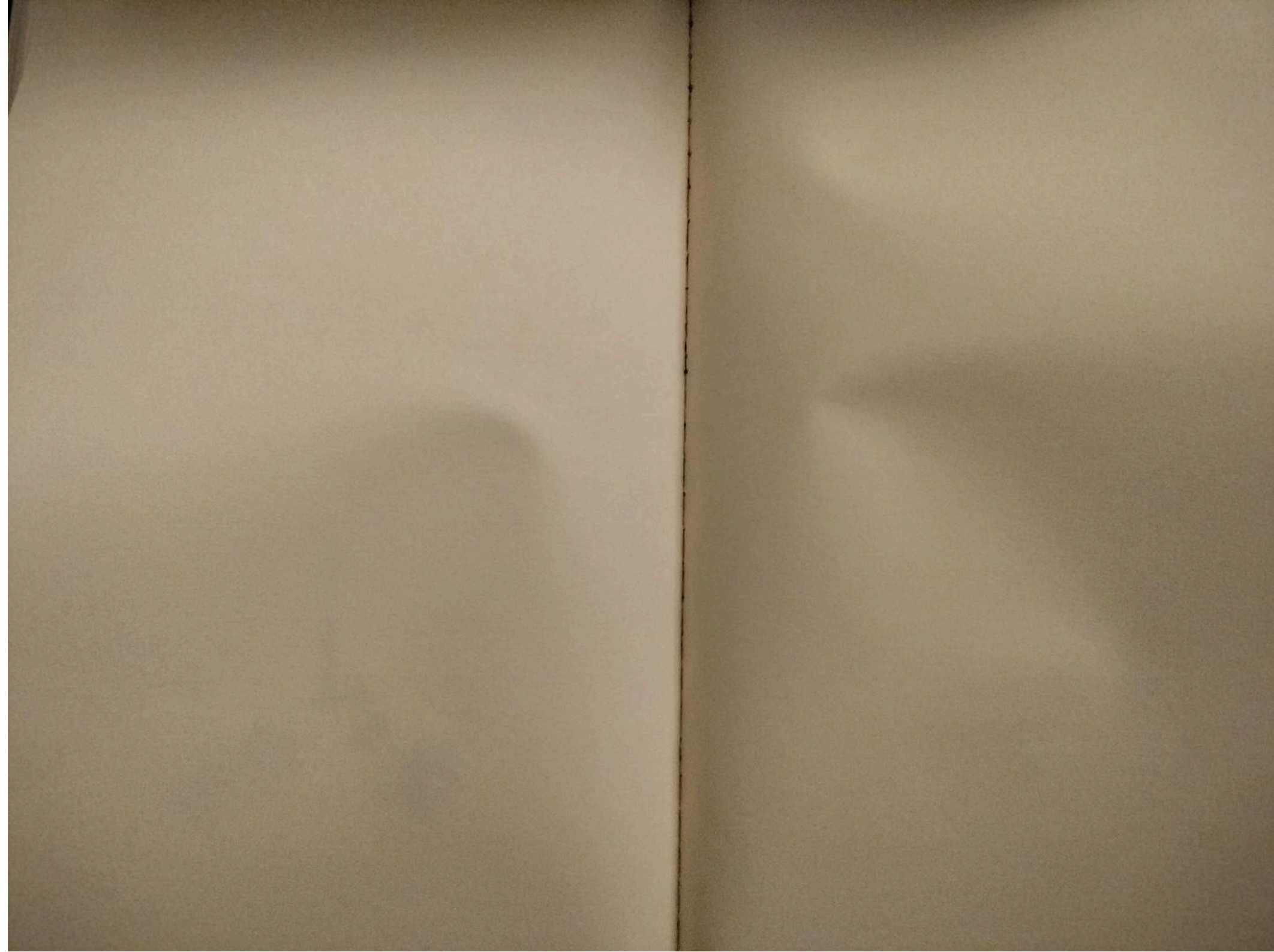
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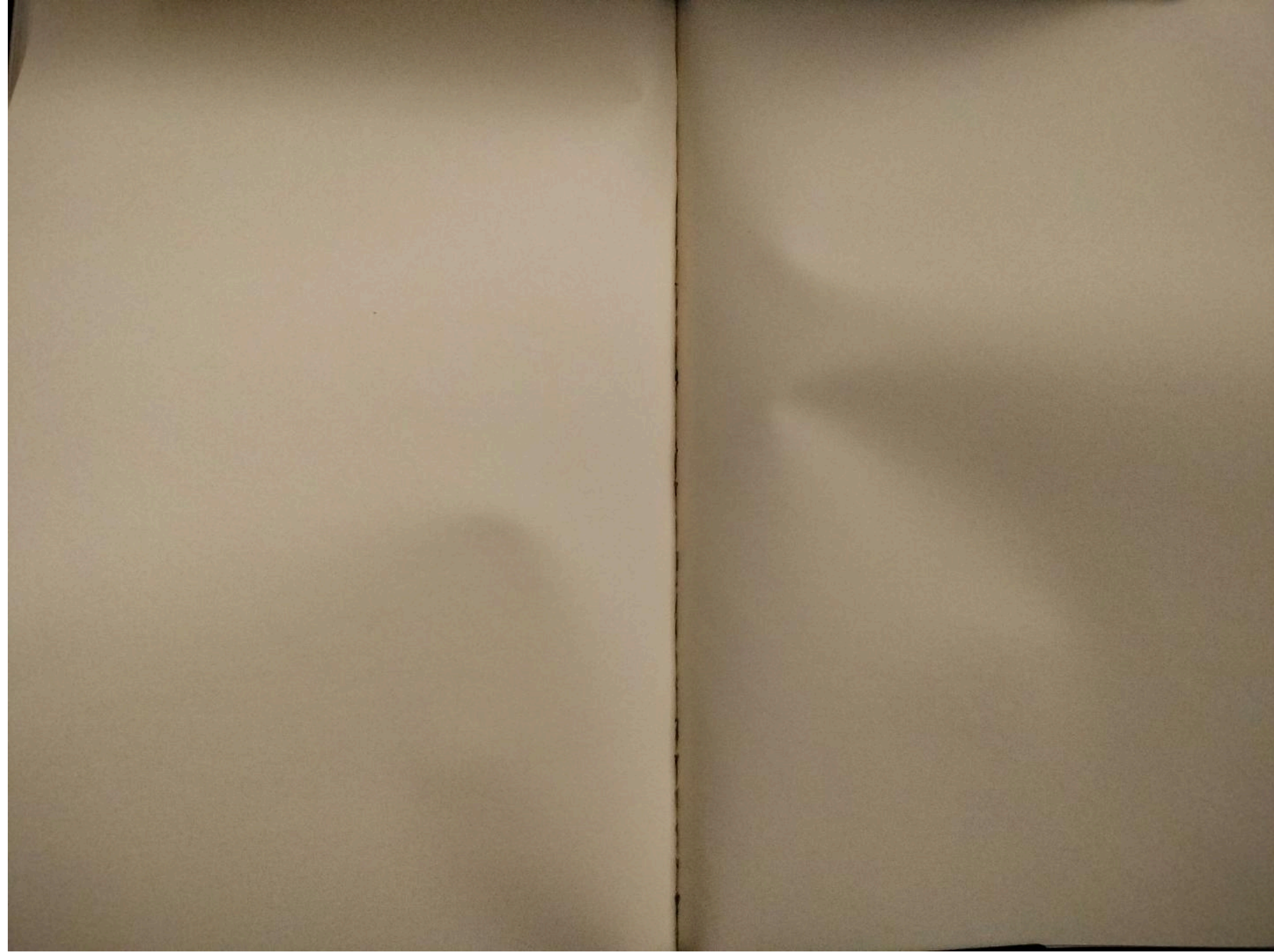
According to the Teaching of the Orthodox Church
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*Glory to God
for all things.*









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On The Departure of the Soul Master Reference Edition

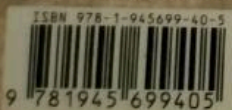
What happens to our soul at the hour of its departure from this world? What is waiting for us in the next life? Are we ready for the final journey to the meeting with God?

The most certain thing in life is death. It is the bridge that all of us—whether young or old, rich or poor—must cross. And yet so few have sure knowledge of what happens at that hour, the most critical hour of our existence.

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Death must find us ready. The saints will help us to be prepared.

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