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Doctor of the Universal Church

The Prayer Book of St. Gregory of Narek

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

Grigor Narekatsi, Saint (951-1003) (Gregory of Narek) Girk' aghot' its = Book of Prayer
also known as Matean oghbergut' ean = Book of Lamentations

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart: The Armenian Prayer Book of St. Gregory of Narek

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Lord, teach us to pray
—Luke 11:1

Contents

INTRODUCTION i

TENETS OF PRAYER 1

Prayer 1 1

Prayer 2 4

Prayer 3 9

Prayer 4 13

Prayer 5 16

Prayer 6 19

Prayer 7 22

Prayer 8 24

Prayer 9 26

Prayer 10 29

Prayer 11 32

Prayer 12 36

Prayer 13 39

Prayer 14 41

Prayer 15 44

Prayer 16 48

Prayer 17 50

Prayer 18 53

Prayer 19 58

Prayer 20 62

Prayer 21 66

Prayer 22 69

Prayer 23 71

Prayer 24 74

Prayer 25 77

Prayer 26 81

Prayer 27 84

Prayer 28 88

Prayer 29 93

Prayer 30 97

Prayer 31 101

Prayer 32 105
Prayer 33 109
Prayer 34 114
Prayer 35 121
Prayer 36 124
Prayer 37 126
Prayer 38 129
Prayer 39 132
Prayer 40 134
Prayer 41 136
Prayer 42 137
Prayer 43 138
Prayer 44 140
Prayer 45 142
Prayer 46 145
Prayer 47 148
Prayer 48 150
Prayer 49 156
Prayer 50 159
Prayer 51 163
Prayer 52 167
Prayer 53 169
Prayer 54 173
Prayer 55 176
Prayer 56 180
Prayer 57 183
Prayer 58 186
Prayer 59 188
Prayer 60 190
Prayer 61 197
Prayer 62 202
Prayer 63 205
Prayer 64 210
Prayer 65 213

Prayer 66 217
Prayer 67 223
Prayer 68 226
Prayer 69 231
Prayer 70 234
Prayer 71 237
Prayer 72 243
Prayer 73 246
Prayer 74 249
Prayer 75 252
Prayer 76 266
Prayer 77 269
Prayer 78 272
Prayer 79 275
Prayer 80 279
Prayer 81 282
Prayer 82 285
Prayer 83 290
Prayer 84 295
Prayer 85 297
Prayer 86 299
Prayer 87 301
Prayer 88 304
Prayer 89 307
Prayer 90 308
Prayer 91 313
Prayer 92 317
Prayer 93 327
Prayer 94 353
Prayer 95 355
Postscript Dedication on the Composition of this Book 357
ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR 359
ABOUT THIS BOOK 359

INTRODUCTION

A thousand years ago St. Gregory of Narek (951-1003) set out, with much trepidation, on a sublime mission to translate the pure sighs of the "broken and contrite" heart[1] into an offering of words pleasing to God. Beginning each prayer with the incantation "speaking with God from the depths of the heart," he referred to himself as "a living book (Prayer 39b)" and to his book as a compendium of prayers for all times and nations[2] – "a testament . . . its letters like my body, its message like my soul (Prayer 54e)." Thus, the man equated himself with the book, and ever since, the book has been equated with this saintly man.[3] So the book like the man came to be known affectionately as *Narek*.

Narek – the Book

The Narek was written in the last years of St. Gregory's life when he appears to have been suffering from a debilitating, terminal illness.[4] Toward the end he wrote, "and although I shall die in the way of all mortals, may I be deemed to live through the continued existence of this book. This book will cry out in my place, with my voice, as if it were me (Prayer 88b-c)." So powerfully have these prayers cried out to the Armenian faithful that for centuries they have been worn as healing relics and placed under the pillows of the infirm. Indeed it was one of the earliest and most often reprinted Armenian books, with more than 50 printings between 1673 and 1875, testifying to the power of the book and the size, level and appetite of the Armenian readership.[5] Although he wrote in Classical Armenian, the language of Armenian Church rites to this day, St. Gregory believed he was inspired to write this book for all people and hoped that it would be translated and recited by many nations, by people of all stations and in all times. (Prayer 3b, 55a, 66a, 90f). This translation, offered with trepidation – for St. Gregory is among the most sacred names in Armenian letters – is a small contribution to the realization of his act of faith.

St. Gregory's *Book of Prayer,* also sometimes called the *Book of Lamentations.* [6] The book is known in Armenian as *Girk aghotits* (literally, 'book of prayer') or Matean *voghbergutyan* (literally 'book of tragedy or lamentation'). 'Lamentation' is one possible translation of the Armenian word *voghbergutyun*, which also can be translated as 'tragedy,' as it has been translated into French. In the second line of the first prayer St. Gregory gives a clue as to why this book might be a tragedy and from whose perspective. For God, the Seer of Secrets, our failure to recognize our sins and our attempts to conceal them are tragic. It might be compared to the experience of an audience seeing the flaws, infidelities and betrayals of the characters on stage, while the characters usually do not, until it is too late.

The *Book of Prayer* occupies a unique place in the religious writing of the Armenian Church and the church universal. It has been compared with David's *Psalms* and Augustine's *Confessions*, and bears some resemblance to the *Hymns* of St. Gregory's Byzantine contemporary Simeon the New Theologian, and the *Hymns* of the fourth-century saint, Ephrem the Syrian. Like the *Psalms,* it is a work of universal worship, and like the *Confessions,* it is a personal effort of the heart in search of reconciliation with God. In their quantity and quality the Prayers are especially reminiscent of the Psalms, that paradigmatic work of inspired prayer, praise, confession and worship, which are a staple of liturgical life in the Armenian Church. St. Gregory spoke of the Psalms in terms similar to his prayer book: "songs of everything for the pure in heart: a testament of life, written for all people (Prayer 51c)." Indeed, several of St. Gregory's prayers are meditations on the Psalms (Prayers 60-62) and the phrase "sighs of the heart" has its roots in several Psalms, (Ps. 38:9-10; Ps. 6:7, Ps. 51:17), as further developed in the Letters of Paul, e.g., Rom. 8:26.

The Narek is a comprehensive course of prayer and meditation based on a distillation of biblical wisdom and Christian doctrine. Where some theologians analyzed with the head, St. Gregory plumbed the depths of the heart in search of God's loving truth. It is the difference between reading an article about a person, and

learning about that person by talking to him directly.[7] As he notes in his Prologue, the book was designed to be an applied synthesis of theology and worship, a handbook for the spiritual development of ordinary Christians and monastics the world over. It is like a rule of spiritual formulated as an experiential exercise. The theoretical indoctrination and instruction is ingeniously implicit and designed to be inculcated by the practice of learning to pray.

The Narek is a masterpiece of intuitive and direct communion with God. According to tradition, St. Gregory saw God, to which he gives witness in Prayers 5c and 27f, where he regrets his wrongdoing "toward the one, whom I saw with my own eyes." St. Gregory also testifies that the book, an "edifice of faith." (Prayer 10b), was written by the finger of God and it was, it appears, his second attempt to compose the book : "I destroyed with my own hand the golden tables of speech, dedicated to your message, written by the finger of God.[8] That was true destruction. And now, with ashen-faced sorrow, I provide a second copy, made in its likeness. (Prayer 34j)."

The Narek is also an expression of the universal human search for reconciliation with the divine through a sacrifice pleasing to God. Like the Old Testament prophets, St. Gregory seeks to know how to communicate with God: "With what shall I come before the Lord?" He understands that the Lord requires "not burnt offerings, or thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil," but "to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God (Mic. 6:6)." The sacrifice pleasing to God, as the Psalmist teaches in Psalm 51, which is recited daily in the Armenian Church, is a "broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:15-20)." *The Narek* aims to express in a new and comprehensive way the New Testament "sacrifice of the Word," accompanied and symbolized by the ethereal fragrances of rising incense, which he compares with the Old Testament sacrifice of the fatted calf in rich smoke.[9]

A man of St. Gregory's erudition and spiritual depth could have written speculative, theological tracts. Instead, in a pastoral way he chose the practical application of his inspiration to compose prayers for saving souls. The result is a bold synthesis of the Old and New Testaments and an encyclopedic prayer book for use by people of all stations and conditions of life. As he explains the Prologue,[10] "this Book of Prayer expresses practical words born of much grief . . . written in response to the requests of hermit fathers and the multitude in the desert (Tenets of Prayer)."[11] In a sense, the entire *Book of Prayer* is a search for a way to teach prayer by example, like that of the Apostles when they asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1)." In short, these are prayers aimed at learning how to pray.

> And with help from our heavenly Father
> who has granted salvation and healing
> to a failing sinner near death,
> I begin this book of prayers with supplications.
> I will build an edifice of faith. (Prayer 10b)

Drawing on the Old and New Testaments, he wrote a new book of psalms, which were the staple of daily worship in monastic communities:

> A new book of psalms sings with urgency through me
> for all thinking people the world over
> expressing all human passions
> and serving with its images
> as an encyclopedic companion to our human condition
> for the entire, mixed congregation of the Church universal. (Prayer 3b)

St. Gregory knew and understood the universal, timeless nature of his *Book of Prayer*, "written for the masses of different nations (Prayer 34a)."

> Let the perfume, the bouquet of this book of confessions
> be redoubled and affect multitudes
> and let it be remembered everywhere, filling the world like
> the fragrant oil in the house of Lazarus.[12] (Prayer 33b)
>
> I have all earthly ills and thus can serve as an
> emissary offering prayers for the whole world. (Prayer 28b)
>
> On the wings of my soul I have soared
> through endless generations of humankind. (Prayer 55a)

Narek – the Man

St. Gregory was a devoted son of the Church. He believed that the Church had a special mission and hoped that his book would help deliver that message: "as I was conceived and born in the womb of the Church . . . I now should address the great and immaculate queen . . . my glorious mother, so she may be known and proclaimed and the extent of her venerable glory might be told to the nations in the future (Prayer 75a)." Having lost his mother when he was a child, he loved the Church like a mother: "This spiritual, heavenly mother of light cared for me as a son more than an earthly, breathing, physical mother could (Prayer 75k)."

St. Gregory was the son of Bishop Khosrov Andzevatsi. He was from a family of scholars at the Monastery of Narek, on the south-eastern shore of Lake Van, near his birthplace, home to the magnificent, newly built 10th-century island cathedral of Aghtamar.[13] He grew up in atmosphere infused with ritual and Bible study. Born in 951 shortly before the first millennium of Christianity, he followed his father and his uncle, the Abbot Anania, into Narek Monastery as did his brother Hovhannes, who later helped St. Gregory with the *Book of Prayer*. Abbot Anania was an original thinker and teacher, founder of one of the pillars of Armenian mysticism.

St. Gregory lived during the Armenian Renaissance, a lull between conquests, when Armenians had enough peace to enjoy several generations of accumulated learning and creativity.[14] These were the triumphant days of Ani, Armenia's "capital city of a thousand and one churches" on the banks of the Akhurian River, before the brutal westward invasions of the Turkic and Mongol nomads from Central Asia. With a population of over 100,000, Ani was a large city by the standards of the times, rivaling the Mediterranean metropolitan centers in Constantinople, Cairo and Baghdad.[15] Armenian creativity flourished with church-building, miniature painting, music, literature, science, and theology, of which St. Gregory was a guiding light. The national epic, David of Sassoon, also took shape at this time as a new expression of national consciousness.[16] It was also a time of religious ferment. In the West, the Byzantines and Romans parted ways over various religious issues that led to the Great Schism. In Armenia, break-away groups, the Tondrakians and Paulicians, were spreading heretical views. When Narek was fifty, the invading Seljuk Turks brought the world as he had known it to a close. Any scholar of his stature and sensitivity could not remain unaffected by the civilization crumbling around him. Moreover, his father and uncle earned the ire of the church hierarchy for being independent thinkers. According to some commentators, their views may have implicated them in certain canonical disputes, which St. Gregory had to wrestle with throughout his life.[17] Church tradition relates that, in his old age, he was called before a religious tribunal to defend his adherence to accepted doctrine. On this occasion he prepared a work, called the *Root of Faith*, once

thought lost, but which appears to have been preserved in five doctrinal prayers of the *Narek* (Prayers 33, 34, 75, 92, 93).[18]

That sense of guilt and suspicion is expressed by St. Gregory in numerous ways, for example:

> If I see a soldier, I expect death,
> a messenger, punishment,
> a clerk, foreclosure,
> a jurist, condemnation,
> an evangelist, the shaking of the dust off his feet,[19]
> a pious person, reprimand,
> a snob, sarcasm (Prayer 23c)

In a way, he responded creatively to this hostility and destruction by building an "edifice of faith" (Prayer 10a) that could not be destroyed – a fortress of images, a church of words, a sanctuary for the heart, and a method of atonement for wrongs.

The reverence for St. Gregory was already evident in his life time and his sainthood was recognized by his contemporaries. He is referred to as St. Gregory in the earliest extant manuscript of the *Book of Prayer* (Matenadaran Ms. 1568, dated 1173), copied and illuminated by the scribe and miniaturist Grigor Skevratsi, containing a hagiography of St. Gregory written by St. Nerses Lambronatsi (1153-1198). During his own life, he was looked upon as a great teacher: "I was dubbed, 'Master,' which testifies against me.[20] I was called, 'Teacher, teacher,' (Prayer 72d)." In the manner of the saintly, his unworthiness was ever before him: "There is another ache in my heart, for they consider me to be something I am not. (Prayer 27f)."[21] He was uncomfortable with this reverence: "I was called by the highest names, but by my works I earned the worst of these descriptions (Prayer 56a)."

These are the reflection of his doubt, his fear, his shame and his cognizance of the futility and human inadequacy inherent in translating into words the sighs of the heart already known to all-knowing God.[22]

Narek: A Cure for Body and Soul

For St. Gregory, prayer was powerful medicine for the body and soul (Prayer 28f, 35a, 42b, 43b). And he was in need of powerful medicine. Like the world around him, his body was collapsing, while he was besieged by doubt from within and criticism from without. The work of his mature years, various passages in the *Book of Prayer* seem to indicate that St. Gregory, although only in his fifties, was suffering from a life-threatening, debilitating illness (Prayer 18k).[23]

> I lie here on a cot, struck down by evil,
> sinking in a mattress of disease and torment,
> like the living dead yet able to speak.
> O kind Son of God,
> have compassion upon my misery. (Prayer 18g)

That torment of body and soul combined, as the Psalmist wrote, to evoke "the sighs of the heart," the raw material of his prayers: "For my soul is filled with torment, and there is no cure for my body. I am tortured and laid low in the extreme, and I groan with the sighs of my heart (Ps. 38:9-10)."

His pleas for God to be a healer, rather than judge are a recurrent theme of the *Book of Prayer*: "Treat me like a physician, rather than examining me like a judge (Prayers 23b, 79a)."[24] These pleas are particularly poignant given his physical condition. St. Gregory had a profound belief in the power of prayer to make us whole (e.g., Prayers 3e, 53c, 57a, 66a). He grasped the power of the book he was inspired to compose:

> And may you make this book of mournful psalms
> begun in your name, Most High, into a life-giving salve
> for the sufferings of body and soul. (Prayer 3e).

The prayers are woeful not because he laments a hard life or his lot, but because of his own sense of inadequacy for his calling. He expresses this in striking imagery when speaking of "this book of woes, my testament of prayers":

> If I were to fill the basin of the sea with ink
> and to measure out parchment the length and breadth of a field of many leagues
> and were to take all the reeds of the forests and woods and turn them into pens,
> I still would not be able to record even a fraction
> of my accumulated wrong-doings.
> If I were to set the Cedars of Lebanon as a scale
> and to put Mount Ararat on one side and my iniquities on the other,
> it would not come close to balancing. (Prayer 9a)

Though deathly ill, he does not ask, "why me, why now?" He does not lament his plight. Rather he laments his unworthiness for God's grace and his own ingratitude and disobedience before God's good will. Shifting seamlessly between the individual and the universal he equates his ingratitude with that of humankind: "God spoke, but who listened? He himself gave witness, but who believed? (Prayer 28d)." He characterized his own unruliness in a colorful image, comparing himself to "a talking horse with a callous mouth, breaking my reins and shaking off my bit (Prayer 22b)."[25]

It was a heavy burden, enough to break body and soul and to leave him feeling forlorn, yet never beyond God's care:

> This image of destruction reminds me of my misery,
> like a captain mourning his ship,
> chin in hand,[26] tears streaming down,
> viewing traces of the wreckage
> bobbing on the crest of the waves.
> My slain sanity sobs with pitiful grief.
> I did not stray from the truth,
> in selecting these words to mourn
> the shattered ark of my intellect.
> For the Good Captain with his heavenly host
> took pity on the sea of humanity in just this way. (Prayer 25c)

Toward the end of the book, he expresses his doubt of reaching old age. This translates into anxiety that he will not have the strength or time to complete his work or his penance (Prayers 82f, 83b, 85a, 86c, 87b, 91b, 91c)[27] in order to realize his hope for deliverance (Prayer 92i) and attain restoration to the light, properly prepared for death (Prayer 94, 95).

Prayer 18, which has been adopted by the Armenian Church as part of its ritual of healing and prayer for the infirm, addresses the torment of terminal illness:

> And because the torments of my infirmities
> surpass even these examples,
> and like a spreading cancer
> have touched all the parts of my body,
> there is no salve as there was none for Israel, [28]
> for my innumerable sores.
> Every part of my body from head to toe [29]
> is unhealthy and beyond the help of physicians.
> But you, merciful, beneficent, blessed,
> long-suffering, immortal King,
> hear the prayers of my embattled heart for mercy,
> when I cry out to you, "Lord,"
> in my time of need.[30] (Prayer 18k)

Translating the Sighs of Wonder, Fear, Gratitude, Regret and Longing

St. Gregory gives many clues to the purpose and inspiration for his work. His primary aim was to translate the sound of the heart's sighs into an offering of words to God:[31]

> The voice of a sighing heart,
> its sobs and mournful cries,
> I offer up to you, O Seer of Secrets,
> placing the fruits of my wavering mind,
> as a savory sacrifice on the fire of my grieving soul
> to be delivered to you in the censer of my will.
>
> Compassionate Lord, breathe in
> this offering and look more favorably on it
> than upon a more sumptuous sacrifice
> rich with smoke. Please find
> this simple string of words acceptable.
> Do not turn in anger. (Prayer 1).

He knew that he could not do this alone and that he was not without help or hope. He was a pliant instrument of God's will:

> You, the potter, and I, the clay,[32]
> Show me, hesitating at the threshold of these contrite prayers,
> the sweetness of your will. (Prayer 2b)

Faced with the awesome task of communicating with the One who knows our every thought yet is willing to listen, is cause for a sighs of wonder, fear, gratitude and regret. Indeed at the beginning of the Armenian Divine Liturgy upon ascending the altar, the deacon incants: "Why are you downcast, my soul?" (Prayers

44b, 82d, Ps. 46:2). St. Paul also addressed this sense of inadequacy: "likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words, and he who searches the hearts of men knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26)." In a similar way, St. Gregory offered "his testament of woes," on the one hand, fearful that his effort to translate the pure feelings of the heart into words would be inadequate (Prayers 1, 2, 32c, 37c, 47a, 70d), and on the other hand, filled with wonder at God's willingness to receive our prayers telling Him what He already knows more perfectly than we could ever express it (Prayers 37c, 47a, 66b). In the words of the Hymn of the Angels from the Armenian Divine Liturgy: "You are surrounded by the choirs of angels, yet you deign to accept this offering by humans."

The sighs of regret are closely linked to his wonder at God's forgiveness and all-powerful love. St. Gregory characterized the power of confessional prayer in a striking image:

> For a small teardrop from the eye
> can cause an entire evil platoon of the Tempter's army to shrink away
> . . .
> And the faint groan of a sighing heart, rising from the soul,
> is like a warm southerly breeze, mixed with sun,
> that melts the fiercest blizzard . . . (Prayer 7a)[33]

He sighed in wonder at the infinite goodness and power of God:

> And when our resources are exhausted
> you perform the greatest miracles. (Prayer 53a)
>
> What is impossible for me is easy for you.
> What is beyond my reach is grasped by you.
> What is hidden for me in my fallen state
> is within view for your supreme goodness.
> What is undoable for me is done by you. (Prayer 57a)
>
> In the face of my evil you are good.
> In the face of my indebtedness, you are forgiving.
> In the face of my sinfulness, you are indulgent.
> In the face of my darkness, you are light.
> In the face of my mortality, you are life. (Prayer 58b)

Still the impulse to speak and reconnect with God is overwhelming. "I long not so much for the gifts as for the Giver. I yearn not so much for the glory as the Glorified (Prayer 12b)." That impulse was urgent, since regret delayed could mean absolution denied: "The sighs of the heart that are not delivered now may not be accepted later (Prayer 79d)."

The Narek as a Guide to Worship

St. Gregory aimed to create an "edifice of faith."[34] He believed strongly in the church and the need for communal worship (Prayer 75j). His writings have taken their place as jewels in the rites of the Armenian

Church. The power of his prayers was recognized by the Church and enshrined in the daily services and feast-day celebrations of the Armenian faithful.[35] Every day some part of his inspired writings are recited in the Armenian Church, for example, the priest's private prayer upon ascending the altar for the Divine Liturgy:

> We beseech you with outstretched arms, with tears and sobbing prayers.
> Appearing before you, judge who strikes terror in our hearts,
> we approach with great trembling and grave fear,
> presenting first this sacrificial offering of words to your power
> that is beyond understanding. (Prayer 33f).

Like other sacred books, the *Book of Prayer* has an internal structure that makes it profitable to read from beginning to end. Or like an encyclopedia, it can be consulted for appropriate advice at specific spiritual junctures in our lives. In the course of the centuries, clergy and laity have created a kind of index to the prayers for different circumstances, for example (passages that stand alone as prayers or meditations are in bold with specific section citations):

against natural disasters	3, 63, 88, 89, 92
against Satan	**66e, 90d**
angels	**81**
apostles	**82**
Christ's passion	27, 28, 36, 37, 44, 52, 58, 66, 67, 77, 86, 88, 89
Church	**75a**
comfort, mercy	**66b, 83f**, **90a, 91b, 91c**
death/judgment	1, 2, 7, 20, 23, 32, 37, 39, 40, 65, 66, 67, **72c,** 73, 74, **77b**, 79, **79b**, 80, 81, **82f**, 91, 95
faith	10, 11, 13, 34, 44, 75, **85a**
God's might	**57a, 70c**
good death	2, **65c**, 67, 73, 80, 85, **95a**
healing	3, 14, **14c**, 17, 18, 25, **25c**, 35, **42b,** 43, **43b,** 48, **48a,** 63, 64, 66, **79a**
hope and love	2, 12, 34, 37, 42, 49, **51b**, **58b**, 65, **66d**, **70d**, **79d**, 88, **92i**, **93b, 93f, 93j**
Incarnation	**34e, 77d**
monks	**72**
pardon	4, 15, 20, **20a**, 24, 32, **37c**, **38c**, 40, 47, 49, 50, **53e**, 57, **74c**, **76a, 83b**
peril, protection	**54d, 59c**
post-communion	1, 5, 14, 67, 95
praise	**9d, 16a, 53a, 84a, 94a**
prayer	**2c**, **53c**, **55b, 82d, 85b**
prayer, evening	12, 31, 91, 93
prayer, morning	40, 84, 85, 92
pre-communion	4, 5, 14, 33, 47, 82, 84
repentance	7, 8, 22, **26c**, 27, **28b**, **38d**, **45a, 55c, 55d, 56a, 67b,** 71, 71a, **72c, 78c, 79**
saints	31, 70, 71, 82, **82c,** 86, 87, 91
sonship	**47b**
the Trinity	**28l, 34h, 44a**
the Virgin Mary	26, 80, **80c**

For those who wish to approach *The Narek* as a course in prayer or spiritual development, commentators have suggested that it may be useful to think of the book metaphorically as an "edifice of faith," to be entered just as a person going to church.[36] In this sense, *The Narek* could be viewed as a kind of sequel to the *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* written by St. Gregory's father, Bishop Khosrov Andzevatsi.

Worshipers start their journey toward church as converts or penitents, at the entrance or vestibule of the church, where since early Christian times the catechumens were required to stay. A vestige of this practice is still evident in the Deacon's instruction to the congregation in Armenian Divine Liturgy: *Let none of the catechumens, skeptics, or penitents approach the Divine Mystery*. On the porch, vestibule, or *gavit* of the church, the worshiper prepares for reconciliation and communion with God (Prayers 1-33). Next, the worshiper enters into the church (Prayers 34-52), proclaiming the confession of faith and petitioning for grace and judgment in preparation for communion. The worshiper then prepares for communion with prayers for atonement, Prayers 53-64. Having taken communion, the worshiper prays in anticipation of judgment. Here, in addition to universal prayers, St. Gregory composes prayers anticipating his own death (Prayers 65-74). Church-going leads to prayers for the Church, the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the angels, apostles, and saints, and finally prayers in preparation for death and life eternal (Prayers 75-90), which culminate, if only for a brief moment, in the nexus with the eternal – the ecstatic moment and contemplation of things to come. This moment is captured in two special instructional prayers: one on the wooden bell that calls us to worship like the trumpet on the Day of Judgment (Prayer 92) and the other dedicated to the holy chrism, used for baptism, ordination, consecrations and extreme unction before death (Prayer 93), which are followed by the dawning of the everlasting day of light in the kingdom of the just sun (Prayers 94, 95).

The Fragrant Sacrifice of Words

For St. Gregory, prayers are not only meant to enlighten or to serve as a means of communication with God. They are also meant to be things of sincere beauty made of thoughts and words – thoughts and words being the best offering that could be given by the creature God honored with his image and endowed with the higher faculties of cognition and speech. As St. Paul said of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "I have all and abound: I am full . . . an odor of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God (Phil. 4:18)."[37] St. Gregory explains the experience of grace and inspiration as "the thunderbolt of wisdom . . . upon the movements of my tongue . . . that I might offer thanks to You with unfailing voice and unbroken speech (Prayer 22e)."

His incantational style of cascading verses[38] and Homeric listings[39] contribute to making these prayers charming in the etymological sense of the word. They exude grace. As the Evangelist Luke wrote, "Out of the good treasure of his heart the good man produces good . . . for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:46)." That grace is expressed in the vividness, abundance and variety of images that St. Gregory employs to turn the ineffable sighs of the heart into human words of prayer to God.[40]

His images cover a wide range of recurrent metaphors. For example, he often uses the image of a field and weeds, a common theme from the Gospels,[41] or the ship wreck and the sea.[42] Some of the other most common images are horses,[43] pottery,[44] judgment,[45] debts/mortgages,[46] and healing salves and remedies.[47] Following the Gospels, St. Gregory constructs "word pictures" and uses parabolic language[48] to make the invisible graphic, the ineffable expressible, the obscure clear, and the unknowable graspable.

The generosity of images, language and metaphor is striking, as St. Gregory transcribes his vision of the object of his adoration and contemplation into a rapid sequence of phrases from a wide range of perspectives.

> Spare me that I may not
> labor without birth,
> sigh without tears,
> meditate without voice,
> cloud without rain,
> struggle without reaching,
> call without being heard,
> implore without being heeded,
> groan without being comforted,
> beg without being helped,
> smolder without aroma,[49]
> see you without being fulfilled. (Prayer 2c)

> Two cups in two hands,
> one filled with blood, the other with milk,
> two censers flickering,
> one with incense, the other with crisp fat,
> two platters piled with delicacies,
> one sweet, the other tart,
> two goblets overflowing
> one with tears, the other with brimstone,
> two bowls at the finger tips
> one with wine, the other with bile,
> two windows of sight
> one crying, the other erring,
> two refiner's cauldrons
> one heating, one cooling,
> two outlooks on one face
> one mildly affectionate, the other fiercely raging,
> two lifted hands
> one to strike, the other to shield, (Prayer 30c)

The piling on of metaphors and similes and the repetition of formulaic contrasts and paradoxes are entrancing. The repetition and variations of sound and ideas set up a two-fold resonance, within the text and between the text and the reader/listener. Each image in the text casts light on the other, and each speaks to different people at different times in different ways:

> Look at me,
> I am
> unworthy of good, undeserving of favor,
> incapable of love, drawn in by the strands of sin,
> wounded in the depth of my inner organs,
> a broken palm tree,
> spilled wine,
> damp wheat,

breached mortgage,
ripped up verdict,
counterfeit seal,
deformed image,
singed garment,
lost goblet,
sunken ship,
crushed pearl,
buried gem,
dried up plant,
broken beam,
rotten wood,
mutilated mandrake,
collapsed roof,
dilapidated altar,
uprooted plant,
oily filth on the street,
milk flowing through ash,
a dead man in the battalion of the brave. (Prayer 67b)

The prayers are designed to calm and focus the distracted and distraught mind of the person at prayer. Because of the variety and quantity of images, they constantly delight, so we do not lose the strand of the prayer – even in moments of distraction, which are only human. For in the next phrase a similar idea is presented from a new perspective that refocuses the mind and reconnects it with the central impulse of the message. St. Gregory designed them to be rhetorically highly textured, liturgical prayers, meant to assist in that most difficult task of translating the sighs of the heart into an offering acceptable to God.

Only you can turn the discouragement of blame
into joyous praise,
shame into resilience,
humility into honor,
banishment into the hope of goodness,
separation into the expectation of reunion,
threats into consolation,
final condemnation into a second chance at deliverance. (Prayer 73a)

They also have a liturgical flavor and purpose. For example,

For yours is salvation,
and from you is redemption,
and by your right hand is restoration,
and your finger is fortification.
Your command is justification.
Your mercy is liberation.
Your countenance is illumination.
Your face is exultation.
Your spirit is benefaction.
Your anointing oil is consolation.
A dew drop of your grace is exhilaration.

You give comfort.
You make us forget despair.
You lift away the gloom of grief.
You change the sighs of our heart into laughter. (Prayer 9d)

Some also have the flavor of proverbial wisdom, good counsel for a good life:

As the Good Book foretold[50]
alien, evil forces stole the wise treasure of my heart.
Wisdom waned in me, as the Proverb-teller says,
and evil impulses grew.[51]
I did not fix the eye of my soul on the head of my life, Christ,
who would have led me down the straight path.
For in trying to run too quickly, I dug myself in deeper.
In trying to reach the unreachable, I failed to reach my own level.
In pretending to greatness, I slipped from where I was.
From the heavenly path, I sank to the abyss.[52]
Trying to avoid harm, I was permanently debilitated.
Trying to be completely pure, I was corrupted completely.
I dodged to the left, and left myself open from the right.
Chasing the second, I lost the first.
Seeking the insignificant, I forfeited the important.
Keeping the small vow, I broke the covenant.
Trying to break a habit, I picked up a vice.
Avoiding the petty, I fell prey to the weighty.
What I did, I did to myself,
which is the worst testimony against me.
Only you are able to deliver me, a captive slave, from these things,
restoring to life a soul devoted to death.
For you alone, Lord Christ, revered as Doer of Good,
with the boundless glory of the Father and the Holy Spirit are
blessed forever and ever.
Amen. (Prayer 55f)

And they are replete with doctrinal explanations, as one might expect of a scholar of St. Gregory's erudition and a holy man of his depth: [53]

Three persons, one mystery,
separate faces, unique and distinct,
made one by their congruence and
being of the same holy substance and nature,
unconfused and undivided,
one in will and one in action. (Prayer 13a)

We confess and profess, honor and worship
the shared glory and unity of the Holy Trinity,
Godhead beyond description, always good,
of the same substance, equal in honor,

beyond the flight of the wings of our thought,
higher than all examples, beyond all analogies,
surpassing the limits on high. (Prayer 34c)

Merely entering the vessel of the virgin womb purely,
and coming out joined with a body inseparable in essence,
without any flaw in his humanity and lacking nothing in divinity,
one and only Son of the only Father and
the first born of the Mother of God, Virgin Bearer of the Lord,
Creator becoming a true man as originally created,
not in the fallen state of mortals. (Prayer 34e)

As one would also expect, St. Gregory took the doctrinal explanation and turned it into an immediately comprehensible image, likening the relationship between human and divine in the incarnate Christ "to the wick in the candle."

You gave the oil, and in this oil you placed a wick,
which exemplifies your union, without imperfection, with our condition,
formed and woven with your love of humankind. (93b)

Longing for our Creator

Ultimately, the *Book of Prayer* is about the longing of humankind for our Creator and our need to communicate with God. It is a longing that gives rise to sighs from the heart, finding its consummation and resolution in death:

sun of justice,
ray of blessing,
cherished desire . . .
Let your light dawn,
your salvation be swift,
your help come in time
and the hour of your arrival be at hand. (Prayer 95a, c).

The *Book of Prayer* is packed with so many insights that an introduction cannot do more than entice readers to explore and find the treasure they seek. So as we move from the introduction to the work itself, may the benedictions of St. Gregory be upon us (Prayer 26d), both those who have copied this book through the centuries that we might partake of it and those who recite it out of their love of God, praying that God may "finish the meanderings of our wretched, errant voices with His own mighty words (Prayer 95a)" and that we may

receive a portion of the forgiveness of sin
and be restored to our former spotless purity,
sealed with God's unchanging image.
Amen. (Prayer 90f)

Thomas J. Samuelian
Yerevan, July 2001

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Prefatory Note to the 2017 Revised Edition

My special thanks goes to Archimandrite Thaddaeus Zirekyants, for his keen and careful suggestions for clarifying and correcting the translation. I have sought to make the translation readable and faithful to the original. Any shortcomings remain my own.

Thomas J. Samuelian
Yerevan, October 2017

Prefatory Note to the 2021 Revised Edition

Happily, Narek studies has evolved since 2001 when this translation was first published, especially since St. Gregory was proclaimed a Doctor of the Universal Church by the Vatican in 2015. Deeming these circumstances sufficient to warrant a new 20th anniversary edition, I have prepared this slightly "retouched" version, revising about 500 words in the close to 85,000 word text, drawing on new insights from the recent annotated translation into English by Prof. Abraham Terian (2021) and the Eastern Armenian translation by Fr. Mesrop Aramyan (2019), to both of whom I express my admiration and gratitude. Many thanks as well to the thoughtful readers who have kindly sent corrections and suggestions over the years to improve the translation. Consistent with the goal of my 2001 translation, I have sought to make this translation readable and faithful to the original. Any shortcomings, of course, remain my own.

Thomas J. Samuelian
Yerevan, December 2021

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[1] Ps. 51: 17; Ps. 38:9-10.
[2] See e.g., Prayer 34a ("written for the masses of all nations"); Prayers 55b, 49b.
[3] "And although I shall die in the way of all mortals, my I deemed to live through the continued existence of this book. This book will cry out in my place, with my voice, as it if were me." (Prayer 88b-c). See also Prayer 54e ("I leave readers this testament . . . its letters like my body, its message like my soul.").
[4] See Prayer 18k and the discussion relating to note 22 below.
[5] For a list of these early printings, see Critical Edition., pp. 197-231.
[6] This book has been referred to informally through the centuries as *The Narek*, based upon the practice of geographic epithets, whereby St. Gregory is known as Surb Grigor Narekatsi, St. Gregory of Narek. The earliest printed versions of the Book of Prayers were published under the title "The Book of Prayer of St. Gregory of Narek." It is also known as the Book of Lamentations because that is referred to in this way in the prologue, "The Tenets of Prayer." Although it is known by both names, *The Book of Prayer of St.* Gregory corresponds more closely to its content and the intent of the author. For this reason, it is entitled and referred to in this edition as "The Book of Prayer." Critical Edition, note 1, p. 973.
[7] Prayer 75d (intuition vs. rational approach to divine mystery).
[8] Ex. 32:19.
[9] See, e.g., Prayers 1a, 55b, 81b, 88b
[10] See Prayer 88.
[11] Commentators disagree on whether this was written by St. Gregory or whether it was composed by later scribes based on Prayer 88c. See also, Prayer 72a.
[12] Jn. 12:3, Mt. 26:13.
[13] *Hay mshakuyti nshanavor gortsichnerê*: 5-18 dar(Yerevan: Yerevan State University, 1976), q.v. Manuel Chartarapet, (Manuel the Architect)168-178.

[14] See, Postscript (colophon) to the *Book of Prayers*; V. K. Chaloyan, *Armyanskij renessans,* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1963) 122. Manuk Abegyan, *Istorija drevnearmjanskoj literatury,* (Yerevan: AN ArmSSR, 1975) 328-330; M. Mkryan, *Grigor Narekatsi* (Yerevan: Yerevan State University, 1955) 110; M. Mkryan, *Hay hin grakanutyan patmutyun* (Yerevan: Yerevan State University, 1976) 403.
[15] G. Matevosyan, *Ani*, (Holy Etchmiadzin, 1997) 179; T. V. Hakobyan, *Ani Mayrakaghak*, (Yerevan: Yerevan State University, 1988) 69.
[16] M. Mkryan, *Grigor Narekatsi* (Yerevan: Yerevan State University, 1955) 49.
[17] Poghos Khachatrian, *Grigor Narekatsi yev mijnadarê* (St. Etchmiadzin, 1996) 53.
[18] See, e.g. Samvel Poghosian, *Narekatsu Hetkerov* (Tbilisi: Merani, 1987), 16-18,21, 51, 66, citing the *Yaysmavurk*, q.v. Narekatsi, and Michael Chamchian, *Patmutyun Hayots*, vol. 2, p.1023. There is even a legend about his ordeal. According to that legend, on the day of his trial he asked for doves to be cooked for his meal, but when he found out that it was Friday, a meatless day, he ordered the doves to fly away and when the birds came to life and took flight, his accusers and judges were awestruck, and bowed in worship before the saint.
[19] Mt.10:14.
[20] Mt. 23:7, 8, 10.
[21] See also, Prayer 56a, 62a, 72d, 72e, 83e.
[22] See, e.g., "I lay open the grief of my soul, which is not totally dead to the world, but is not alive to God, in poetry neither especially hot, or particularly cold. (Prayer 26a)." Also, 1a, 2a, 21c, 22b (like a talking house with a callous mouth), 37b (the flawed immaturity of my soul), 44c (try ten thousand times still fall short), 47b (unworthy to be called son).
[23] For references to illness, see also, Prayers 19a, 32b, 25b, 25c, 28f, 35a, 42b, 43b, 64c, 69b, 69c, 79a.
[24] See also, Prayers 6c, 20e, 22b, 28b, 28d, 37b, 46a, 47b, 56a, 60b, 64c, 65c.
[25] Jas. 3:3.
[26] Job 21:5.
[27]Cf. the Prayer for Forgiveness after the Priest's Confession at the opening of the Armenian Divine Liturgy: "may he give you time to repent and to do good works."
[28]Wis. 16:12; Is. 1:6.
[29] Is. 1:6.
[30] Jon. 2:3.
[31] See Prayer 26a ("transposing my weeping into words").
[32] Is. 64:8, Jer. 18:6.
[33] See also, Prayer 50a.
[34] Prayer 10b.
[35] Prayer 18 is the prayer included in the healing service, traditionally credited with many miracles of healing and cure.
[36] This approach and division of *The Narek* as attending Church for Divine Liturgy, is based on various attempts to index and provide rubrics for the *Book of Prayer* (See Critical Edition, pp. 157-168), further elaborated in the new French translation that appeared as the present translation was going to press. See, Annie and Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Grégoire de Narek, Tragédie*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Louvain: Editions Peeters, 2000), pp. 199-202.
[37] See Prayer 1a.
[38] For examples of cascading verses, see, Prayers 2c, 9d, 16a, 25c, 27g, 29a, 31a, 32a, 49b, 51b, 54b, 67b, 76b, 77b, 78c, 80c, 81e, 87b, 87c, 88b, 90d.
[39] For examples of Homeric listings, see, Prayers 3, 29a, 27h, 29c, 45b, 48e, 56a, 67b, 83a, 84a, 89, 90a, 92j, 93r.
[40] St. Gregory's trepidation at the composition of his Book of Prayer is a recurrent theme of the prayers, e.g., Prayers 1a, 2c, 28b, 59a.
[41] See, e.g., Mt. 13:3-8, Mt. 24-31; Prayer 2c ("like the planter sowing seeds in vain into barren ground"); Prayer 15e ("the germs of sin spouting in tens of thousands upon the fertile field of our thorny natures"), Prayer 34b ("reasoning fields hardened by my heart").
[42] See, .e.g, Prayers 25b ("traces of the wreckage bobbing on the crest of the waves"), Prayer 32c ("helmsman of the soul"), 54d ("drowning"), 63c ("tossed on the sea"), 90a ("rudder of my will").
[43] See, e.g., Prayers 22b, 32c.
[44] See, e.g., Prayers 2b, 19a.
[45] See, e.g., Prayers 19c, 22d, 38c-d, 69a, 83b.
[46] See, e.g., Prayers 26b, 53e, 54a, 74c.
[47] See, e.g., Prayers 3e, 43b, 48a.
[48] See, e.g., Mt. 13:13.
[49] Lev. 3:3-5, 1 Sam. 2:15.
[50] Job 17:2 (Armenian version).

[51] Pr. 30:2-3.
[52] Is. 14:13-15.
[53] See Prayers 44 (Trinity doctrine), 47b, 75e (Trinity, incarnation, Christ creator), 77d (incarnation), 80c (Jesus creator), 93a (incarnation).

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TENETS OF PRAYER[1]

expressed in practical words born of much grief
on repentance
on counsel for the benefit of the soul,
on self-discipline,
on the rules of contrite living,
on dedication and commitment,
on exposing the unseen,
on confession of sins,
on disclosure of secrets,
on laying open of the covered up,
on reproach for the hidden.

powerful salves for incurable wounds,
effective medicines for invisible pains,
multi-symptom remedies for the pangs of turmoil,
for the passions of all temperaments,
occasions for tears, impulses to prayer,
prepared in response to the requests of
the hermit fathers and the multitude in the desert,
called the book of lamentations written
by the monk Gregory of Narek Monastery.

[1] See Prayer 88, ll. 43-49.

Prayer 1

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

The voice of a sighing heart, its sobs and mournful cries,[1]
I offer up to you, O Seer of Secrets,[2]
placing the fruits of my wavering mind[3]
as a savory sacrifice on the fire of my grieving soul[4]
to be delivered to you in the censer of my will.

Compassionate Lord, breathe in
this offering and look more favorably on it
than upon a more sumptuous sacrifice[5]
offered with rich smoke. Please find
this simple string of words acceptable.
Do not turn in disdain.

May this unsolicited gift reach you,
this sacrifice of words[6]
from the deep mystery-filled chamber
of my feelings, consumed in flames
fueled by whatever grace I may have within me.[7]

As I pray, do not let these
pleas annoy you, Almighty,
like the raised hands of Jacob,
whose irreverence was rebuked
by Isaiah,[8] nor let them seem like the impudence
of Babylon criticized in the 72nd Psalm.

But let these words be acceptable
as were the fragrant offerings
in the tabernacle at Shiloh[9]
raised again by David on his return from captivity
as the resting place for the ark
of the covenant, a symbol for
the restoration of my lost soul.

B

Because your stern judgment
echoes mightily in the valley of retribution,[10]
contradictory impulses in my soul
brace for battle like clashing mobs.
Crowds of thoughts strike each other, sword
against armor, evil against good,
ensnaring me for death, as in other times,

when your grace had not rescued me –
that grace of Christ, which Paul,
chosen among the apostles,
taught was greater than the law of Moses.[11]

For as the Scripture says, "The day
of the Lord is upon us,"[12]
and in the narrow valley of Jehoshaphat[13]
on the banks of the Kidron,[14]
those small battle grounds
foreshadow on earth
victory in the life to come.
Thus, the kingdom of God in a visible form
has come already, charging me
on truthful testimony with wrongs
graver than those of the Edomites, [15]
Philistines and other barbarians –
wrongs that brought down the hand of God.

And whereas their sentences were measured in years,
my transgressions will be punished without term.
As the prophet and the parable teller warned,
the dungeon and shackles[16]
are already at my threshold to show me
here and now my eternal disgrace.

Only you can work the miracle
to make life possible for a soul
so imperiled by doubt,
O Atoner for all, exalted beyond saying
in your boundless glory on high
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 44:21.
[2] Cf. Ps. 6:7; See, also, Ps. 38:9-10, ("For my soul is filled with torment, and there is no cure for my body. I am tortured and laid low in the extreme, and I groan with the sighs of my heart."); Rom. 8:26 ("Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words, and he who searches the hearts of men knows what is in the mind of Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.").
[3] Ps. 42:6 ("Why are you cast down, my soul?"); also incanted by the deacon during the Ascension to the Altar at the beginning of the Armenian Divine Liturgy.
[4] Ps. 39:3.
[5] Ps. 51:15-20, Am. 5:22.
[6] Cf. Divine Liturgy, Hymn of the Angels "Hreshtakayin" ("myriads of angels worship you, yet it was pleasing to you to receive praise in a mysterious voice from human beings.").
[7] Ps. 92:14 ("They [the righteous] shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing."); Cf. Pr. 11:25 ("The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."); See Lev. 1:8-13; For "fat as a choice offering," See, Lev. 4:8-9 ("and the fat that is upon them"); Philip. 4:18 ("I have all and abound: I am full . . . an odor of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God."); Lk. 6:46 ("For the good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good . . . for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.").
[8] Is. 1:15.

[9] 2 Sam. 6:17.
[10] Jl. 3:14.
[11] Acts 13:39, Rom. 8:2-3.
[12] Jl.2:1, 3:14.
[13] 2 Chr. 20:16, 20:26-27.
[14] 2 Chr. 15:16.
[15] Is. 14:26-29, Jer. 47:1, 49:7-18.
[16] Is. 24:17, Jer. 48:43.

Prayer 2

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, my heavy laden soul,
what will you do?
You call with your lips and voice to
God most high,
God, who cares only for deeds and
is not taken in by words.[1]
You, my soul, with a heart always turned toward Egypt,
how can I describe you?

Am I
a Sodom, to be punished likewise with destruction,[2]
or the prosecutor of Ninevah, who was struck dumb?[3]

Am I
more cowardly and barbarous than the queen of the south,[4]
lower than Canaan,[5]
more stubborn than Amalek,[6]
incurable as the city of idols,[7]
a relic left behind from the rebellion of Israel,[8]
a reminder of the broken covenant of Judah,[9]
more reproachable than Tyre,[10]
more shunned than Zidon,[11]
more immoral than Galilee,
more unpardonable than faithless Capernaum,[12]
maligned like Korazin,[13]
slandered like Bethsaida?[14]

Or am I
immodest as Ephraim as he grayed,
or a dove, whose gentleness seems due to
feeblemindedness and not to inner calm, [15]
or an evil serpent born of lion's cubs,
or the serpent's egg filled with decay,
or like the last blow against Jerusalem?

Or am I in the words of our Lord
and the sayings of the prophets,[16]
an abandoned tabernacle about to collapse,
the unlatched doors of the stronghold,
my speaking edifice stained again,
having given up my rightful inheritance,
my home built by God,

as Moses, David and Jeremiah prophesied?[17]

My thinking body now consumed by disease,
afflicted with carping counsel, disciplined by the law,
anointed with the clay of mildness,
incapable of finding my own salvation,
undone by the Maker's hand,
expelled as just punishment
by order of the Almighty, to an unholy place,[18]
rejected, exiled, greatly shunned, nothing spared,
having buried my gift in the ground,[19]
like the one chastised in the Gospel by losing his inheritance.

B

But you, God,
Lord of souls and all flesh,
in the words of one divinely graced,[20]
you are long-suffering and abounding in mercy.

In the words of blessed Jonah,[21]
grant that I finish to your delight
this book of prayers, now begun.
And having sown these words with tears
and set forth on this journey toward the dwellings you have prepared,
may I return joyfully in the time of harvest
with the bounty of atonement,
with sheaves of goodness and the fruits of delight.

Do not give me a barren heart,
like the childless womb that was Israel's,[22]
or eyes like dry breasts,[23]
but hear the prayers of your thoughtful servant,
almighty and merciful Lord,
before prayers of heaven,
as those of heaven are heard before those of earth, and
those of earth before offerings of wheat, wine and oil,
and those of wheat, wine and oil before Jezreel,[24]
so may the pleadings of the heavenly host
move my soul more than worldly temptation.

You – the potter, I – the clay.[25]
Show me, here as I hesitate at the threshold of these contrite prayers,
the sweetness of your will.
Strengthen me that I might not be unworthy
of the light when the heavens open,
so that I might not be consumed and snuffed out like a candle.

Rather as you would for any earnest entreaty,[26]
give me heart, for I am exhausted,

give me strength, for I am weary,
give me life, for I am worn by pangs of conscience,
and relieve my anguish in seeking you.

Accept the gift of my prayers
and grant the mercy of your grace.
Accept this meager offering from a weakling like me,
and grant greatly according to your heavenly might.
Fortify my words of repentance, having sent the Holy Ghost,
endowed with the message of the breath of God.
Grant, Benevolent One, that we might be enlightened like Isaiah.
Offer me, although I am deserving of death,
the gold of grace instead of the clanging of brass,
the brightness of copper instead of blackness of unadorned iron,
Lebanon's shining copper a reminder of virtue.[27]

C

Why have you hardened my miserable heart
so I do not fear you, who are beyond words and awe?[28]
Help, so I will not be unfruitful in this task
like the planter sowing seeds in vain into barren ground.[29]
Spare me that I may not
labor without birth,
sigh without tears,
meditate without voice,
cloud without rain,
struggle without reaching,
call without being heard,
implore without being heeded,
groan without being comforted,
beg without being helped,
smolder without aroma,[30]
see you without being fulfilled.

Hear me, Lord, before I cry out to you, who alone are almighty.
Do not leave the wages of my suffering unrecompensed
for the tallied days of my life of sin,
wayward soul that I am.

D

Grant me life, compassionate Lord.
Hear me, merciful Lord.
Be charitable to me, forgiving Lord.
Save me, long-suffering Lord.
Protect me, defender Lord.
Be generous, all-giving Lord.
Free me, all-powerful Lord.
Revive me, restoring Lord.

Raise me again, awe-inspiring Lord.
Enlighten me, heavenly Lord.
Cure me, omnipotent Lord.
Grant pardon, inscrutable Lord.
Bestow gifts, bountiful Lord.
Adorn me with grace, generous Lord.
Let us be reconciled, healing Lord.
Be accepting, unvengeful Lord.
Wipe away my transgressions, blessed Lord,
so that on that Day of Misery,
when I stare at the abyss on either side,
I may also catch sight of your salvation, my hope and guardian,
and on that terrifying journey may
your angel of peace sweetly guide me.

Endow me, Lord, on the day my breath is finished
with a clean spirit raised in light among the joyful heavenly host,
with gifts of your love overtaking me.
May I arrive with the workers for justice.
Grant to my wayward soul an unexpected kindness
on that day of despair.
Do not assign, blessed Lord and Savior,
a wild beast to guide your sick sheep,
but grant me health, for I am dying of sin, and
grant me salvation, for I am ruined by transgressions.

E

Will you, I wonder:
Forget to be charitable, my expectation?
Neglect to be compassionate, caring Lord?
Regret your charity toward humankind, constant Lord?
Retreat from your life-giving, everlasting Lord?
Abandon the cheerful fruit of your mercy?
Corrupt the gracious flower of your sweetness?
Dishonor the grandeur of your generous bounty?[31]
Vary the glory of your white-haired exaltation?[32]
Waste the fitting splendor of your crown?

If bliss is for the merciful,
then you, a kingdom unto yourself, filled with love,
will you not grant me full salvation?
Will you not offer a salve for my wounds?
Will you not minister to my pains?
Will you not cure my weakness?
Will you not shed light upon the darkness,
for me who trusts in your strength?

You, gift of life to the universe,
who alone have glory in oneself and of oneself,

whose everlasting being is witnessed by everything,
blessed and glorified through three eternities,
and beyond the limits of all conceivable infinities.
Amen.

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[1] Is. 29:13.
[2] Gen. 19:1-29.
[3] Mt. 12:41.
[4] Mt. 12:42.
[5] Hos. 12:7.
[6] Ex. 17-8:16.
[7] Jer. 51:9.
[8] Ex 32:1-4.
[9] Jer. 3:6–11.
[10] Jl. 3:4.
[11] Jl. 3:4.
[12] Lk. 10:15.
[13] Mt. 11:21.
[14] Mt. 11:21.
[15] Hos.7:9-11.
[16] Lk.21:20-24, Jer. 30:7.
[17] Jer. 12:7-13.
[18] Lev. 14:40.
[19] Mt. 25:18.
[20] Num. 16:22.
[21] Jon. 4:2.
[22] Gen. 11:30.
[23] Hos. 9:14.
[24] Hos. 2:21-22.
[25] Is. 64:8, Jer. 18:6.
[26] Is. 25:4 (Arm. 25:5).
[27] Is. 60:17.
[28] Is. 63:17.
[29] Mt. 13:5.
[30] Lev. 3:3-5, 1 Sam. 2:15.
[31] Dan. 7:9 (white-hair of the ancient of days).
[32] Rev. 1:14.

Prayer 3

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Lord, my Lord, grantor of gifts, root of goodness,
ruler of all equally, creator of all from nothing,
glorified, awesome, awe inspiring, beyond understanding,
dreadful, mighty, stern,
unbearable, unapproachable, incomprehensible, inconceivable,
ineffable, invisible, unexaminable,
untouchable, unsearchable,
without beginning, outside of time,
unclouded knowledge, bold vision,
true being, exalted and humble,[1]
blessed existence, shadowless dawn,
ray shining upon all, light professing to all,
unwavering assurance, undisturbable calm,
indelible seal, infinite image, witnessed name,
taste of sweetness, cup of bliss,
soul-nourishing bread, love in dark exile, unambiguous promise,
covering most desirable, garment most protective,
cloak most worthy, ornament most glorious,
great help, trustworthy refuge,
undiminishing grace, inexhaustible treasure,
pure rain, glittering dew,
universal cure, free healing,
health restored, sublime spur,
undeceiving call, good news for all,
king who lifts up the slave,
defender who loves the poor,
giver of endless wealth,
safe harbor, unyielding command,
hope without bounds,
long in vision, unsparing in generosity,
just right hand that dispenses to all,
impartial eye, voice of comfort, consoling tidings,
harbinger of bliss,
living name, finger of providence,
unstumbling start, sincere course,
life-giving will, candid advice, unenvying honor,
broad possibility, narrow restriction,
track without trace, path without markers,
image indescribable, quantity immeasurable, model inimitable,
unparalleled compassion, inexhaustible mercy,
humility celebrated, kiss of salvation.
And more than these worthy epithets, dedicated to your Godliness,

you who are blessed, praised, lauded, preached, evangelized,
proclaimed, exalted, recounted, sought with unflagging desire,
whatever your streams of sweetness bring us,
shall be illustrated in these image-filled psalms,
showing you joyful in my salvation, blessed Lord,
as if a ravenous hunger had been relieved by a sumptuous feast,
for you are glorified not because of some vain song of mine,
but because you may accept these modest prayers
as justification for granting your great salvation.

B

A new book of psalms sings with urgency through me,
for all thinking people the world over,
expressing all human passions
and serving with its images
as an encyclopedic companion to our human condition,
for the entire, mixed congregation of the Church universal,
for the newborn who have just arrived,
for adolescents in the second stage of life,
for adults whose days are ripe and numbered,
for the guilty and the just,
for the brazenly haughty and the falsely modest,
for the good and the evil,
for cowardly and brave,
for slaves and underlings,
for nobles and clerics,
for the middle class and princely,
for artisans and the lords,
for men and women,
for commanders and servants,
for high and low,
for exalted and menial,
for royalty and commoners,
for knights and footmen,
for city and country folk,
for those brutally bridled by arrogant kings,[2]
for those cloistered in heavenly contemplation,
for sages with God-given wisdom,
for priests, pious and chosen,
for bishops, properly arrayed,
for patriarchs, charged with pious supervision.
May this book of prayers
I have undertaken to compose
with the strength of the Holy Spirit
and with a view to the multitudinous needs of all
serve for some as heartfelt pleas of intercession and
for others as counsel toward virtue
that through this book they might constantly
appear before you, Great Mercy.

C

May you heal the souls and wash away the transgressions
of those who read this book with pure hearts.
Forgive their debts and free them from the bonds of sin.
Release the flow of tears from those who study this book,
and instill in them the desire to repent.
And with them, Lord, grant me, contrition for my willfulness,
and give them grace-filled inspiration through my voice.
May their prayers, through this book, also be offered for me,
and may their sighs rise like incense with mine.
May your light enter and dwell in those
who taste and embrace these mournful psalms.
And if through this some pious readers dedicate themselves to you,
receive me also, merciful Lord, with those who live for you.
And if this book brings forth cleansing tears for our ills,
may they also rain upon me, Keeper.
And if those who partake of life's tribulations
through this book find their way to your heavenly kingdom and earn salvation,
grant that by your will, O blessed Lord, I might be in their number.
And if sighs pleasing to God should be evoked through this book,
may the benefit overflow to me also, exalted Lord.
If a pure hand lifts incense to you,
may my voice join with the sound and sighs of prayers and reach you.
If others' petitions labor to be born with mine,
may mine, thus multiplied, be rededicated to you.
If this offering of the words of my soul be pleasing,
may they be offered to you with those who have gone before.
If the disheartened falter in exhaustion,
may they regain their steadiness through these sighs, setting their hope on you.
If the bulwark of their faith crumbles with sin,
may it be rebuilt with these writings shaped by your protecting right hand.
If the thread of hope is severed by the sword of transgressions,
may it be restored by the goodness of your almighty will.

D

If the perils of death besiege a person with pain,
may redemption and hope of life be found through these words,
victorious in you, O Life Giver,

If a confused heart is wounded by doubt,
may these words make it whole through your sweetness.

If one is defeated by an irreparable loss,
or buried in the depths of an abyss,
may he come to the light under your watchfulness,
hooked by this invention.

If one is ensnared by drugs and their torpor,

and surrenders to dark tendencies,
let him be strengthened on your account, Sole Refuge,
and find tranquility in you.

If deserted by the armor of faith,
may he be sustained through the hand of your intercession,
and restored to steadfastness.

If one strays from the watchful eye of his caretakers,
let him be watched over by these words until their return, Renewer.

If one is seized by the tremors of demonic fevers,
awake his soul with the sign of the cross,
proclaiming and worshiping this miracle.

If a violent storm suddenly strikes the vessel of the human body
on its voyage through this world,
steady its course with your rudder and send it sailing back toward you.

E

And may you make this book of mournful psalms
begun in your name, Most High,
into a life-giving salve for the sufferings of body and soul.
May you perfect what I have started
and may your spirit be mixed with it.
May the breath of your great might
infuse these verses with grace
so that you may brace the wilting heart
and accept praise from us all.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 138:8.
[2] 2 Kg. 19:28.

Prayer 4

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Since I have begun
these conversations with you
who holds in your hand
the life breath of my sinful soul,
I am shaken, and rightly so,
trembling in constant fear, remembering,
with unbearable terror that defies words,
O creator of heaven and earth,
your inescapable tribunal,
which justly judges me a sinner.
And what is more, there exists no remedy
for the multitude of incurable, mortal wounds
and the stinging bites inflicted by the deadly fangs
of him who pursues my soul's destruction.
Especially since according to the Prophet,
there is no putting off the day of confrontation:[1]

Not by words of justification,
not by a cloak of protection,
not by a mask of obfuscation,
not by speeches of propitiation,
not by appearances of deception,
not by compositions of prevarication,
not by swift feet of evasion,
not by aversion,
not by the ashen dust of abnegation,
not by fixing one's mouth to the earth,
not by self-burial in the depths of the earth,
for even the covered and the invisible are readily seen by you.

B

My virtue is dissipated and depleted,
my sins laid open and ever worsening,
my wrongs permanent and I am lost.
Upon the scale of justice
the weight of the right is ever decreasing
and the weight of wrong is increasing,
the harvest of goodness washes away
and the errors of my ways harden to stone.

The bail is lost even as the sentence is sealed.

Death’s mortgage is signed,
while the covenant of good news is voided.
The doer of good is despondent,
while the doer of evil is jubilant.
The host of angels grieve,
while Satan’s horde dances in glee.
The army on high is orphaned,
while the army below is elated.
The murderer's bounty grows,
while the protector's treasure is plundered.
The pretender’s rights are upheld,
and the true heir's legacy is betrayed.
The creator's gift is forgotten,
while the destroyer's ambush is remembered.
The Savior's grace is mocked,
while the tricks of Satan are celebrated.
The fountain of life runs dry,
while the tyrant's rust continues to corrode my soul.

C

And now, would it not be better.
as the prophecies foretold,[2]
never to have been conceived,
never to have taken shape,
never to have been born,
never to have seen the light of life,
never to have been counted among mortals,
never to have grown up,
never to have been dressed in the image of beauty,
never to have been armed with words,
than to be seized by such horrible sins,
too great for a hard rock to bear
let alone the frail body?

D

And now, compassionate God,
I pray for your mercy,
as you instructed in your own words,
"Make offerings in the name of God's salvation
and you shall be made holy,
for I want contrition not sacrifice."[3]
Be exalted anew in remembrance of this offering in incense,
for everything is in you, and everything is from you.
To you glory from all.
Amen.

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[1] Ec. 8:8.

[2] Job ch. 3 passim; Jer. 20:14.
[3] Hos. 6:6, Mt. 9;13, 12:7, Ps. 51:16-17.

Prayer 5

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, I, earthbound
and preoccupied with the cares of everyday existence,
numbed by the deceitful wine of foolishness,[1]
I, who lie in all things and am truthful in none,
marked with these faults,
how shall I come before your judgment, Just Judge,
terrible beyond words and telling, mighty God of all?
The more I compare my sinful ingratitude with your lovingkindness,
the more I prove that your law is always stronger,
and my lawlessness, always condemned.

B

You made me in your glorious image,[2]
favoring a weak being like me with your sublime likeness,
adorning me with speech, and burnishing me with your breath,
enriching me with thought, cultivating me with wisdom,
establishing me with ingenuity,[3] setting me apart from the animals,
endowing my character with a thinking soul,
embellishing me with a sovereign individuality,
giving birth as a father, nurturing as a nurse, caring for me as a guardian,

You sowed a wayward being in your courtyard,[4]
irrigated me with the water of life,[5]
cleansed me with the dew of the baptismal fount,
rooted me beside the life-giving brook,
nourished me with heavenly bread,
quenched my thirst with your blood,
acquainted me with the impalpable and unreachable,
emboldened my earthly eyes to seek you,
embraced me in your glorious light,
permitted my unclean earthly hands to make offerings to you,
honored my base, mortal ashes, like a flicker of light,
imprinted upon a worthless wretch like me
your father's image, awesome and blessed,
out of your love for humankind.

C

You did not scald my mouth for daring to call myself your co-heir,
did not reprimand me for arrogantly communing with you,
did not darken the sight of my eyes for gazing upon you,

did not exile me in shackles with those condemned to death,
did not break the wrist of my arm for improperly reaching to you,
did not crack the digits of my fingers for touching the word of life,[6]
did not engulf me with fog for dedicating this to you, fearsome Lord,[7]
did not crush the rows of my teeth for chewing your communion,
infinite Lord,
did not turn in anger as I did with you,
as with the stubborn house of Israel,
did not dishonor me at your wedding party,
I, who am unworthy of singing and dancing,
did not scold me for my disheveled clothes, I, who am disorderly,
did not cast me into the dark, my hands and feet shackled. [8]

D

And I exchanged all these portions of
goodness, patience and forgiveness from you,
O beneficent, blessed and always-tolerant God,
for all manner of waywardness of the flesh and the ego,
for the wavering passions of the mind and the diversions of worldliness.
Yes, that is how, my God and Lord, I repaid you for your abundant goodness.
Thus did I offer you my evil in the manner Moses condemns. [9]
Abandoning wisdom and pursuing folly,
thus did I foully dissipate the bounty of your favor with the ways of vanity,
thus in a storm of mindlessness did I lose the beacon of your ineffable grace
glowing with your care, God most high.

E

And although on many occasions you attempted
to draw me to you by reaching out your helping hand,
I rejected it, as the prophet accused Israel. [10]
And although I promised and made a covenant to please you,
I did not keep it,[11]
but again perverted it into something evil.
Reverting to my old ways,
I sowed the field of my heart with thorns of sin for a harvest of dissension.
The words of the God-fearing holy prophet apply to me,
for you expected grapes but instead I sprouted thorns.
I became an unappetizing fruit of bitterness, outcast from the garden.
Swaying violently in unsteady winds,
always blowing to and fro, I wavered.
In the words of blessed Job, I followed my path of no return.[12]
I built my house upon the sands in foolishness.[13]
Misled by the broad gate, I missed the narrow gate to life.[14]
I closed myself off from the pilgrimage of exodus.
I spitefully uncovered the abyss of destruction.
I blocked my hearing against your teaching of life.
I covered the eyes of my soul against the cure of life.
I did not recoil from the wasting of the mind from torpor,

in spite of your trumpet of wrath.
I was not sobered by the reports of the fiery trial,
on the day of judgment.[15]
I did not awaken from the slumber of mortal sleep, the portent of perdition.
I did not give comfort to your Holy Spirit in my bodily tabernacle.
I did not inhale the allotment of grace you granted me.
With my own hand I wreaked havoc, in the words of the proverb teller,
killing my living soul.[16]

F

And what is the use of composing these meager and paltry verses
in my state of remorse which passes all measure and evades all cure?
Now it is up to you to offer life to my dead soul
and without vengeance to visit me, a condemned prisoner,
O Son of the Living God, to you be all glory.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 60:3 (Arm. 59:5).
[2] Gen. 1:26-27.
[3] Ex. 31:3.
[4] Ps. 92:13 (Arm. 91:14).
[5] Jn. 7:38.
[6] 1 Jn. 1:1.
[7] 1 Kg. 8:10-12.
[8] Mt. 22:12-13.
[9] Dt. 32:5-6.
[10] Jer. 6:8.
[11] Ps. 78:10 (Arm. 77:10).
[12] Job 16:22.
[13] Mt. 7:26.
[14] Mt. 7:13.
[15] Mt. 24:31, Rev. 21:8.
[16] Wis. 1:15-16.

Prayer 6

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

What use, what good is it to me
to exhaust myself with this stream of words, the voice of my sighing heart?
Would it not be better to lance the accumulated words, like deadly pus,
or with fingers in the throat, to vomit up the heaviness of my heart,
weighed down with the wounds of my soul?

B

And since I was not found worthy of sharing
in the glory of the saints with their blissful laughter and smiles,
as described by the proverb teller[1] and psalmist,[2]
I shall be granted the second rank,
the rank where people like me are assigned.
But in view of the error of my ways,
even they are superior to me just as the penitent is superior to the impenitent.
Manasseh should be celebrated,
when compared with the excess of my transgressions.[3]
The Pharisee should be honored when compared with my foul baseness.[4]
The Prodigal Son should be praised
when compared to the betrayal of my vows.[5]
The deceit of Amaziah's son should be commended,
when compared with my thankless ingratitude.[6]
More blessed is the thief who was prosecutor of the faithless.[7]
More honorable is the prostitute, the example and the mother of all repentant.[8]

C

No less than Pharaoh have I hardened my heart.
No less blameworthy than the frenzied Israelite mob,
have I rebelled against my creator.
No less than the enemies of God have I taken the battlefield,
and I did not refrain from denying the creator of all from nothing.
I make waves like the turbulent sea during a storm,
but I do not tremble, humbled by your severe commandment,
like the waves of the sea against the shore.[9]
My countless misdeeds are measured like mounds of sand.
The boundless accumulation is less than the mass of my lawlessness.

D

For although small things mount up
as sands on the shore,

nevertheless, they are unique and distinct in their origin and increase,
while my transgressions are so countless that
they are impossible to comprehend:
one with its kith, the other with its kin,
one with its defects, the other with its dangers,
one with its thorns, the other with its roots,
one with its stem, the other with its fruits,
one with its limbs, the other with its branches,
one with its shoots, the other with its joints,
one with its claws, the other with its fingers,
one with its shakiness, the other with its sturdiness,
one with its causes, the other with its effects,
one with its imprint, the other with its traces,
one with its shadow, the other with its darkness,
one with its tactics, the other with its strategy,
one with its guile, the other with its intent,
one with its trajectory, the other with its size,
one with its depth, the other with its baseness,
one with its spark, the other with its passion,
one with its goods, the other with its treasures,
one with its pipes, the other with its fountain,
one with its torrents, the other with its lightening,
one with its flames, the other with its shame,
one with its pits, the other with its abysses,
one with its embers, the other with its dullness,
one with its thunder, the other with its raindrops,
one with its currents, the other with its floods and frost,
one with its gates, the other with its roadways,
the furnace and its heat,
the fire and its fumes,
the melting tallow and its smell,
the wormwood tree and its bitter sap,
the destroyer and its victim,
the thief and his assassins,
the bully and his accomplices,
the ringleader and his minions,
the beast and its whelps,
the biter and the bitten,
the corrupter and his ilk.

E

And these are but the main categories
of the soul's common afflictions.
They are further divided into smaller classes,
each of which has thousands upon thousands of subclasses,
but the total number can be comprehended
only by the one who sees as done
that which is scripted in us.[10]
If a person does not indulge in self-deception nor put on a mask,

nor engage in impious hypocrisy,
but has self-knowledge,
and senses our common human nature,
and is cognizant of being earth born and knows our proper place and limitations,
then he shall understand this list of attributes,
not as some meaningless scribble,
nor as a complete description of even the essential types
and kinds of imperfections whirling in our nature.
Rather, he will know that I have identified certain seeds of the thousands of evils,
and even if through these he learns of others,
he realizes that even these categories are not enough.

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[1] Job 8:21.
[2] Ps. 149:5.
[3] 2 Kg. 21:1-18, 2 Chr. 33:1-20.
[4] Lk. 18:11-14.
[5] Lk. 15:11,31.
[6] 2 Chr. 26:16-19.
[7] Lk. 23:43.
[8] Lk. 7:35-50.
[9] Job 38:11, Ps. 104 (Arm. 103):6-9.
[10] Rom. 8:29-30, 2 Cor. 3:2-3.

Prayer 7

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

So that I will not give up hope of salvation,
and, laying down my arms, surrender to so many invisible attackers,
which are nothing other than the tribe of foes,
springing up, of their own, in the categories just described,
in numbers and forms that are terrifying,
I shall present here against these fierce foes,
the mightiest of godly champions, most victorious and invincible,
although an arduous task, like
grasping for an unreachable fruit,
or plodding an untrodden path.

For a small teardrop from the eye,
can cause an entire evil platoon of the Tempter's army to shrink away,
like the squirming of centipedes or earthworms,
drowning in a puddle of oil or a drop of some lethal potion.
And the faint groan of a sighing heart, rising from the soul,
is like a warm southerly breeze, mixed with sun,
that melts the fiercest blizzard,
for like storms, they are easily born and when opposed, quickly die.

B

But I shall never stop judging my condemned self with anguished words,
or reproaching myself for my sins,
like a wicked, irredeemable and incorrigible being.
For although I have slain some of my tormentors,
I helped others to live and lost my soul.
Like a plant with bitter branches,
I have blossomed with the odor of wrongful ways,
with corrupting and fatal fruit,
which I have made into the wine of destruction.
The offspring of Canaan and not Judah,
in the words of the great prophet Daniel.[1]

I am
the child of hell and not paradise,[2]
the heir of Hades not of coveted glory,
the stuff of torment, not of rest,
ungrateful rather than grateful,
disgraceful rather than graced,
ever sinful rather than forbearing,
one who embitters the sweetness of your beneficence,

an evil and bad servant like the one who was reprimanded by our Lord,[3]
one who, as the Prophet Isaiah said, uses my learning for evil.[4]

I am
diligent in the baseness of corruption,
conscientious in angering the Lord,
ever active in satanic ventures,
a daily cause of grief to my Maker,
weak in my flight toward goodness,
lazy in the blessing of fidelity,
slow in observing my promises,
fainthearted in the necessary and useful,
an unfaithful and ungrateful servant.

C

Woe to my sinful soul, for I have angered my creator.
Woe to this son of perdition,[5] for I have forgotten the gift of life.
Woe to this debtor of untold thousands of talents, for I haven't the means to repay.[6]
Woe to this porter heavy laden with vile sins, for I cannot turn to the giver of rest.
Woe to this debtor of the Lord, for I cannot face the Almighty.
Woe to this heap of dried up reeds, for I am consumed in Gehenna.[7]
Woe to me as I remember that the arrows of the wrath of God
are fitted with flames.[8]
Woe for my stupidity, for I did not recall that the hidden shall be revealed.[9]
Woe for my impiety, for I always and ceaselessly wove the web of evil.
Woe to my well-fed body which shall be food for the relentless worms,[10]
for how shall I endure their fierce venom?
Woe to me for having drunk of the cup of death, for how shall I suffer eternity?
Woe to me for raising this unworthy soul from this corrupt body,
for how shall I face my judge?
Woe to me for the lack of oil in my lamp, for its darkness shall not be relit.
Woe to me for the sudden alarm of the fear of dismay
when the door of the marriage feast is closed.
And woe to me for the terror of the voice of these words,
trembling and quaking, before the pronouncement
of our heavenly king's judgment:
"I do not know you."[11]

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[1] Dan. 13:56.
[2] Mt. 23:15.
[3] Mt. 25:26.
[4] Is. 5:18-21.
[5] Jn. 17:12.
[6] Mt. 18:23-34.
[7] Is. 5:24.
[8] Ps. 7:14.
[9] Mt. 10:26.
[10] Is. 66:24, Mk. 9:48.
[11] Mt. 25:1-12.

Prayer 8

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, what will you do, my lost soul?
Where will you hide?
How will you live?
And how can you escape the prison of your sin?
Your transgressions are many and your punishments countless.
The scoldings severe and the harsh words endless.
Even the angels have lost patience and the judge cannot be bribed.[1]
The court is mighty and the tribunal just.
The vengeance is terrible and the retribution, merciless.
The sentence terrifying and the condemnation complete.
The rivers fiery and the streams impassable.
The darkness is thick and the fog impenetrable.
The pit is vile and the torment eternal.[2]
Hell is all-encompassing and the blizzard unrelenting.
Now, indeed you have piled up all these bitter things,
a depraved and terrible cell of unbearable punishment,
O my worthless sinful soul, evildoer, prostitute,
soiled, a refuse dump of filth.

Here then are the wages of your handiwork:[3]
You have turned from the straight path and strayed from holiness.
You have been outcast from the ranks of the righteous and honest.
You lack spiritual gifts and riches of our
most jealous benefactor and almighty king.

B

You have ensnared yourself in an inescapable prison,
by confessing that your wounds are incurable
and your punishment unequaled and
testifying that your soul is condemned to death and incurably broken.
You are
evil among the good,
bitter among the sweet,
dark among the light,
bruised among the adorned,
rejected among the praised,
impious among the pious,
brute among the thoughtful,
stupid among the intelligent,
foolish among the wise,
unclean among the elect,

dead among the living,
filthy among the saints,
drunken among the sober,
deceptive among the just,
useless among the useful,
dishonored among the glorious,
deficient among the abundant,
underling among the superiors,
most lowly among the sublime,
poor among the wealthy,
unworthy among the saved,
homeless among the rich in spirit,
cast away among the blessed.

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[1] Is. 5:23.
[2] Ps. 55(54):24.
[3] Is. 3:10-11.

Prayer 9

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, O wretched soul of mine,
what appropriately revolting words shall I use to describe you
in this book of woes, my testament of prayers?
You who are so completely discredited that
I am at a loss for words to answer,
unworthy to communicate with God and the saints.
If I were to fill the basin of the sea with ink,
and to measure out parchment the length and breadth of a field of many leagues
and were to take all the reeds of the forests and woods and turn them into pens,
I still would not be able to record even a fraction of my accumulated wrong doings.
If I were to set the Cedars of Lebanon as a scale
and to put Mount Ararat on one side and my iniquities on the other,
it would not come close to balancing.

B

I am like a tree, towering with branches,
covered with leaves, but barren of fruit,
a true member of the same species as that fig tree that the Lord struck dry.[1]
For although covered with lush flowing hair, that is, with an attractive exterior,
as if adorned with a halo,
mesmerizing like a drumbeat at a distance,
if the sower were to come close to pick the harvest,
he would find me devoid of any goods
and revolting without beauty,
an object of ridicule for viewers and a spectacle for the malicious.

For the bushy plant without fruit and spirit is but a metaphor
for the hapless, unprepared soul
cursed at an unvigilant moment.
If the earth, moistened with dew, cultivated by the farmer,
does not produce crops to multiply this effort,
it is abandoned and forgotten.[2]
Then, you, my miserable soul,
a thinking, breathing plant
that has not given timely fruit,
shall you not suffer the same fate as those in the parable?
For you have indulged with unsparing excess
in the harvest of all the human evils
from Adam till the end of the species, and even found some new ones,
despised and repugnant to your creator, God.

C

And I have fixed my mind's eye upon you, O worthless soul of mine,
sculpting a monument in words.
I cast stones at you mercilessly like some untamed wild beast.
For although I may never chance to be called just,
still following the counsel of the wise,[3]
as my first rebuttal, I criticize myself of my own free will,
as if criticizing some bitter enemy,
and having confessed the angst of the secrets of my mind,
that is, the accumulated burden of my evil deeds,
I spread them before you, my God and Lord.
With what measure I mete out reprimand to my soul,[4]
let your undiminishing compassion be measured for me,
that I might receive your abundant grace many times greater
than the magnitude of my sins,
though my wounds and injuries overpower me, incurable and inescapable,
yet the genius of your curative art, exalted and honored Physician,
shines twice as brightly.
The increase of my sins is more than matched by your generosity,
my benefactor.
Blessed Lord, as in your venerable parable.[5]

D

For yours is salvation,
and from you is redemption,
and by your right hand is restoration,
and your finger is fortification.
Your command is justification.
Your mercy is liberation.
Your countenance is illumination.
Your face is exultation.
Your spirit is benefaction.
Your anointing oil is consolation.
A dew drop of your grace is exhilaration.
You give comfort.
You make us forget despair.
You lift away the gloom of grief.
You change the sighs of our heart into laughter.
To you is fitting blessing with praise
in heaven and on earth
from our forefathers and unto all their generations
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Mk. 11:12-14, 20-21, Mt. 21:18-20.
[2] Heb. 6:7–8.
[3] Pr. 28:13.
[4] Mt. 7:2, Lk. 6:38

[5] Lk. 7:42.

Prayer 10

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Both unruly sin and deep regret
plunge us into damnation, being
essentially similar even though from different sources.
But when compared they share the same character flaws:
one doubts the strength of the Almighty's
hand like a cowardly skeptic,[1]
while the other, like a wild beast,
brutally cuts the thread of hope.[2]
Satan, flattered by the first,
constantly rejoices; while the second
provides fresh blood for the hounds of hell to lap up.

B

I catch my breath like one bludgeoned with a thick club,
until he reaches death's shores. I catch
my breath, mustering whatever life remains
hoping that my soul will be rehabilitated, protected,
restored, and resurrected from mortal perdition
with the help of Christ's hand,
Christ who is merciful in all things.
And with help from our heavenly Father,
who has granted salvation and healing
to a failing sinner near death,
I begin this book of prayerful lamentations,
I will build an edifice of faith,
as one of our faith filled forefathers did
when he was instantly transported to heaven
through the balm of repentance,[3]
thus bequeathing us here and now the promise of immortality,
perhaps more so than the Apostle writing about those
who, enduring their trials on earth,
put their faith in heaven and the hope of things to come,
and were filled with the abundance of the unseen.[4]

C

For even he who has committed mortal sin,
even he, recaptured in the evil spirit's prison
and cast down into the abyss of evil,
even he still can grasp the slender hope of salvation.
Even he has hope of escape through redemption,

like the remorseful sinner miraculously reclaimed
through the raindrops of his eyes
caused by the compassion of the Almighty,
the Almighty who again made the earth flourish,
as a gift from the Spirit of God.
Let us remember also the healing and encouraging words of our Lord,
"With faith, anything is possible."[5]
First and foremost let us consider this the measure
of what is good and favored in the eyes of God;
for the way to the holy of holies is through faith.
Without faith, the Lord of glory did not, will not
show his miraculous power to us, asking first
that his good work be met by our faith.
For this reason those who seek life
should place their faith in God,
as the blessed mouth of the Lord attested,
"Your faith has saved you."[6]

D

Faith, that happy and favored word,
which lasts forever untarnished and unbounded,
honored together with charity and hope[7]
brings the rewards of truly clear vision, perfect wisdom,
acquaintance with God and familiarity with the Exalted.

For if the faith of a mustard seed[8]
can cast a great mountain
into the depths of the sea, then truly
we should accept it as the first step
toward eternal life.

Faith, this simple and clear form of worship,
means setting aside doubt to see the future and hidden
with the eye of the soul.
Faith is honored in a glorious trinity
with charity and hope. For if you view
these three as distinct aspects
of one and the same mystery,
you shall forever be magnified in God.
And if you believe, you shall love
and through love have hope in his unseen rewards.
Glory to him forever.
Amen.

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[1] 2 Sam. 15:12.
[2] Acts 8:9-24.
[3] Gen. 5:24 (Enoch), Heb. 11:5.
[4] Heb. 11:1.
[5] Mk. 9:23.

[6] Mt. 9:22, Lk. 7:50, 8:48.
[7] 1 Cor. 13:13.
[8] Lk. 17:6, Mk. 11:23.

Prayer 11

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, I, the most laggard of believers,
devoid of goodness, contemplate with my mind's eye
all creation out of nothing by the hand of our maker.
And with hope, my faith grows
that Jesus Christ can do anything he wills,
as Paul advised[1] and David taught.[2]
"As I believe, so have I spoken."
May their living prayers visit me
so that through faith I might know him and the power
of his resurrection. And that I may,
in the words of the Apostle, share in
his torment[3] and the glory that followed.
For true faith attends and resembles
the transformation of renewal,
from sin to atonement,
from wrongdoing to righteousness,
from uncleanness to holiness,
from unforgivable mortal transgressions
to blameless bliss,
from earthly bondage to heavenly freedom.

B

For what is more wondrous
than to see the sinner's external giddiness,
as his heart with the help of God is purged
of the thick darkness of doubt, while internally sighing
as the weight of his most terrible sins is cast from the highest summit
into the pit of the perdition,
and he grasps for the life-giving wafer of salvation,
clinging as to the last glimmer of light
preserved in mind and soul.
Or like the amazingly intense fire, kindled
at the bottom of the sleeping well,[4]
by the Almighty's command, the sinner,
consumed with grief,
all expectation of goodness abandoned,
all assurance of grace lost,
can but hope to regain
the blessed innocence of the new-born.
These flickers of hope, which God keeps alive
for broken, contrite hearts,[5]

souls laid low and are
sweeter to God than the finest of incense,[6]
for they proclaim the good tidings
of the Giver's almighty power.
It was for this reason the Savior asks
the blind, "Do you believe I can do this
for you?"[7] thus obtaining a token of faith
before restoring light to their eyes.
And what hope of revival seems more remote,
than for a corpse four days dead?[8]
Yet, armed with faith the women of his family,
fell at the feet of the creator, and they saw
the manifestation of God's glory when their
brother was resurrected.

C

And there is ample proof that even after sin
the grace of God persists: First there is
the case of Enoch,[9] then Aaron,[10]
then David[11] and next Peter.[12] And Eliezer,[13]
the younger, upon whom God took great pity
as attested by his elders.
And it is unnecessary to add the example of
the Prodigal Son,[14]
the prostitute praised by the Lord,[15]
the tax collector remembered for his good deed,[16]
the lucky thief, who, with his last breath,
earned a halo through faith.[17]
Or even those whose sins cannot be atoned for,
such as those who took part in killing our creator,[18]
or Paul, foremost of the chosen,
who was formerly the chief of the unjust.[19]
And there are others who stumbled, even knowing the law,
but then raised themselves up ten thousand times higher
than those who lived under the law. And what of him
who, before the law was given,[20]
honored the traditions of his fathers,
remaining more faithful to the commandment of his forefather
and taking the guilt of man's original sin upon himself,
paid for it with the torment of mortal passions,
atoned for it, not by burial in earth,
but through the torments of the body,
was transfigured, miraculously triumphing
over death's grip to become the herald
of the possibility of eternal life for us mortals.[21]

D

And consider those who chose a dissolute life

from a tender age and in the fullness of time
did not tumble from their high stations but rather
were raised from their squalid lives
into the vault of heaven.
In times past the wayward
changed their ways by their own efforts,
turning earthen vessels into gold and
etching a princely image of our heavenly model
in majestic, imperishable and irreplaceable relief.
Triumphing over the betrayals toward which
our nature inclines us, they give us more cause for hope,
especially now that the Light has been revealed.
Its veil lifted, its curtain drawn,
by the promise of our Lord Christ
by whom the divine word is fixed firmly
in us, and who is according to the voice
of the prophet,[22] "The covenant of peace and
the seal of constancy,"
the mediator of our reconciliation,
our heavenly advocate, immortal, living and eternal.
And therefore by this most true law,
and the immutable terms set by the creator,
I kiss the image of the Word with lips of faith
and await the glory of grace,
For verily, in the words of the Apostle,
"If God absolves us, no one retains
the power to condemn."[23]

E

And taking refuge in this unclouded assurance,
I who was broken am restored,
who was wretched, am triumphant,
who was dissipated, am healed,
who was desperately outlawed, find hope,
who was condemned to death, find life,
who was mortgaged by damnable deeds, find the light,
who was debauched by animal pleasures, find heaven,
who was twice caught in scandal, again find salvation,
who was bound by sin, find the promise of rest,
who was shaken by incurable wounds, find the salve of immortality,
who was wildly rebellious, find the reins of tranquility,
who was a renegade, find calling,
who was brazenly self-willed, find humility,
who was quarrelsome, find forgiveness.

Therefore, to Jesus Christ
and his almighty and awe-inspiring Father,
to the name and the will of

the beneficence of the true Holy Spirit,
the blessed essence and one Godhead,
all power and dominion, majesty and glory
forever.
Amen.

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[1] 2 Cor. 45:13.
[2] Ps. 114.
[3] Phil. 3:10 - 11.
[4] 2 Macc. 1:19-20.
[5] Ps. 51:17.
[6] Ex. 30:7-8; 25-26.
[7] Mt. 9:28.
[8] Jn. 11:39, 43-44.
[9] Gen. 5:24, Heb. 11:5, Sir 44:15.
[10] Ex. 32:1-6.
[11] 2 Sam. 12:1-16.
[12] Mt. 26:75.
[13] Ex. 18:4 (Moses' youngest son).
[14] Lk. 15:11-32.
[15] Lk. 7:36-50.
[16] Lk. 18:9-14.
[17] Lk. 23:39-43.
[18] Lk. 23:43.
[19] Acts 8:1.
[20] Abraham
[21] Enoch
[22] Is. 54:10.
[23] Rom. 8:33-34.

Prayer 12

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Although I have let myself fall
into seemingly eternal despair,
beating myself with the rod of doubt,
let me now dare with the slightest hope
to call upon the Holy Trinity to help me, a sinner.
For upon blessing and acknowledging
the life-giving God of all, and calling out to him
as to a family member,
it becomes possible for the benefactor
who grants all grace, to grant life
to me, a mortal, as the Prophet foretold,
"Whoever calls out the name of the Lord shall live."[1]

B

Not only do I call, but I believe in the Lord's greatness.
I pray not only for his rewards but also for himself,
the essence of life, guarantor of giving and taking of breath
without whom there is no movement, no progress,
to whom I am tied not so much by the knot of hope
as by the bonds of love.
I long not so much for the gifts
as for the giver.
I yearn not so much for the glory
as the glorified.
I burn not so much with the desire for life
as in memory of the giver of life.
I sigh not so much with the rapture of splendor
as with the heartfelt fervor for its maker.
I seek not so much for rest
as for the face of our comforter.
I pine not so much for the bridal feast
as for the groom,
through whose strength I wait with certain
expectation believing with unwavering hope
that in spite of the weight of my transgressions
I shall be saved by the Lord's mighty hand and
that I will not only receive remission of sins
but that I will see the Lord himself
in his mercy and compassion
and receive the legacy of heaven
although I richly deserve to be disowned.

C

Now for my many humiliations
my head bowed in shame
my lips locked with embarrassment
my tongue not daring to move
I resort again to intoning supplications,
mournful sobs and cries, offered on high.

Accept with sweetness almighty Lord my bitter prayers.
Look with pity upon my mournful face.
Dispel, all-bestowing God, my shameful sadness.
Lift, merciful God, my unbearable burden.
Cast off, potent God, my mortal habits.
Spoil, triumphant God, the deceiver's beguiling pleasures.
Dissipate, exalted God, his disorienting fog.
Block, life-giving God, his destructive ploys.
Undo, secret-seeing God, his evil entrapments.
Fend off, inscrutable God, his attacks.
Inscribe your name on the skylight of my abode.
Cover the roof of my temple with your hand.
Mark the threshold of my cell with your blood.
Imprint the outside of my door with your sign.
Protect the mat where I rest with your right hand.
Keep my cot pure from all seductions.
Preserve my suffering soul by your will.
Steady the breath of life you have given my flesh.
Surround me with your heavenly host.
Post them on watch against the battalion of demons.

D

Grant blissful rest
like the slumber of death
in the depth of this night
through the intercession of the Holy Mother of God and the elect.
Firmly close the windows of sight,
sentient faculty of the mind,
with impregnable fortifications
against the waves of anxiety,
the cares of daily life,
nightmares, frenzy, hallucinations,
and protected by the memory of your hope
to wake again from the heaviness of sleep
into alert wakefulness and
soul-renewing cheerfulness
to stand before you
raising my prayerful voice
in harmony with the heavenly choirs of praise

with the fragrance of faith,
to you in heaven, all blessed king,
whose glory is beyond telling.
For you are glorified by all creation
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Jl. 2:32, Rom. 10:13.

Prayer 13

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Beneficent, almighty, awe-inspiring God,
good Father, charitable donor of mercy,
whose very name heralds the good news of
your grandeur, compassion and fatherly affection,
you are gentle even toward the bitter and discontented.

With you also is your Son, who is like you,
whose hand is strong like yours,
whose awesome reign is eternal like yours,
whose exaltation is shared with you in your creation.

So too the Holy Spirit of your truth,
that flows from you without end,
the perfect essence of existence
and eternal being, is equal to you
in all things, reigning with the Son
in equal glory.
Three persons, one mystery,
separate faces, unique and distinct,
made one by their congruence
and being of the same holy substance and nature,
unconfused and undivided,
one in will and one in action.
One is not greater, one is not lesser,
not even by the squint of an eye, but
the cause of the shadowless light of heavenly love
revealed in our midst have been
glorified together with the *Sanctus*[1]
from before the ages.

B

For verily, as Peter's open profession of
faith in the Trinity earned for him
the blessed name, Rock, so
in expectation of your clemency,
do I, a sinner condemned, await exoneration,
O deliverer of captives.
And though all rewards are yours, so too is all mercy,
but I look to you more for mercy than rewards,

[1] Following Terian, *Narek*, p. 58, n. 2.

for mercy glorifies the giver, rewards merely
recognize the effort of labor,
since rewards are compensation for merit,
but mercy is an act of generosity toward the unworthy.

C

And now, God of compassion, may human deeds
not prevail over your grace, even if they transgress
the laws of nature, but rather may your forbearance
triumph so that your ways may never be less
than those of mortals.
For when your light came to herald the new covenant,
those, like the Jews who prided themselves
in keeping the law, were abandoned to greater heartache
and became more needy of your charity,
than those wretched persons, forever lost in the wilderness.
Since everything is possible for you, O benevolent God,
hear my sighs of supplication to you.
Have mercy, save us, and be generous.
For yours is forbearance, gentleness, salvation,
atonement and glory for all time, to all peoples.
Amen.

Prayer 14

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

I pray to you, ray of light,
heavenly king, praised beyond telling,
Son of God, majestic beyond words,
incline your ear once again,
exalted compassion, refuge of life,
toward the feeble sobs of this
wounded soul.

B

Nowhere is it shown,
nowhere can we read that the traveler
all but slain by the swords of bandits,[1]
cried out to you in his distress,
for he had grown stiff from his wounds.
Nor did he utter a single plea
for he was struck dumb.
Nor did he point out his serious plight
with trembling fingers, O Seer,
for he was shattered.
Nor did he fix eyes filled with tears upon you, doer of good,
for he was ashamed.
Nor did he try to gain your favor through messengers
for he was disconsolate.
Nor did he try to rend your heart,
compassionate one, by showing
his blood soaked clothes and beaten body,
for he had lost hope.
Nor did he crawl upon his knees,
since he could not stand and walk
for the half-dead differ little from the dead.
All the more since, after receiving your counsel,
benefiting from your forbearance and
basking in the radiance of your glory,
he nevertheless did not forswear his wicked ways
but in stiff-necked revolt,
joined the ranks of your enemies
allying himself with those who hate you.[2]

C

But you, generous, kind, unspiteful, giver of life,
not only did you not record his sins
but you did not even scold him,
you did not kick him, but rather approached
him in sympathy and treated him with care.
Unlike the priest's custom in Aaron's
weak law, hurling aspersions and fistfuls of stones
to speed death,[3] you were in no rush
to crush a wounded man.
And unlike the Levite, our early predecessor,
who was the end of the old and the start of the new,
caught between the two, in soulless limbo,
you saw the plight
of the wounded man and did not aim
the deadly axe at the root of life,[4]
frightening him to death at what is to come
by appearing as the minister of death.
But rather like the Assyrian pagans
known as the promise keepers,[5] who received
the law from the Jews
and kept it in tact, even when Jews
had forgotten it, you donned
the mortal cloak of our body to proclaim your
good tidings of deliverance to all peoples.
And by the work of your incorruptible divinity,
you extended your hand to raise
the man condemned to death by his mortal sins,
raising him along with all his generations.[6]

You brought joy to the gloomy heart.
You steadied the fainting soul.
You restored happiness to the despondent spirit.
You filled his emptiness with the anointing
of the life-giving baptismal font
and the cup of light.
You renewed him through regenerative,
heavenly bread, your body.
Through the watchful company of the happy
elect, you cared, cured, and comforted him.
With a mare's gentle gait you transported him[7]
unharmed until his deliverance to the abode of light.
You cured him through two
intercessors, the life-giving testaments,
old and new, given out of your love
for humanity. And as it was once with Moses,
like an eagle with outspread wings, you snatched[8]
him midair and deposited him in calm safety,
in the land of happiness, ordering

his doctors to nurture him with
the sustenance of your word.

D

And now, you who have miraculously endowed
all things with the supreme light of your goodness,
gathering as your own, the scattered treasures
and re-establishing your inheritance,
redeem me also, wiping out the debt of my sins.
You, who minister without charge to the unworthy,
grant me also atonement and healing,
O compassionate, mighty, inscrutable, incorruptible
and awesome, eternally blessed one,
unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

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[1] Lk. 10:30-35.
[2] Lk. 10:30, Is. 2:3.
[3] 2 Cor. 3:7, 9.
[4] Mt. 3:10 - 11.
[5] 1 Kg. 16:24.
[6] Rom. 5:15-18.
[7] Gen. 33:14.
[8] Dt. 32:11.

Prayer 15

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now again with the same sighs
from my distressed heart
pouring out the same wordy strains,
I seek your mercy, bestower of all gifts,
and with my soul immersed in torment[1]
like the dead, I pray to you
living, immortal God, confessing
before your honor, my disgrace,
before your goodness, my evil,
I am more devastated than cured,
more embarrassed than emboldened,
having broken my vows and forsaken
the trust reposed in me.

I am like the pathetic sheep in the second parable,[2]
which strayed into inaccessible hills
and wandered in a daze among beastly demons[3]
and fierce idols, without the slightest chance of
returning to the fold. Although my tongue was lost
for words to tell my anguish, and my hands
lacked the agility to communicate like the mute,
still you found me, you who alone
are praised from beginning to end
throughout the generations.

You found me, a sinner, lost in darkness
crying like the psalmist in prayer,[4]
and because of your willing care
you are called Shepherd, for not only
did you care, but you sought,[5]
not only did you find, O worker of miracles,
but with the goodness of your love,
a love that defies description,
you rescued me,
lifting me upon your shoulders,
to set down alongside your heavenly army,
the heirs to your fatherly legacy.

B

And now, mighty savior,
blessed visitor, compassionate comforter,

you, who heard the unspoken supplication
of one suffering in silence at death's door,
and of another who wandered into
the wilderness, helpless, lost,
unable to speak, bleating inarticulately,
you, who in your divine providence that graces the universe,
cared for those lost or in peril, now
show again your compassion and the bounty
of your kindness to me whose iniquity
exceeds everything told above,
whose mortal sins come in all varieties,
whose flavor is that of evil among the sweet taste of goodness,
whose body deserves to be cut off to the last limb,
whose wounded soul is infected with all manner of vile ills,
whose stupor is on a level with the speechless beasts,[6]
whose alienation has removed him from intelligent life,
whose nature no longer resembles that of his species.
If there were an example, I would cite it.
If there were others like me, I would describe them.
If there were a category, I would name it.
If there were my equal, I would note it.
If there were a parallel, I would mark it.
If there were a model, I would show it.
If there were a precedent, I would use it.
If there were a present example, I could take heart.
But since mine surpasses all measure
and defies all categories, you are my only hope of
atonement, healing and salvation,
redeemer of all mortals, renewer of the universe.

C

For if in the view of blessed David's pure heart,
his lawlessness was piled over his head,
his transgressions outweighed the heaviest
burdens, then my wrongs are even greater than
all the waters of seas in torrential flood,
inundating and submerging the mountains.
Release but a breath of your kindness[7]
as in Noah's day, a breath that can melt mountains,
and the stormy flood of my billowing misdeeds
will evaporate along with my earth-shattering transgressions
and my mountain-high sins.

D

Now with your sharp and mighty word
and the unbounded discretion of your swift judgment,
give me a way to redeem myself, even as the Prophet
promised, even in my advanced stage of lawlessness.[8]

And forgiving my stubborn defiance,
O long-suffering, merciful, blessed one,
be truly generous and forgive me all at once,
wiping out my unrepayable debts
and the crushing interest which has accrued,
for you have no wrath in your heart, nor vexation,
nor deceit, nor traces of darkness,
for you wish only life and light.

You neither made death
nor, as David and Solomon attest,[9] do you take
joy in human misery.

E

In your just laws, you set as a key rule
that one wrong should not be returned for another,[10]
but that we should forgive seventy times seven [11]
the sins committed against us each and every day.
You addressed this to us, wicked by nature,
the germs of sin sprouting in tens of thousands
upon the fertile field of our thorny natures.
As you so rightly witnessed, "The human mind
from childhood is inclined toward evil."[12]
Even John, the Evangelist of your word of life,
who was exceedingly pure, nevertheless
shared our common nature and said frankly
in contrast to my roundabout manner of speech,
"If we say that we have no sin, we make him a liar."[13]

And now, your prophetic word is fulfilled
and borne out beyond question by my iniquities.
So deliver me with your mercy,
O fount of lovingkindness,
who alone are blessed through all eternity.
Amen.

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[1] 1 Tim. 5:6.
[2] Lk. 15:4 7.
[3] Ps. 48:15.
[4] Ezek. 34: 11-12.
[5] Jn. 10:11.
[6] Ps. 48:13.
[7] 1 Kg. 19:11.
[8] Is. 5:18.
[9] Ps. 29:6, Wis. 1:13.
[10] Rom. 12:17.
[11] Mt. 18:22.
[12] Gen. 8:21.

[13] 1 Jn. 1:10.

Prayer 16

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

You alone are God in heaven, exalted and benevolent,
yours is the power, and yours, forgiveness
Yours is healing and yours, abundance.
Yours are the gifts and yours alone grace.
Yours atonement and yours protection.
Yours is creation beyond knowing.
Yours are arts beyond discovery.
Yours are bounds beyond measure.
You are the beginning and you are the end.
Since the light of your mercy is never obscured
by the darkness of anger,
you are not subject to disease in any form.
You are too lofty for words, an image beyond depiction,
a quantity beyond weighing ,
the breadth of whose glory is unbounded,
the reach of whose incisive power is indescribable,
the absoluteness of whose supremacy is limitless,
the compassion of whose good works is unflagging.

You turned, according to the Prophet,[1]
the shadow of death into dawn.
You willingly descended into Tartarus,
the prison of those detained below,
where even the door of prayer was sealed
to free the captive and damned souls
with the commanding sword of your victorious word.

You cut the bindings of wretched death
and dispelled the suspicion of sin.[2]
Turn toward me, trembling in the confines
of my squalid cell,[3] fettered by sin,
mortally wounded by the troublemaker's arrows.

B

Remember me, Lord of all, benefactor,
light in the darkness, treasure of blessing,
merciful, compassionate, kind, mighty,
powerful beyond telling, understanding, or words,
equal to all crises, you who are, in the words
of Jacob, always ready to do the impossible. [4]
O fire that clears away sin's underbrush,

blazing ray that illumines every great mystery,
remember me, blessed one, [5]
with mercy rather than legalisms,
with forbearance rather than vengeance,
with lenience rather than evidence,
so that you weigh my sins with your kindness
and not with judgment.
For by the first, my burden is light,
but by the second, I am damned forever.

C

Now, cure me, O kindness,
even as you did the ear of the one
who attacked you.[6]
Take away the whipping winds of death
from this sinner, so that the calm of
your almighty spirit might rest in me.
Unto you all glory, now and forever.
Amen.

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[1] Am. 5:8.
[2] Zech. 9:11.
[3] Jer. 38:6.
[4] Gen. 35:1.
[5] Heb. 4:12, Wis. 24:25.
[6] Lk. 22:51.

Prayer 17

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now, tormented by bitter grief I pray
to you, keeper of imperiled souls.
Do not add to the pain of my sighs.
Do not wound me. I am already injured.
Do not condemn me. I am already punished.
Do not torture me. I am already tormented.
Do not cudgel me. I am already beaten.
Do not push me. I have already fallen.
Do not destroy me. I am already discredited.
Do not reject me. I am already banished.
Do not exile me. I am already persecuted.
Do not embarrass me. I am already humbled.
Do not scold me. I am already cowering.
Do not crush me. I am already broken.
Do not upset me. I am already agitated.
Do not shake me. I am already quivering.
Do not confuse me. I am already bewildered.
Do not flay me. I am already picked over.
Do not pound me. I am already crushed.
Do not taint me. I am already debased.
Do not blind me. I am already in the dark.
Do not frighten me. I am already perplexed.
Do not roast me. I am already charred.
Do not kill me. I am already dying.
Do not overload me. I am already weakened.
Do not yoke me. I am already bent over.
Do not double my wailing. I am already weeping.
Do not till my soil too deeply.
Do not scatter my ashes too harshly.
Do not judge my works too roughly.
Do not blow my dust too meanly.

B

Do not measure your greatness against my smallness,
your light against my dimness,
your good nature against my native evil,
your cornucopia of blessing against my cursed fruit,
your genuine sweetness against my complete sourness,
your unchanging glory against my total debasement,
your shrine of life against my vessel of clay,
your lordship over lords against my dust of the earth,

your undiminishing fullness against my slavish poverty,
your unpillaged abundance against my abandoned torment,
your unblemished goodness against my most wretched squalor,
for who can reach morning and
at the light of daybreak expect dark,
or at the portal of life expect death,
or at liberation expect bondage,
or at grace expect condemnation,
or at salvation expect destruction,
or at renewal expect ruination,
or at blessing expect banishment,
or at cure expect injury,
or at fullness expect want,
or at abundance of bread expect famine,
or at the flow of rivers expect drought,
or at motherly compassion expect deception,
or at the care of God's right hand expect persecution?

C

And now with my body shaken by disease
and my soul in peril I pray,
"Lord, if you want you can make me clean."[1]
Like a groping blind man,
I cry with laments and call to you
not only the son of David
but also profess your divine birth.
I not only call you, "Rabbi,"[2]
the name of honor given to teachers
who claim to know the truth, but I also
believe you to be the Lord of heaven and earth.
I not only expect to be cured when you are close,
O compassionate God, by the touch of your hand,
but also when we are separated by great distances
through the power of your Word.
I do not draw a line between your will
and your compassion, a line of doubt,[3]
for I believe that you will, because
you are compassionate and you are able,
because you are our creator.
Say the word and I will be cured.[4]
Let me join the centurion in his faith.[5]
For my faith pertains not just for short
distances, but also between the sanctuaries of heaven and earth,
for I know you are able to raise
the dead and make them whole.
Even sitting in heaven you work miracles
over the whole world below.
And I have nothing to give in return.

D

Grant me forgiveness, with the word of your judgment,
even as you forgave the debt
of 500 dinars in the case of the prostitute,
God of goodness, Lord of bliss.
The more you bestow, the greater your glory.
The more you give, the more you are loved.
The more your mercy, the more your greatness.
For all your benevolence, you are rightly praised.
Though Lord of all, you came to us as our equal.
Though possessing everything, you weigh by our measure.
Though you have gifts beyond telling,
you accept our skimpy payment.
And to the account of mortals, you grant
unlimited credit. Your generosity is sublime,
yet not too high to receive our meager praise.
Show the same compassion to me with my
countless debts so that I might
in expressing gratitude for your gifts
also commemorate your love.
To you glory in all things.
Amen.

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[1] Mt. 8:2.
[2] Mt. 20:31.
[3] Mk. 9:21.
[4] Mt. 8:8.
[5] Mt. 8:5-10.

Prayer 18

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

I was born in sin, the child of mortal labor.
Now, in one day, a penalty of countless thousands has come due.
I turn to you for forgiveness not on the meager human scale,
but with the full undiminishing measure
of lovingkindness shown toward us
by our Savior Jesus Christ:
Before I was, you created me.
Before I could wish, you shaped me.
Before I glimpsed the world's light, you saw me.
Before I emerged, you took pity on me.
Before I called, you heard me.
Before I raised a hand, you looked over me.
Before I asked, you dispensed mercy on me.
Before I uttered a sound, you turned your ear to me.
Before I sighed, you attended me.
Knowing in advance my current trials,
you did not thrust me from your
sight. No, even foreseeing my misdeeds,
you fashioned me.

B

And now, do not let me
whom you made, saved and took into
your care, be lost to sin and
the Troublemaker's deceptions.
Do not let the fog of my willfulness
prevail over the light of your forgiveness,
nor the hardness of my heart
over your long-suffering goodness,
nor my mortal flaws
over your perfect wholeness,
nor my weak flesh
over your invincible strength.

C

In your name, Almighty,
I extend the shriveled arm of my soul
so you will make it whole as before,[1]
as in the garden of Eden,
when it reached to pick fruit of the tree of life.

The misery of my incorrigible soul, [2]
bound up, infirm, bent over,
is like the stricken woman in the Gospel,
bowed by sin, her gaze on the ground
in Satan's tyrannical chains,
kept from your heavenly blessing.

Turn your ear toward me, last hope of mercy
and raise this humbled, fallen, dried up, thinking piece of wood,
to make it blossom in piety,
as foretold in the words of the holy prophet.[3]

D

Like one without light, blind from birth,
I do not have vision to look upon your face, O creator,
almighty and compassionate, my only protector.
If you turn the caring gaze of your immeasurable love
upon my breathing speaking vessel,
you could rekindle, out of nothing, the light of being within me.

Like the wretched woman in the Gospels,
afflicted by evils for twelve years,[4]
I bleed with rivers of infirmity.
Look down upon me from on high
cloaked in blinding light,
where sewn clothing does not exist,
but everything is covered in mighty miracles.

E

Condemned as I am, I do not approach
the soles of your life-giving feet
to anoint them with oil[5]
or offer to wash them with my tear-drenched hair.
But rather, a true believer,
I kiss the earth, with pure faith,
hands reaching up, sighing with streaming tears,
begging for the healing of my soul,
a soul wasted by shortcomings,
dissipated by weakness.

F

And these two feet, means of motion,
foundation of my body's structure,
now lame and unsteady,
vanquished by evil,
impede my ascent to the tree of life-giving fruit.
May you again inhabit them, my only hope of cure.

And the organ of glorification with which you endowed me,
whose voice when moved by the magnanimity of your mercy
used to turn back the breath of the Troublemaker, silencing him,
may you miraculously restore your living word to me,
so I might speak again without faltering,[6]
like the one you healed in the Gospel.

G

I lie here on a cot struck down by evil,
sinking in disease and torment,
like the living dead yet able to speak.
O kind Son of God,
have compassion upon my misery.
Hear the sobbing of my agitated voice.
Bring me back to life
with the dew of your blessed eyes
as you brought back your friend from breathless death.[7]
In a dungeon of infirmities, I am captive, bitter and in doubt.
Give me your hand, sun that casts no shadows, Son on high,
and lift me into your radiant light.

H

Like the pitiful, wailing voice of the widow of Nain,
mourning her only son,
fingers trembling, chest heaving, [8]
tears streaming down her face paralyzed with grief,
I beg with my last sighing breath:
Grant me, who has lost hope,
your comfort and pity.
Teach me not to moan and protest like a prisoner,
kind and praiseworthy creator of the universe,
but rather, like the young man you brought back to life,
who comforted his grieving mother,
may I too receive from you
a second chance for my condemned soul.

I

You took pity, O Savior of all,
even on demon-possessed brutes,[9]
and those unfortunates, stoned, beaten, and deformed,
with their unkempt, knotted hair,
and their wild faces, raving in delirium.
Like them, I petition you,
turn back the legions of evil defiling
your sanctuary within me
so that when your Spirit arrives

your goodness might dwell here
and fill my body with your cleansing breath,
bringing lucidity to my reeling mind.

J

Like souls banished to hell,
I am held captive by illness.
Let your light dawn in radiant rays of mercy
upon my torture to rescue me
from the clutches of the sickness
tearing me apart.

The infirmities that cause disease
traveling invisible paths, secretly lying in wait,
straying from the ordained ways with malicious purposes –
all torment my soul.[10]
Hidden from examination, the
malignant growth proceeds
with the poisonous work of the Evil-doer.
With your strength which knows no equal,
Son of God, heal me so that I might live.

With your almighty hand pluck out
the harvest of destruction
that the various mortal illnesses,
each dressed in its own way, produce.
Pluck out the evil roots
sprouted upon the field of my unruly body
with your mighty hand
that plows and cultivates the plots of our souls
so they may bear the fruit of the gospel of life.

K

And because the torments of my infirmities
surpass even these examples,
which like a spreading cancer,
have touched all the parts of my body,
there is no salve as there was none for Israel, [11]
for my innumerable sores.
Every part of my body from head to toe[12]
is unhealthy and beyond the help of physicians.
But you, merciful, beneficent, blessed,
long-suffering, immortal king,
hear the prayers of my embattled heart for mercy,
when I cry to you, “Lord,”
in my time of need.[13]
Amen.

[1] Mt. 12:10-13.
[2] Lk. 13:11-13.
[3] Ezek. 17:24.
[4] Mt. 9:20-21, Mk. 5:25-29.
[5] Lk. 7:37-38.
[6] Mk. 7:35.
[7] Jn. 11:3.
[8] Lk. 7:11-15.
[9] Mk. 5:5.
[10] Lk. 14:2.
[11] Wis. 16:12, Is. 1:6.
[12] Is. 1:6.
[13] Jon. 2:3.

Prayer 19

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Hear, all-seeing vision of hope and goodness of life,
the profuse sighs of my hurting soul,
unreachable greatness, fearful name, living word,
longed for message, delectable taste,
worshipful calling, confessed beneficence,
sweet perception, professed reality,
glorious essence, blessed existence,
Lord Jesus, praised and worshiped with your Father
and exalted and proclaimed with the Holy Spirit,
You, who alone became human like us for our sakes,
so that you might make us like you for your sake,
light unto all, merciful, almighty and heavenly in all ways,
I pray that with your divine miracle-working power,
compassionate God, you restore this,
my collapsing broken earthen vessel.
And I pray that you recast the image you gave me, worn by sin,
in the lightning crucible of your word.
Cleanse the temple of my body,
the vessel of my soul,
the altar of your repose,
as your dwelling place,
I pray you, O doer of good.
Do not repay my evil deeds with evil.
I am drunk, in the words of the prophet,[1] but not
with wine. Empty out the dregs of iniquity
from my stupefying cup of death. And by the command
of your salvation, giver of all life,
let me with the last drop of your cup[2]
be spared on the day of judgment.

B

You are just in your law
and triumphant in your judgment.[3]
If you hand down a death sentence,
your action is right.
If you reprimand before giving a stern condemnation,
your decision is just.
If you cast me into the abyss
or still the movement of life,
if you silence my power of speech,
or darken the windows of my eyes,

if you check my joy in life,
or impair my ability to be nourished by ordinary food,
if you reduce the richness of my days,
or make drops of fire fall along with the dew drops,
if you starve me by your silence,[4]
or shut the doors of my ears,
if you cut off the bounty of your grace,
or make the earth move under my feet,
if you shut off the light of your countenance
for which I yearn, or expel me from this world completely,
if you terrify me with a lightning bolt,
or condemn me to incurable pain,
if you betray me to the demons of evil,
or chew me up in the jaws of beasts,
if you blow me away in billowing anger,
or invent some new torture,
more evil than Tartarus,
more severe than Gehenna,
more vile than maggots,
more anguishing than darkness,
more terrifying than the abyss,
more pitiful than nakedness,
I will testify against myself that
I deserve these and more.

C

And since the punishments always match
the sins they are for,
like mirror images, identical,
parallel, emblematic of the wrong,
it is important to confess
and lift the veil from my face
to one who seeks to know me.
For as I did not tend the needs of
my fellow man with warm charity,
it is right that I freeze with fear
at the first sign of danger.

And since I did not check my willful pride,
it is fair that I should be consumed with unbridled disgrace.

And since I did not love the good news
of your light, it is just
that I should be condemned to grope
in the darkness of ignorance and fog of perdition.

And since I paid no heed to small faults,
considering them harmless, it is fitting
for me to be wounded by the stings of insects.

And since I did not lend a helping hand
to those in danger, it is proper for me
to be cast into a pit of filth.

D

But evil is not from your Godly bounty,
source of all good,
and darkness is not from your radiant light.
And temptation is not
part of your protection. No, I found these myself
like a destructive child.
And the mounting sins of my iniquity have justified
your anger. Despite the warnings of the Good Book[5]
I became the servant of the prince
of iniquity, giving him your place.

E

And since the scandal,
the most private secret, has been uncovered[6]
and its shamefulness leaves a mark
upon my face. I show myself, as in
the parable of the prophet, in complete
offensiveness like a naked prostitute.[7]

Rekindle your light of atonement in me,
heavenly king, so that
shaking off the dust of sin,
my soul can stand upright like the
people returning from Babylon,
having heard the voice of good tidings.
And I will be established again,
on the firm foundation of your unshakable hope.
In the words of the prophet Isaiah,[8]
I shall be clothed in my former purity
by your mighty hand, for the sweetness
of your all-giving divinity and your great glory.
Blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] Is. 29:9, 51:21.
[2] Is. 51:22.
[3] Ps. 50:6, Rom. 3:4.
[4] Am. 8:11.
[5] Ec. 10:4.
[6] Col. 3:5.
[7] Nah. 3:5-6.

[8] Is. 52:1.

Prayer 20

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Lord, O Lord, who bears no grudges,
tolerant, forgiving, compassionate, powerful, and merciful,
behold, your actions rest on truth,
your judgment upon confessions,
your decisions upon sound testimony,
O seer of the unseen. Like the three
fortunate youths who were tested by the caustic fires
of Babylon but were unharmed,
I groan a mournful refrain,
"I have sinned. I am lawless. I have done wrong.
I have rebelled and I have not heeded your commandments."[1]
They being innocent of any wrong
cried out this confession, while I am rightly
condemned to death and have yet more reason
to plead even as Daniel,
the blessed holy prophet,
who was of your true lineage
and the chosen branch of the house of Judah.
To his words and prayers of commitment that
were acceptable to you, I add my cries for punishment and humiliation.

B

Knowing full well what was improper,
I strayed from the path,
sinning in all ways in all things,
I fled from the balancing bounds
of your will. And this is
the characteristic profile of base
lawlessness that I practiced and
perfected till my wrongdoing knew
no limits. Is this not the very image
of criminality? You admonished
but I was shameless. You entreated
but I took no heed. Both are flagrant signs
of rebellion.

C

You clothed yourself in righteousness,
O doer of good, and prepared
shame and humiliation for me.

For you, fitting glory,
for me, deserving insult.
For you, sweetness immemorial,
for me, vinegary bile.
For you, praise that cannot be silenced,
for me, weeping laments.
For you, songs of blessing rising with incense,
for me, the alienation of exile.
For you, all rights justly deserved,
for me, every worrisome debt.
For you, exaltation and praise beyond words,
for me, the abject punishment of eating dust.

D

And you, O splendid goodness beyond measure,
you received our offering with sweet frankincense fitting to you, while
I received my portion of censure compounded by aggravating circumstances.
For if the innocent prayed to you in this way,
what apology shall I weave in my guilt, I who have
faltered more basely than anyone?
I have strayed down wayward paths in my undisciplined mind.
In my everyday speech I have been brazen.
I have been obsessed by shameful deeds.
I have become puffed up and haughty.
I have become arrogant and conceited
though I will soon be lowered into the earthly grave.
I want to make a deal
though I cannot even give my breath as collateral.

E

I, breathing dust, have grown haughty.
I, talking clay, have become presumptuous.
I, filthy dirt, have grown proud.
I, scattered ashes, have risen up,
raising my hands with my broken cup,[2] strutting
like a swaggering peacock, but then
curling back into myself, as if rejected,
my speaking slime glowering with anger
I grew arrogant, as if I were immortal,
I, who face the same death as the four-legged creatures.
I embraced the love of pleasure
and instead of facing you, turned my back.
In flights of fancy I darted into lurid thought.
Indulging my body I wore out my soul.
In strengthening the sinister side
I weakened the force of my right side.
I saw your concern for me, too deep for words,

and paid no heed.

F

As Hosea wrote of Ephraim,[3] I rushed
toward my former ways like a wild fowl.
In my sanctuary I was immersed in my worldly
preoccupations and I did not halt the meandering
horse of my mind with the reins of rationality.
I added to my former wrong doings with new
inventions. Like Job,[4] I made my heavy yoke
even more unbearable. Like Jeremiah,[5]
I became like a rotten cloth, and, as the preacher[6] said,
my name is erased from the book of humankind
like a stillborn child. And as Isaiah[7] said,
I have become soiled like the napkin of the
menstruating woman and I am shattered and
unmendable like a ceramic bowl.[8] Like the Edomites
chastised by the prophet, I have prepared myself
for a squalid end[9] as the fourth penalty for
my lawlessness. And it would be no lie were I to add
that abandoning my inheritance in heaven I even built
a tabernacle to the demon Moloch,[10] even fashioned
an idol in the form of the Babylonian Star
of Rephan like the one the Israelites had in the Sinai,[11]
so that my legacy should be hell.

G

And now with the license of my original grace revoked
I have changed, I am dispossessed, I am exiled,
I am banished, I am separated and irreparably cut off.
Now, accept me, O Lord, and renew the impression of
your image on my soul, I who am unworthy of life,
a capital felon, evil person,
a fallen being trampled by Satan,
a terminal patient at death's door,
depraved and unworthy of your calling,
defeated with one blow, wanderer, exile and outlaw,
a doubter, wretch, reject, battered, shattered,
broken, wounded, dejected, embattled soul.

H

And again, O compassionate Lord who loves humankind,
almighty God, as you consider these words of pleading,
treat them as a confession from a contrite soul
fallen at your feet in repentance.
And as you judge, note and weigh

the tearful soul, the heaving sighs,
the quivering lips, the dry tongue,
the clenched face, the good will in the depth of the heart,
you who are the salvation of humanity,
the seer of the undone, the creator of all,
the healer of invisible wounds,
the defender of the hopeful and the guardian of all,
to you glory forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Dan. 3:29-30; 9:5.
[2] Jer. 51:7-8.
[3] Hos. 9:11.
[4] Job 40:21.
[5] Jer. 13:7.
[6] Ec. 6:3 - 4.
[7] Is. 64:6.
[8] Is. 30:14.
[9] Am. 1:11.
[10] Am. 5:25-26, Acts 7:42-43.
[11] Am. 5:25-26, Acts 7:42-43.

Prayer 21

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Since I of my own will mortgaged myself to death,
never standing as a human being on my own two feet,
and never having received a rational soul, as the Bible says,[1]
I did not turn away from my former sinful ways
to travel the path of goodness.
Why should I not begin this chapter
by disclosing my wayward tracks toward darkness?
So I shall adapt my writing to this purpose
without changing my earlier testimony,
and confess again the rest of the evil
stains upon me.

B

Deserving the punishment of a foreign mercenary
I joined the army of Beliar by my acts of obstinacy.
Swept off by the agile dances, gleeful stunts,
and foolery of the slithering demons,
ingenious deceivers, I wallowed in my sloth,
and in the chambers of the fallen. I took comfort
in secret floggings and invisible wounds instead of
warding off these outcasts with Christ's cross.
No, I willingly joined them
with no reason other than my miserable lawlessness.
Your name, O Jesus, was profaned among the demons,
as it was among the Gentiles for the sake of Israel.
The vices I planted in myself blow by wicked blow
like thieves and evil spirits
ate away at the flower of my soul like corrosive rust.
Like caterpillars and locusts,
as the saintly prophet Joel[2] described
in his terrifying lament about the land of Israel.
Indeed, I cultivated rather than uprooted them,
recruiting throngs of warriors armed with deadly weapons.
I collected them in my soul and
nurtured those that goaded me toward lawlessness and iniquity,
I strengthened my enemies so that they became invincible,
I took bitterness as my portion instead of your sweet sustenance,
always deceitful toward the Creator,
and faithful to the Deceiver.

C

How dare I raise my voice in appeal,
considering the wretchedness of my plight,
the anguish of my peril,
the shadow of my shame,
the darkness of my humiliation?
The voice of doom is overwhelming
and the cry of my protests unbearable.
And if I could see my soul,
deformed, shriveled, wasted away,
I would sob yet more painfully in extreme embarrassment
at the disgusting, ashen color of its baseness,
like a minion at a pagan temple.
For becoming a slave to sin is the same
as worshiping a stone idol.

D

Since I have traveled the path of destruction
pursuing the footprints of darkness,
like the priests of Israel scolded by the prophet, and
since I have traded your plot of paradise for a barren desert,[3]
how can I call myself human,
when I have earned a place among the inhuman?
How can I be named a thinking being,
when I indulge in brutish ways?
How can I be called a seeing being,
when I have snuffed out my inner light?
How can I be known as cognizant,
when I have slammed the door on wisdom?
How can I aspire to incorruptible grace,
when with my own hand I have slain my soul?[4]
Indeed I lack attributes of a moving or even breathing being,
let alone one capable of spiritual, thoughtful life.

E

Chipped among the set of plates,
defective among the stones of the wall,
disdained among the ranks of the called,
lowest of the tribe of the elect,
weakest among those fearful of death,
most dejected with the pain of Jerusalem,
as mournful as Jeremiah's words,[5]
"My days have been wasted in wailing,
and the course of my years in crying."
In the songs of the musician,[6]
"Like wool eaten by moths, like wood chewed up by worms."

In the words of the wiseman,[7]
“My heart was consumed by suspicion.”
In the words of the Psalmist,[8]
“I unraveled like a spiderweb, and became useless.”
In the words of the prophet,[9]
“I have disappeared, evaporated like the morning cloud and the dew at dawn.”

F

I do not put my hope in any human being,
for I would be cursed by the seer[10] and falter in despair.
Rather I place my faith in you, my Lord, who loves our souls.
You, who even at the hour
you were nailed to the cross
overflowed with boundless compassion,
and beseeched your Father on high
to take mercy on your tormentors.
Now grant me hope of atonement, life and refuge,
so that when I take my last breath
I might receive from you a healed soul.
To you with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
all power, victory, majesty and glory forever.
Amen.

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[1] Dan. 7:4.
[2] Jl. 1:4.
[3] Jer. 12:10.
[4] Wis. 22:23.
[5] Jer. 6:6-7.
[6] Ps. 30:11.
[7] Pr. 25:20.
[8] Ps. 38:12.
[9] Hos 13:3.
[10] Jer. 17:5.

Prayer 22

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now I continue to accuse my cursed soul
in different terms confessing all my undisclosed evil doings
so that perhaps the all-knowing might record in my favor
these anguished words of penitence and contrition.

B

My body, the grievous tormentor of my soul,
wounded, untreatable, beyond care or recovery,[1]
is like a talking horse with a callous mouth,
breaking my reins and shaking off my bit,
a surly, wild and incorrigible colt,
an untame, recalcitrant, and stubborn[2] heifer,
a homeless man, banished and lost,
a street urchin, roguish and impudent,
a steward, deserving mortal punishment, unfaithful and indolent,
an intelligent person, turned beastly and unclean,
an abandoned olive tree, barren and dry,
a body, discomfiting my soul, condemned and writhing,
a victim, untended, untreatable, irreparable,
a string of imperial gold coins, wasted and forfeited,
a delinquent servant, runaway and wretched.[3]

C

I am of no use to you at all, Lord,
for I am willingly self-destructive of soul and body,
and remain spiritually lost and mentally deluded,
with a twisted will[4] and broken heart,[5]
absent minded and stagnant brained,
numb and drained,
brazen and disagreeable,
besieged by inflammations,
wracked by fatal sickness.
I pity the womb that bore me and
bemoan the breasts that fed me, asking
why was their milk not curdled with bile?
Why was I nurtured with sweetness rather than bitterness?

D

And because I have risen against myself

with words like a harsh prosecutor
and have even taken up the sword
of righteous anger that cannot be sheathed,
who among the earth-born will plead for me?
I shall confess every scandalous detail.
I shall submit my being to judgment.
I shall beat down the army of destruction.
I shall prosecute the marauders wounding me.
I have sinned in everything and in all ways.
Have mercy upon me, O compassionate God.
It is no new thing to find me the fog of iniquity.
I am always the same, breaking
the same commandments and appearing
before you unreformed, stumbling
in an unmendable garment.
And only you, who stands beside me,
O truly compassionate and blessed,
with your love of humankind and your unwavering forgiveness
can save me.[6]

E

Now, O caregiving, mighty, heavenly, kind,
creator of all out of nothing,
send the thunderbolt[7] of wisdom in powerful words,
upon the movements of my tongue
that it might cleanse the senses
with which you endowed me,
so that with the faculties you created and fixed a second time,
I might offer thanks to you
with unfailing voice and unbroken speech.
For the glory of the majesty of your Father,
our God, forever.
Amen.

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[1] Lk. 10:30.
[2] Gen. 12:6.
[3] Mt. 25: 26-30.
[4] Jg. 5:6; Wis. 2:15, 4:24, 16:30, 27:6; Sir. 4:1; Job 9:20; Is. 27:1; 1 Pet. 2:18; Phil. 2:15.
[5] 2 Macc. 7:39.
[6] Zech. 3:1-3.
[7] Is. 6:6-7.

Prayer 23

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Lord God of all, able to do anything,
all-encompassing space, unbounded, unlimited,
close to all with your very essence,
nowhere, yet without you there are no bounds,
invisible, yet without the light of your dawn nothing is visible,
awesome glory, incomprehensible name,
voice of majesty, sound of the infinite, essence beyond analysis,
unreachable distance, immediate closeness,
who notes distress and sees misfortune,
visits the grieving and can cure all hopeless cases,
Father of compassion who spreads mercy, God of comfort.

B

Look with mercy, O Lord, on my anguish,
on the many symptoms of dread afflictions
I set out before you.
Treat me like a physician, rather than examining me like a judge.
Indeed I am overwhelmed by anxieties
caused by vacillation and doubt.
When the body is weakened by malady,
when the soul is not fortified against evil,
when the senses are paralyzed by passion,
the members of the body wallow in desire,
the heart's wisdom is wounded by remorse,
the expectation of good is abandoned,
and despite the ability to think,
man sinks to the level of beasts.[1]
His existence becomes enmeshed with disgust
even while appearing outwardly whole,
his intellect frays within.
Remembering the graveness of his mistakes,
he falls into despair
tormented by past deeds and constantly worried.
The clarity of prayer becomes clouded
as he smolders in the fires of conscience.
At work, although his hand stays on the plough,
his mind keeps turning over the past.[2]
Walking forward, his feet drag back.
Knowing the essential, he is consumed by irrelevancies.
In battles of the mind, he is always defeated by details.
And the door of his voice box is charred by the burning of his heart.

Everywhere sunless fog rises from damp whims
enshrouding everything and blocking the grasp of hope.
His senses are branded with unbearable pain.
His mind is obsessed by the misfortune of perdition
and retribution occupies the tribunal of his thought.
His tender eye fills with anger.
Bright spirits disfavor my earthen vessel
and I am worthy of being stoned to death with stones of justice.
With terror my meager nature collides with yours
as your thundering words scatter my thought-bearing ashes.
Like the prodigal son I have wasted the talent given me,[3]
and like the useless servant I buried the honorable gifts received.[4]
The fruits of my labor are covered with the darkness of sloth,
and fade like the afterglow of a candle when it is taken away.
My tongue, having lost the right to respond, is dumb.
My twisted lips have been justly silenced.
My mind whirls with anxiety
unable to concentrate
too stupefied to weigh and choose what is right.
The path of deliverance is blocked
by the wreckage of evil,
and the lamp of my soul[5] is filled only with ash.
The letters of my name have been scratched from the book of life,[6]
and blame is written in the place of blessing.

C

If I see a soldier, I expect death,
a messenger, punishment,
a clerk, foreclosure,
a jurist, condemnation,
an evangelist, the shaking of the dust off his feet,[7]
a pious person, reprimand,
a snob, sarcasm,
If I am put to trial by water, I will drown.[8]
If I take a remedy for my condemnation, I will die.
At the mere sight of the harvest of goodness, I recoil remembering my evil.
If a hand is raised, I take cover.
At the least trifle, I tremble.
At the slightest sound, I flinch.
If I am invited to join in a toast, I quiver.
If I am scolded, I cower.
If I am called for questioning, I mumble.
If I am interrogated, I become dumb.

D

Now, all these pitiful doubts, heaped upon each another,
in the unconscious depths and inner chambers of my heart's being,

stifle me, piercing my heart with invisible arrows,
unextractable, permanently lodged in my soul,
filling it with pus forewarning
a dreadful death.
With each breath I draw,
the ulcers and rust from these buried secrets,
locked away in iron, cause pain.
The cry of my voice strangled by these torments,
I offer to heaven, mixed with tears and the sobbing grief of my soul,
O doer of good, for whom everything is possible,
along with the prayers of other earth-bound sufferers.
With them I offer up my last sigh
and tears here on earth,
so that you will grant a calm peace to me,
a pitiful laborer engaged in vain earthly pursuits.
Eternal glory to you,
who are all in all through all.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 48:13, 21.
[2] Lk. 9:62.
[3] Lk. 15:11.
[4] Lk. 19:20.
[5] Lk. 11:36.
[6] Ex. 32:33.
[7] Mt. 10:14.
[8] Num. 5:16-22.

Prayer 24

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

What am I worthy to ask of you in prayer?

May I pray for
paradise,[1] from which I have strayed?
your magnificent glory, of which I am denied?
your everlasting life, from which I was rejected?
the society of angels, from which I was expelled?
the company of the just, from which I am banished?
the living vine, from which I have been ripped away?[2]
the shoot of the plant of bliss, from which I have dried up?
the grace of the flower of glory, from which I have fallen?
the legacy of praise, from which I was disinherited?
the devoted fatherly embrace, from which I have pulled away?

B

Or may I pray
that I might be honored with clothing of light, from which I have been stripped?
that I might hope for return to my creator, from whom I have been estranged?[3]
that I might turn my desires to the light, from which I have strayed?
that I might join the body of Christ, from which I was rejected?[4]
that I might touch the hand of him, from whom I am separated?
that I might seek refuge in the sanctuary, from which I was spurned?

Or might I pray for
the renewal of salvation, from which I fell?
the reawakening of joy, from which I was abandoned?
the rule of monastic life, from which I have been diverted?
the edge of steadfastness, from which I have slipped?
the bulwark of the immovable rock, from which I have been shaken?
the procession of the faithful, from which I strayed?

Or may I pray that I might
prosper in the city of firstborn, from which I was taken captive? [5]
receive my daily bread, for which I have not worked?
be compensated for labor, for which I have not sweat?
be showered with rewards, which I have not earned?[6]
be recorded in the book of life, from which I have been erased?[7]
remember the bounty of blessings, which I always forget?

C

And now the thread of the hope of life has snapped.
I am dominated by a plague of leprosy, diseased all over.
My body has been eaten away by corruption.
Besieged, I have been made dead to God.
A small, shiny, ugly, white scar[8]
is all that remains of my earlier ambiguous symptoms,[9]
leaving no doubt of my uncleanness.
All vestiges of pride have been snuffed.
Salvation is forsaken; the good darkened by shadows.
Access to life is completely closed;[10] comfort removed.
The tribunal of judgment approaches.
The poisons of death quicken within me.
The malignancies reawaken.
The harbor is shut by reefs.
The path of hope is blocked.
The cloak of grace has been stripped away.
The splendor of majesty is eclipsed.
The sense of direction has been confused.
The stabs of reprimand have multiplied.
The horns of iniquity have sprouted.
The flames of hell have singed me.
The yoke of servitude weighs heavily.
The chains of slavery are strengthened.
The supporting structure has collapsed.[11]
The base of the summit has disintegrated.
The entire habitation is in abysmal condition.
The Spirit of God which loves holiness is dejected.[12]

D

I have embraced the bitter dregs
of torment, anguish, sorrow, spiritual distress,
pains beyond treatment,
doubt beyond steadying, shame beyond measure,
scandal beyond concealment, humiliation beyond brazenness,
fleeing beyond return, persecution beyond human decency,
a long, barren pilgrimage.[13]
Whereas you are salvation, strength, and relief,
mercy, enlightenment, atonement and life eternal,
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God,[14]
creator of heaven and earth,
who offers water to those parched from thirst in the desert.[15]
Blessed, kind, mighty, loving,
forbearing, caring, ingenious, visitor,
defender without sparing, protector victorious,
life indestructible, intercessor to heaven,
undiminishing fullness, bliss celebrated,

lovingly extend your right hand of mercy.
Accept and present me, a manifold sinner,
my sins forgiven and cleansed,
to your Holy Spirit, equal to you in honor, O living Word,
so that reconciled through you the Holy Spirit might return to me.
Through you and the will of the almighty Holy Spirit
may I be cleansed and presented to your Father
so that I may, with him and by your grace,
through the breath of salutation,
be inseparably united with you.
And for these gifts, to you, the Father and the Holy Spirit,
three persons, one nature and one godhead,
glory and thanksgiving from your created beings,
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Gen. 3:23-24.
[2] Jn. 15:2.
[3] Lk. 15:11-20.
[4] Eph. 5:30.
[5] Heb. 12:23, Ex. 13:14-15, Num. 18:15-16, Lk. 2:22-23.
[6] 1 Cor. 9:24-27.
[7] Ex. 32:33.
[8] Lev. 13:2; Lev. 13:19
[9] Lev. 13:5.
[10] Mt. 25:10.
[11] Sir. 27:3.
[12] Eph. 4:30.
[13] Lk. 19:12.
[14] Mt. 16:16.
[15] Num. 20:1-11.

Prayer 25

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

In describing my imprisonment and captivity,
I have recounted some of the wicked torments
that have afflicted me one after another,
most unfortunate soul that I am.
Now I change my figure of speech,
but not the subject of my laments.

B

The ways of my life are like the waves of the sea,
my soul tossing in this world upon countless, endless swells,
riding in the shell of my body
like the ship lost at sea, as the prophet Isaiah once said mourning[1]
the sudden destruction of Jerusalem and Samaria by Persian hordes.

Would I then be wrong to use similar sounds and images to describe
the spiritual destruction that crashed upon me?
For as I strode through life free of doubts and cares,
I had no inkling of the peril lying in wait for me
between work and rest.
It arrived like the winter's blast on a summer's day,
a turbulent front thrusting me into turmoil.

Wrecked by the blows of the wild waves of the sea, like a ship
whose rudder has become unhinged,
whose tall mast has been ripped from the deck,
whose flapping sails are in shreds,
whose well-built frame has lost its form,
whose ropes have unraveled,
whose lookout has been laid low,
whose cable strands have snapped,
whose anchor has come loose,
whose joints are unjointed,
whose guiding oar is bent,
whose keel is submerged,
whose helm is detached,
whose steering mechanism is gone,
whose backbone has snapped,
whose ribs are undone,
whose underbelly is shattered,
whose deck burst loose,
whose cabin has collapsed,

whose railing has fallen,
whose captain's chair has tipped,
whose deck planks have split apart,
whose fastening nails are out.

C

This image of destruction reminds me of my misery,
like a captain mourning his ship,
chin in hand,[2] tears streaming down,
viewing traces of the wreckage
bobbing on the crest of the waves.
My slain sanity sobs with pitiful grief.

I did not stray from the truth
in selecting these words to mourn
the shattered ark of my intellect.
For the Good Captain with his heavenly host
took pity on the sea of humanity in just this way.
Indeed, our merciful Lord,
wept like one of us mortals for the death of a friend[3]
and shed tears for fallen Jerusalem and treacherous Judas.
Those two, like sunken ships, were lost beyond hope,
but the first, having hit bottom,
was lifted up into tranquil peace,
by the thread of hope held in the hand of our deliverer.

D

I wonder

Will I ever see the battered ark of my body restored?
Will I ever see my shipwrecked soul healthy again?
Will I ever see what has been separated by so great a chasm rejoined?
Will I ever see the sad and tired heart of this grieved spirit in bliss?
Will I ever see the defiled image of nature once again in full bloom?
Will I ever see the destroyed temple of my miserable self standing?
Is there hope I might see this exiled slave set free?
Indeed, may one fallen from grace expect to be lifted once more to the light?
Will I ever see the native splendor of your radiance appearing to me in mercy?
Will I ever see the saddest aspect of my soul smile?
Will I ever hear good tidings instead of bad news?
Will I ever see the thousand cracks in my vessel mended?
Will I see through the windows of my mind's eye the bond of my debt torn up?[4]
Will I see the goodness of forgiving grace dawn upon the days of my anguish?
Will you lead me again into the joyous altar of light?
Will my dried bones come alive again like Ezekiel's through your life-giving breath?[5]
Will I again set eyes upon your holy cathedral, I who cry forth like the prophet from the belly of the whale,[6]
rejected from the light, standing before you in shame?

And will morning's light ever dawn to dispel my gloom, I, who was reared in darkness?
Will one tormented in the deep frost of winter ever see spring?
Will the mist of the rain restore the green pasture of my soul?
Will the lost sheep, gashed by wild beasts, be again counted among your flock through your merciful will?

E

For as Job said, the snares of evil are all around,
from these I cannot escape.[7]
But by your good will
if the light of compassion should shine,
if the door of your mercy should open,
if the rays of your glory should spread,
if the care of your hand should be revealed,
if the dawning sun of life should break forth,
if the sight of your beautiful morn should be unveiled,
if the bounty of your sweetness should flow forth,
if the stream from the maker's side should run,
if the drops of your pure love should shower down,
if the good news of the dawn of your grace should resound,
if the tree of your gift should blossom,
if the parts of your blessed body are distributed,
if the dashed expectations should be reassembled,
if the silenced sound of your beckoning voice, Lord, should again be heard,
if your banished peace should return,
then with this blessing
shall the faith of steady hope be forever mine
finding refuge in the Holy Spirit,
who with the Father is worshiped with the voice of sweetness
and together with you bathed in light too bright for human eyes.[8]
Grant life, forgiveness and heavenly bliss to me, a sinner,
holding your incorruptible grace, the true token of faith,
as an indestructible legacy.

This we pray in the name of your awe-inspiring, mighty and holy oneness
and the lordship of your three-fold person
beyond human words and understanding
to you, who are in essence and in existence eternally
exalted, crowned, clothed and
enthroned with sweetness, mercy and benevolence.
Indeed through you, O merciful Lord,
all things, in all ways, for all people, are possible.
To you glory here, now and forever and in the eternity to
come on the great day of revelation.
Amen.

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[1] Is. 5:30.
[2] Job 21:5.
[3] Jn. 11:35.
[4] Col. 2:14.

[5] Ezek. 37:1-11.
[6] Jon. 2:3-5.
[7] Job 18:8, 19:8, 36:8.
[8] 1 Tim. 6:16.

Prayer 26

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, truly and rightly, I join the others
who, modulating the sobs of their voices,
appropriately dress their writing
with the same sound at the end of each verse,
thereby more intensely inflaming and rending the heart,
and the anguish of the pangs of its distress
to the point of tears.
Thus I take my place at the head of the table of the practitioners
of this art,
who punctuate their poetry with sobs,
and like them sighing and exclaiming “alas,”
I lay open the grief of my soul,
which is not totally dead to the world,
but is not truly alive to God,
poetry neither especially hot, or particularly cold,
as the Evangelist wrote in the Revelations,
“thrice condemned by the Holy Trinity and all-knowing creator.”[1]
Thus, the fitting manifestation of my afflictions,
making them twice as pitiful,
is to set forth with a single rhyme
making them the epitome of wretchedness,
resonating response after response.

B

Like one, who renouncing debts, incurs even more penalties,
wretched person that I am, I am condemned by my unworthy acts
to a double penalty and unwaivable judgment,
liable before the Almighty, apprehended without any defense,
in a matter of thousands of talents, but without an ear’s worth of coins,
held captive in bitter confinement without an intercessor
left to sup on sighs and pain in a prison of darkness,
tormented without refuge or sustenance, I am pitiful,
and chose here a different mode for my lamentations,
transposing my weeping with words,
arranged with regularity in the same manner,
with the indivisible, mystical symbol: 20,
the pure vowel sound “ee” and the number of talents
returned by the industrious servant of the parable.[2]
The flames of the furnace of spiritual poverty are fanned from all sides,
around my miserable, defenseless self. My anguished heart is mortgaged and
my inconstant soul, easy prey to error.

Unsparingly indicted, judgment shall be demanded of me.
My senses shall be wounded by the weapons of death and sin.
Like a slave condemned beyond salvation,
my very essence is shredded by the hacking of its sharp sword.
At the mere recollection of the tribunal of my judgment,
gloom without a glimmer of light envelopes my pessimistic eyes.
Helpless captive of doubt, wretch that I am,
the image of heaven's consternation overwhelms me.
In the severe sunless Tartarus, without cover,
without refuge, singed by the flames of Gehenna, I am
lost without trace, swallowed by the abyss of sin.
This is my net worth of useless silver
which will never be honored or acceptable for deposit
in the Lord's treasury.
My petitions are tainted and my hands are unclean for an offering.
I am heartbroken and my fingers tremble in hope of redemption.
With my face to the ground, I beseech you, Mother of Jesus,
intercede and pray for forgiveness for me, a sinner.
You, who are the mighty savior of life, Queen of Heaven,
to you we offer the blessing of our voices and
the fragrance of incense and the gift of sweet oils.

C

Now, let me add to the lamentations already written, another part.
I have offered to the grantor of grace the fruits of tears.
Having been unable to find the depth of my perdition,
whenever I tried to describe it in precise words,
even the swift wings of my mind were not able to comprehend its essence.
Because the defeat of my mental capacities by the invincible forces of sin,
I have taken the cup of wrath in my hand and
I drink, as a taste of death, the perplexity of doubt.
And now that I have set these rhythms of transgression to song with a pitiful voice,
an invisible inferno blazes within me with flames that cannot be quenched,
like some invisible molten metal bubbling furiously in a blasting furnace,
like the shooting of poisoned arrows into the deepest chamber of my heart,
like jabs of pain from mortal wounds piercing through the veins of my liver,
like pangs of labor, the pain is stuck in my blocked intestines unable to escape,
like my two burning kidneys that cannot be cured,
like the unbearable bitterness of bile at the back of my throat,
the fading voice of a sigh of "alas" can be heard in my windpipe.
The various elements of the nature of my essence are like
enemies at war with each other,[3]
wavering with the timidity of opinions in total crisis.
Although kin, they are destroying each other in irreconcilable betrayal,
neither dead nor alive, I am buried in the mire of the baseness of sin.
And with the suspicion of a convict I gaze upon your benevolence,
that I might be lifted out of the pit of this hopeless life into the light of our desire.

D

May those who copy these words be crowned among the blissful.
May they expecting your mercy join the ranks of the pure.
May they be granted life through your beneficence for their homage to God the Word.
May the praiseworthy blessings of your lips be
upon the heart of those who distribute this book.
May the aspiration of Solomon's book of Proverbs be fulfilled.[4]
Through your Spirit, exalted God, may the imprint of your image be
incorruptibly renewed,
for you alone are patient and forgiving, and to you all glory.
Amen.

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[1] Rev. :15-16.
[2] This line has been the subject of a number of interpretations. Critical Edition p. 1019-20 n. 11. Avetikian is followed here, according to which the reference is to the letter ի [i] in Armenian, which is the number twenty and also the sound in which all the lines in this lamentation end starting from Part B. Twenty is indivisible as a "pure sound" not a diphthong, and is mystical in that it is the number of talents returned by the industrious servant in the parable of the Three Servants, Mt. 25:14.
[3] This is the conflict between the four elements, earth, wind, fire and water, out of which medieval thinkers believed all else was composed.
[4] Pr. 11:25.

Prayer 27

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

As I adapted the earlier chapters
to the wordy creations offered up in my lamenting voice,
wailing and sobbing, shrieking cries,
weeping sighs of anguish,
again I begin my prayers
with confession and contrition,
revealing my dark secrets.
And I shall place here, at
the beginning and end of each sentence
the same words, echoing each other
to form a single supplication of similar litanies
for soul-saving humility.

B

I have sinned against your beneficence, disrespectfully have I sinned.
I have sinned against the rays of your dawn, benightedly have I sinned.
I have sinned against the boundless benefits of your grace, verily have I sinned.
I have sinned against the exalted mercy of love, brazenly have I sinned.
I have sinned against the creator ex nihilo, undeniably have I sinned.
I have sinned against the tenderness of your almighty embrace, prodigally have I sinned.
I have sinned against the enlightenment of your undiminishing light,
underhandedly have I sinned.
I have sinned against the eating of your ineffable life, repeatedly have I sinned.
I have sinned against the talents of your incomprehensible gifts,
incessantly have I sinned.
I have sinned against the praiseworthy body of God, mortally have I sinned.
I have sinned against your worshipful blood, our creator, irrefutably have I sinned.

C

Indeed this "I have sinned" is a blessed phrase in this prayer for the heart set on hope,
It has an honorable lineage, an unforgettable command,
paternal tribute, law of our forefathers, our common inheritance,
irrefutable argument, forceful response,
bridge of life, pleasing to Heaven,
beloved of the saints, unseverable tie,
magical words,
inescapable logic, earnest request,
inviting altar, heart-rending cry,
hope for the hopeless, shield against hardship,
charter for the faithful, letter to the pagans,

rule of the ancients, birthright of Christians,
victorious creative force, mighty abyss,
terrifying separation, transcending art,
incomprehensible depth, dazzling vision,
sealed mystery that cannot be unlocked,
beyond the grasp of the quickest mind.
A fitting, miraculous sound,
which was not uttered by the outcast sinners,[1]
for if it had been, perhaps at that very moment,
the just death sentence and culling of the flock[2]
no longer being applicable,
the eternal barrier would have been torn down.
This word is an ornament of crowning glory,
by which the Godhead himself spreads his magnanimity among us.

D

For who, having sought refuge by holding the horn of the holy altar,
did not instantly escape punishment, being found pure?[3]
Or as Achan son of Carmi,[4] King Saul son of Kish,[5] and Judas son of Simon,[6]
were not absolved, merely by saying "I sinned"?
This, I affirm, with God as my witness, was just and fair,
for forced confession is not performed with loving contrition
and therefore cannot bring salvation.

E

But I again embrace this happy word, repeating it willingly
like a kind of baptism,
I have sinned by forgetting your favor, again I have sinned.
I have sinned by slaying my soul with my hands of flesh, senselessly I have sinned.[7]
I have sinned by betraying the life you gave, verily I have sinned.
I have sinned by ignoring your word, basely I have sinned.
I have sinned by hastening the day of my death myself, destructively I have sinned.
I have sinned by mortgaging myself to lifeless death, mockingly I have sinned.
I have sinned by my impudence before your greatness, annoyingly I have sinned.

F

Yet again I cry out my soul's ultimate lament.
For its loss and destruction came about by my own hand,
I strayed beyond return and though treated as a son, I turned hostile.
I stumbled from the heights of heaven and only gathered thorns of life.
Moreover, I cry out,
for I defiled myself and turned myself into an altar to the Destroyer.
There is also another ache in my heart,
for they consider me to be something I am not.
Like an outwardly sparkling cup that is really dirty,
or a whitewashed wall that is filthy,

or a showoff dressed in vain conceit
that is really a light engulfed in gloom,
a miserable eye blinded not by a speck, but a stick,[8]
or an extinguished torch of glory,
destructive in all things, in all places, in all ways,
toward the providence of the Lord,
toward the manifestations of Godliness,
toward the images shaped by the creator,
toward the fearfulness of humility,
toward the one, whom I saw with my own eyes,[9]
toward this, for which I am more accountable
than for the entire Gospel.
Amazement, shock,
gnawing cares, those infeasible intentions and
calculations beyond the mind's ken,
failed escapes, faulty landings,
deserved disappointments, fair reprimand,
appropriate ridicule, just denunciation,
well-deserved curses –
such are the accusations and self-inflicted torments of my sinful self.

G

And since you are able to forgive all these transgressions
and cure these deadly wounds,
Lord of mercies, God of all
Christ King, Son of the exalted Father,
creator, compassionate, beneficent,
blessed, generous, bountiful,
awesome, mighty, merciful,
guardian, rescuer, bulwark,
savior, reviver, resuscitator,
long-suffering, unvengeful, refuge,
physician, praised, heavenly,
ineffable, light, life,
resurrection, renewal, atonement.

H

If you would look upon me with that goodwill
toward humankind as you do,
then as I contemplate you, I will cry out in anguish.
If you would listen, I will sigh.
If you would incline your ear, I will whisper a prayer.
If you would take note, I will beseech you.
If you would forgive, I will ask forgiveness.
If you would turn toward me, I will call.
For if you turn away, I will be ruined.
And if you kick me away, I will cry.

If you do not protect my soul, I will die.
If you show me your terrible countenance, I will perish.
And if you scold me, I will tremble.
If you glare at me, I will shake.
If you are stern, I will cringe.
If you drive me away, I whimper.
If you knock me down, I will shatter.
If you do not put out the flames of despair, I will agonize.
If you despise me, I will flee.
If you threaten me, I will collapse.
If you examine me, I will be stoned.
If you look hard at me, I will sink.
If you do not spare me, I will be rejected.
If you summon me, I will be paranoid.
If you stare at me, I will be shamed.
If you call me, I will fear.
For I have betrayed the gift of goodness,
forsaken bliss, abandoned grace, disavowed my word,
forgotten the gift of life, lost boldness and confidence,
angered the creator of my being,
trampled that grace beyond words,
deformed the image of honor.

I

But if you, Lord Jesus, reach out
to me in loving-kindness as I suffocate with sighs of pain,
then, as the Scriptures promised,
"Your cure will cleanse away the greatest sins."[10]
And through your boundless kindness
I will be joined to you, with your image of light
reimprinted upon my soul.
Atoned and re-established in your salvation,
I will reach the immortal life of the virtuous
and give glory forever to you
with the Father and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

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[1] Mt. 25:41.
[2] Mt. 25:32.
[3] 1 Kg. 2:28.
[4] Jos. 7:19.
[5] 1 Sam. 15:24.
[6] Mt. 27:4.
[7] Rom. 6:12.
[8] Mt. 7:3.
[9] Commentators through the centuries have interpreted this as a witness to St. Gregory's sainthood and visions. Critical Edition p. 1026, n. 14.
[10] Ec. 10:4.

Prayer 28

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Which of my sins shall I confess now?
Which shall we examine?
On which kind shall I discourse?
How much of the hidden shall I uncover?
Which shall I confess –
the present, which I am still doing?
Or the past, which I have done?
Or the future, which I fear?
The slippery places, where I stumbled?
Those faults I thought small, but which God reckoned large,
or the insubstantial, which are not worth mentioning?
The minor, which are many,
or the few, which are grave?
The psychological passions which are destructive
or the physical ailments which are deadly?
Those that began as easy pleasures,
or those that ended in destruction?
The invisible or visible?
Those committed directly by the hand,[1]
or those committed indirectly by one's breath?
The scattershot of easy marks
or the arrow shots at length?
Those whose depth is beyond measure
or those that totally cover the surface?
Many-headed harlotry[2]
or incurable illness?
The body swollen with evil
or the soul starved of the good?
The penchant for things unpleasing to God,
or the equally frenzied tugging at the leash of restraint?
The mortal sins or my vain thoughts?

B

Truly, like a willfully crazed person, stripped naked,
I display my waywardness openly,
contradicting the wise man who said
that the clever cover up their shame.[3]
I who am estranged from religion, who am expelled from the ranks,
in holiness, profane; in celibacy, unclean,
in justice, iniquitous; in piety, wicked,
in words of my mouth, close to my creator, but in my innermost organs, distant.

By my lips offering honor, as the Prophet says, but not with my heart.[4]
And if I recount my full shame here,
I would tempt fate with a worse punishment,
for I am the unreliable servant,
vacillating between two paths, both leading to damnation.[5]
I try, but I have no success.
I press forward, but I do not arrive.
I rush, but I am late.
I strain, but I do not see.
I desire, but I am not fulfilled.
I long, but I do not meet.
I have all earthly ills and thus can serve as
an emissary offering prayers for the whole world.

C

Forgive these sins, generous God,
and do not focus only on them.
It is easier for you to erase them than
for me to describe my vile actions.
Therefore I write without restraint
so you may blot them out,
you, who for the sake of us sinners
became long-suffering.
My soul, like Ezra's yearning heart,
is anxious, my spirit, restless
as I list these faults,[6]
showing how I am in danger of every mortal passion,
how I am fallen into a pit of sin.
And like Job I doubt you hear me.[7]
Now, as a self-accused, self-condemned captive,
bound by sin, I turn myself in
and block all of life's possibilities.
But by your mercy toward me
your greatness is multiplied, praiseworthy Lord.

D

And as advised by the good prophet,
let us try to pray with him in song,
with our firm faith in God's protection,
"Give your word," says Hosea,
"And turn away from sin and toward the Lord our God,
and say to him, 'Would you forgive our sins?'
that you might be restored to the good,
that your souls might enjoy bliss. "[8]
God spoke, and who are we not to listen?
He himself gave witness, and who are we not to believe?

E

These words, weighed and judged,
these terms describing God-given conditions,
this good news, the Lord's purpose,
this door to what is right,
this invitation to comfort,
this genuine picture,
the undiminishing treasure,
the indelible memory,
I hereby set down in faith,
and testify with the prophet –
that you are able to forgive all our sins,
thereby magnifying, exalting yourself,
for this wretched soul.
In this you reign, providing all,
reaching everywhere,
triumphing over all violence,
crumbling all hardness,
fending off all blows,
softening all severity,
overcoming all bitterness,
sweetening sourness,
lightening the inconsolable,
forgiving all debts,
remitting all transgressions,
you, able, mighty, master of all arts,
submerge and destroy all sins and clear them away,
as with a flash of lightning, which takes no space,
but penetrates the depths and is enveloped by the universal sea.

F

Now, Father, through prayers offered by the readers of this book,
have mercy, for the sake of the cross and the suffering and
death of your Son, on the one who is the source of
the lamenting voice of these tearful psalms.[9]
May he who prepared this remedy for the salvation of our souls
be made whole in your name, Almighty.
Let him who showed us the true path through confession,
be clear of all his transgression.
Let him who taught us to clip the wings of our pride
with his message on the rule of life
be released from the evil bonds of deadly sins –
original, final and all in between.
Through the beneficence of your Trinity,
restore us to the light and
we will deem ourselves blissful with him.

G

Now, Father creator
awesome name, miracle-maker,
shuddering voice, familiar exclamation,
embracing thought, splendid alert, severe command,
essence beyond examination, existence beyond words,
reality beyond measure, might beyond thought,
good will, limitless dominion,
immeasurable greatness, exalted beyond comprehension,
quantity beyond weighing, supremacy beyond surpassing,
the origin of the Son by fatherhood, and not by priority,
by you and through your unbounded power,
banish the tormenting and demonic frenzied fever,
which slyly entered with sin.
Banish it from humankind so that
frightened by the wondrous and unending stream
of blood of your heavenly lamb,
we might be cleansed forever.

H

And now, before your wonders, in abject humility,
may Satan shrink in shame at the evil deeds of his angels,
may he be tormented and driven away,
banished and exiled,
into the outer darkness,
from the altar of your dwelling place within us.
And when you have purged them, wipe the tears from our faces,
erase the sobbing of our voices from our hearts.
And in memory of the blows, like thorns in the side,
mortal and terrifying,
by which the Only Begotten was nailed to the cross,
may the evil one also suffer similar pain.
And may the blow to the side by the piercing arrow,
gravely wound him and
kill the creator of death.
And since Christ bowed his venerable head in your bosom,
before he breathed his last breath, O Exalted One,
let rebellious Beliar with his evil ways
perish totally, condemned, vanquished.
And again, since the truly immortal was concealed and buried
in the womb of the earth, let the haughty
see himself bound in the darkness of the shadows
on the deadly pavement of hell.
And may he remember the first irreversible blow
by which the resistance to the poisonous snake died
at the price of the suffering of the almighty Savior.

I

For your glory and in praise of your Son and through the Holy Spirit,
I confess this, Father of mercy,
for in the deep mystery of your unity,
one does not need the least power from the other,
rather we glorify your Word made flesh without beginning,
along with the timeless Father.
To you alone, Holy Trinity,
from one stem, indivisible self,
blessings, thanks and strength,
and the ineffable splendor of greatness,
felicitous balance and equality forever.
Amen.

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[1] Gen. 3:3-7 (sin by reaching for the fruit of the tree of knowledge vs. sin by the breath of one's voice).
[2] Following Terian, *Narek*, p. 122, n. 2, Rev. 17:1-5.
[3] Pr. 12:16.
[4] Is. 29:13.
[5] 1 Kg. 18:21.
[6] 1 Ezra 8:72.
[7] Job 9:16
[8] Hos. 14:2, Is. 55:3.
[9] Commentators suggest that this section is dedicated to St. Gregory's teachers or parents. Critical Edition, p. 1028, n. 11.

Prayer 29

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

You alone are the origin of all goodness,
mercy beyond telling, Son of the one God on high,
who made the whole day a purgatory for our sins,[1]
and not a house of condemnation.
You are for me
the expectation of good news, instead of a day of dread.
You, physician to the ailing,
shepherd to the lost sheep,
master to the servant under your care,
pure wine for the dejected,
curative ointment for the wounded,
freedom for the captives of sin,
blessing of goodness for the rejected,
seal of grace for the despised,
the calling to anointment for the dispossessed,
restoration to uprightness for the fallen,
a mighty fortress for the stumbling,
a sublime helping hand to the disgraced,
the gate to heaven for the doubting,
stairway to bliss for the depraved,
the straight way for the confused,
forgiving king for the trespasser,
sweet hope for the abandoned,
the outstretched hand of life for the banished.

B

You alone are great and generous in everything.
You are the definition of abundant goodness,
who pours forth constantly without measure,
more than we ask or expect,
as Paul said in gratitude.[2]
For you commanded that we should do good,
from dawn to dusk, in the same day,
nine times fifty, plus four times ten.[3]
Always attentive, forgiving with an unfettered heart,
something more than the expectation of men's prayers.
And if we place my wretchedness and disgrace beside your glory,
omnipotent and awesome power, God of all, blessed Lord Christ,
by what measure of weight shall the balance between
the creator and the clay be set?
You remain in these things infinite and unexaminable,

good in all things, having no part in the wrath of darkness;
therefore, far less are the number of stars than your greatness,[4]
for you called them into existence from nothing
by merely pronouncing their names.
Or take the mass of the earth floating in air,
created from nothing, from which you established the dry land of earth.
These are less than the number I formulated above,
by which you taught us to be like you in forgiveness.

C

As the radiant light of your long-suffering will
dispelled all evil without trace,
like a speck of fog in the heat of the sun,
so here, our natural impulses are shown in our common behavior.
For who among mortals has sinned and not regretted?
Who has been corrupted and not been ashamed?
Who has been base and not been humiliated?
Who has faltered and not repented?
Who has been ruined and not sobbed?
Who has been scandalized and not felt compunction?
Who has been defeated and not closed his mouth?
Who has been cheated and not sighed?
Who has tasted bile and not become bitter?
Who has fallen from the heights and not been disheartened?
Who has lost greatness and not mourned?
Who has been deprived of happiness and not cried?
Who has been robbed of the grace of glory and not lamented?
Who has done harm to his soul and not been embarrassed?
Who has been banished from God's sight, and not felt the loss of his gaze?
Who has heard God's warnings, and not trembled?
Who has made one mistake and not sighed "alas" a thousand times?
Who has bared himself on a winter's day and not shivered?
Who has done wrong and not pelted himself with stones in his mind?
Who has seen the high and mighty slave and not been vexed?
Who has done evil and not cursed himself?
Who has cultivated vices and not condemned his soul?
Who has done shameful things and not made a mockery of his body?
Who has had hard times and not cursed his life?
Who has remembered his misdeeds and not stewed?
Who has recalled secrets and not become flustered?
Who has seen the dark side and not sought the perdition of death?
Who has had visions of the invisible and not hung his head back to earth?
Who has committed sins of ease and not burned
with the inextinguishable flames of the furnace?
Who has violated nature, and not been parched?
Who has acted willfully and not prayed for his own death?
Who has done the unspeakable and not become disturbed?
Who has unbearably violated his essence and not grieved?

Who has become high and mighty and not been worn down?
Who has committed acts that corrupt innocence and not burned?
Who has done things condemnable by banishment and not been anguished?
Who has appeared with a grimy face
and not felt deserving of the heaven's disapproval?
Who has focused on one of his major sins
and not been wounded by sin's weaponry?
Who has committed a scandalous act
and not woven the discouraging woe into the sighs of his voice?
Who has been ousted from his chair in heaven and has not fallen down cringing?
Who has placed dirt on his head instead of a splendid halo
and not been tortured with a thousand deaths?
Who has put on sack cloth instead of a bright cloak and not been sad?
Who has lost his life and not sweat tears of blood?
Who has clothed himself in darkness instead of light and not fainted?
Who has mourned for a loved one, and not wilted?

D

These then faithfully describe me,
the sinner deserving reprimand,
a sad face, an extinguished ray, dried up liquid, shriveled lips,
a deformed mould, a dispirited soul, a distorted voice, a twisted neck.
It would not be wrong to classify me as
a mind shorn of arrogance, a heart stripped of pride,
a wretch afraid to ask for help, too parched to pray,
self-scolding wanderer,
starved by self-denial, hungry because of duly earned torment,
struck down by a fair verdict, condemned to death by self-incrimination,
deservedly exiled, self-cursed outcast,
like the Pharisee who was rejected,
and the sinful tax collector who was pleasing to God.[5]

E

And now, if the Slanderer takes credit, as part of his day's work,
for planting his bad seeds and using his evil devices on us, the wayward,
why should you not count one by one the good things
that by your will and saving care
are planted in us to fortify our souls,
Lord of merciful kindness, mighty and victorious,
you who pardons us sinners,
omnipotent savior of all?
If you can exchange the abyss for heaven,
or bring the dark of night into the light,
if you can turn the bitter bile into sweet manna,
or the groans of extreme grief
into the dancing circles at a joyful wedding,
if for you these are easy and possible,

then you can do more than these,
you who reign over all in awesome power.
To you glory forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Lk. 17:4.
[2] Eph. 3:20.
[3] Mt. 18:21-22. Jesus' commandment on how many times we should forgive those in error, 7 times 70 (490). Omitting the "three" as an erroneous scribal error, following Terian, *Narek*, p. 128, n. 10.
[4] Ps. 146:4
[5] Lk. 18:9-14.

Prayer 30

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now, let us see the truth of your words, O merciful God of all,
who forgives and blesses the sinner,
even the sinner faltering many times a day,
if he turns back repentant,
even if the choice to turn back is made
with his last breath,
or in the very midst of sinning,[1]
especially since this cruel companion
of our governing faculty[2]
is the always contrary, lying, cheating,
flattering Instigator,
the same who, in the words of the Proverbs, grazes on the wind,[3]
an unruly fugitive from you, my creator.
My wayward body, easy prey for this Predator,
sowing thorns among the wheat,[4]
endlessly wavering on any excuse,
so often only you can keep track.
And then comes the pitiful wail,
which follows the sinning,
hopeless and tormented, hear me sighing, “alas”
as I come before you, Lord,
with pleas for mercy and wretched groans,
written with tears,
humbled by pangs of guilt caused by the distress of boundless evil.

B

So that the repetition does not add up
to mere wordiness,
I will make my plea even more pathetic
because a sinner does not dare ask for paradise
but only reduced torment.
He does not ask to be among the immortals, who live in the light, but only
among the feeling, breathing beings destined for the dark grave,
not among the resurrected,
but among broken hearted and contrite,[5]
justly deserving in death, restrained in their merriment,
with a smiling face but an anguished mind,
cheerful demeanor but mournful eyes,
composed appearance but bitterly tearful heart.

C

Two cups in two hands
one filled with blood, the other with milk,[6]
two censers flickering
one with incense, the other with crisp fat,
two platters piled with delicacies,
one sweet, the other tart,
two goblets overflowing
one with tears, the other with brimstone,
two bowls at the finger tips
one with wine, the other with bile,
two windows of sight
one crying, the other erring,
two refiner's cauldrons
one heating, one cooling,
two expressions on one face
one mildly affectionate, the other fiercely raging,
two lifted hands
one to strike, the other to shield,
two grimaces
one dejected, the other angry,
two rebukes at a time
one for now, the other for later,
two hideouts for doubt
one "at least," the other "perhaps,"
two sighs in one mouth,
one for misfortune, the other for confusion,
two impulses in one heart,
one of doubtful hope, the other of certain doom,
two downpours from one dark cloud,
one of arrows, one of stones,
two thunderous downpours
one of hail, the other of fire,[7]
two sorrows of a painful night,
one disease, the other death,[8]
two insults to sad mourning,
one of rebuke, the other threat,
two suns on opposite horizons
one dark, the other blazing.[9]

D

And if a fist is raised, he cringes as if it is for him.
If a hand bearing gifts is extended, he thinks it is for someone else.
If someone swaggers, he cowers.
If another's head is high, his hangs low.
If evil is recalled, he sighs.
If the saintly are remembered, he is ashamed.

If the next life is mentioned, he trembles.
If someone blesses him, he curses himself .
If someone praises him, he puts himself down.
If he is criticized, he agrees.
If viciously ridiculed, he considers it just.
If someone wishes his death, he seconds it.
If death thunders in, he barely raises his head.
His book of rights slammed shut,
his hope of being heard abandoned,
his path of action checked,
he would not hesitate at suicide
to gain release from this dead end,
if that did not foreclose salvation.
In the words of the soulful wise man,
truly, woeful is the sinner
standing in doubt at the fork in the road.[10]

E

Why don't you take pity, benevolent God,
upon my wailing and sighing,
you, whose name is exalted for saying, "I am the merciful Lord"?[11]
Grant your goodness in the face of my slavish wickedness,
your sweetness before my bitterness at being condemned to death,
your beacon for my lost self, found again,
your mercy upon my brazen waywardness,
your humility before my destructive impudence,
your right arm to protect me from peril,
your hand to save me from drowning,
your finger to mend my incurable wounds,[12]
your spirit to defend my traumatized soul,
your patience for my insolent ingratitude,
your strength for anointing a scoundrel like me,
your commandments as atonement for my sins,
your foot as a refuge for a runaway like me,
your arm protecting a fugitive like me,
your light guiding a wayward soul like me,
your wisdom reassuring a doubter like me,
your blessedness for accepting the cursed like me,
your goad as encouragement for the disheartened like me,
your cup as comfort for the grieving like me,
your will as relief for the anguished like me,
your love calling even those despised like me,
your word to steady those wavering like me,
your bloodshed for wounded souls like me,
your care for my ever increasing, unseen pains,
your mentorship for choosing me in my despair,
your communion rejoining those cut off like me,[13]
your spark of life under death's shadow like me,

your serenity for those troubled like me,
your welcome for those harshly persecuted like me,
your beckoning voice to those who have strayed like me,
for you rule all with mercy.
With you there is no darkness,
and without you no goodness,
and yours is the glory forever.
Amen.

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[1] Mt.18:21.
[2] Following Terian, *Narek*, p. 132, n.2.
[3] Pr. 9:12.
[4] Mt. 13:24.
[5] Ps. 51:19
[6] Per Terian, *Narek*, p. 133, n. 9, wine/blood for believers, but milk for the immature in faith.
[7] Ex. 9:23-24.
[8] Lam. 1:2, 2 Cor. 7:10.
[9] Rev. 6:12, 7:16.
[10] Sir. 2:14.
[11] Ex. 22:27.
[12] Mk. 7:33.
[13] Rom. 11:23.

Prayer 31

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, since I have increased
the distress of my sighing voice
with great cries and inconsolable grief,
so that you, merciful inducer
of confession of invisible secrets,[1]
Son of the living God, Lord Jesus Christ,[2]
might look with kindness and grant atonement,
for you are indeed able and truly sufficient.
If you want, you have the means;
as much as you want, you can do,[3]
you, who are more enriched by giving than receiving.[4]
Your treasure increases more by sharing than gathering.
Your estate grows more by disbursing than collecting.
Your stores pile up more by distributing than hoarding.
All this gives me faith that through you
I might find the path to salvation.
I, the disgraced, believe along with the honorable.
I hope with Abraham and Anna,
one of whom believed your word,[5]
and the other listened to the words
of the high priest – and for that, in old age,
became the father of countless sons.[6]
He hoped to see the barren womb of Sarah
as the fertile and blessed field of many peoples:
saints, prophets, and chosen kings.
And the other, Anna,
with the untilled field of her womb,[7]
abounded with fruit of seven children,
a mystical number symbolizing the eternity of Him, who is,
and the unexaminable bonds of the eternity
of the Godhead and the unending
abundance of children of the baptismal font,
the glorious number which is unpunctuated, an infinite decimal,
rather it is a prime number, inherently unique and pure,
whose nature is eternally beyond telling
and difficult for our minds to comprehend.

B

And now count this small confession of faith in prayer
toward the justification and salvation of my hopeless soul.

Hear the quivering voice of the cries of my sighing heart,
and rank me with those blessed souls just described,
so that I too might live with them and share in their bliss.
Trusting more in your grace than my works,[8]
since grace is far more exalted and glorious,
far greater than anything that can be measured by words–
a comfort to my distress and atonement for my sins,
beyond the feeble reach of our minds,
for with your awe-inspiring blood
and the mother of your incarnation, worthy of adoration,
the circle of the apostles, ranks of prophets,
host of martyrs, both cavalry and foot soldiers,
armed only with courage, wrestlers with fate,
platoons of hermits, orders of learned teachers,
assemblies of the pious, legions of heavenly spirits on earth,
the heavenly patrol of guards, the offering of the first fruits,
sacrifice of bulls, lighting of lanterns,
the aroma of incense, the fragrance of scented oils,
the victorious sign of salvation,
the erection of altars where God dwells,
the hands of the priests that rest with grace.[9]

C

The soul's every movement
is a reminder of God,
the taking of a step,
the extension of the right hand,
the raising of the arm,
with thanks for good works,
with shame for bad,
for familiar conversation
and public addresses,
in plain speech,
in elevated works,
in the fervor of virtue,
day and night,
we are guided by you
in the useful movements for our spirit,
asleep or awake,
in mortal battles or combat with demons,
in large and small struggles with heretics,
while drinking or eating,
in all that once stirred feelings,
whether pleasant or unpleasant,
with the pleasant we pray to remain,
and from the unpleasing, through your miraculous intercession,
we pray to be free.
For you are capable of all things, as we all believe,

the suckling infants, rash youths,
immoral men, haughty outlaws,
even the actor and the motley mob,
even in the dancing
and clapping of hands that do not please
your will, Almighty,
you are not forgotten.

D

You have created all and all is yours,
you who are all-compassionate, take mercy on all,
and even those who sin are yours,
for they are in your accounting,
for they know your strength,
even as the Proverb teller said,[10]
whose prayer I echo with my wretched words,
testifying like a criminal,
I dare to say
that whoever praises your name
recognizes your existence, and though he be
tainted by the sevenfold sins,[11]
deserving of double punishment
to set a good example, yet,
he is yours, is he not?
For sometimes in the midst of black crows
one sees a flock of white doves,
and in the middle of wild, unkempt horses,
will be a tame sheep,
in the midst of beastly dogs, a sacrificial lamb,
and mildness amid harshness,
perfection amid defects,
humility amid haughtiness,
truth amid lies,
simplicity amid cunning,
purity amid perversity,
kindness amid wickedness,
honesty amid depravity,
mercy amid cruelty,
repentance amid despair,
sweetness amid anger,
reconciliation amid hostility,
forbearance amid sarcasm,
encouragement amid insults,
blessings amid slings and arrows,
that being why I could never understand,
who among us earthly born is destined
for your inheritance, for
you alone judge fairly

and distinguish
the impious who thinks himself pure,
and the prostitute who is repentant,[12]
O only king and benefactor of all,
blessed in the highest and in all things forever.
Amen.

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[1] Is. 1:18; 43:25, Mt. 9:2.
[2] Jn. 8:10, 20:23.
[3] Mt. 8:2.
[4] Acts 20:35.
[5] Gen. 17:16.
[6] 1 Kg. 1:17.
[7] 1 Kg. 2:5.
[8] Rom. 11:6.
[9] Priests were often buried under altars with hands folded in prayer. Thanks to Prof. Abraham Terian of St. Nersess Seminary for this insight.
[10] Wis. 15:2.
[11] Gen. 4:15-24.
[12] Lk. 18:10, Jn. 8:11.

Prayer 32

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, being bereft of all the virtues mentioned
and seeing myself among those who
should be punished, I pray for mercy
with the prayers of all others,
with the defeated and timid,
the weak and small,
the fallen and despised,
the banished and returned,
the doubter and the true believer,
the disgraced and the exalted,
the repressed and the upright,
the stumbling and the standing,
the rejected and the accepted,
the hated and the called,
the stupefied and the sober,
the wayward and the restrained,
the exiled and the invited,
the disowned and the beloved,
the dejected and the cheerful,
the bashful and the blithe.

B

But here I will not recount again the sins of Jerusalem,
as Micah commanded concerning his forefathers,[1]
or as Isaiah told of Jacob's iniquity,[2]
rather I will reveal my own transgressions,
for with the peril of death upon me, I utter, "Alas," like the prophet Micah,[3]
and reproach myself like the Psalmist,
so that my full confession might find favor,
and I will not need to say "alas" again,
but might be at once cleansed completely by your blessed command.
Now, again upon my knees, before your sweet beneficence,
I open my soul before you,
showing how I sink like an image of death,
like the crawling beasts
lowered to the ground and covered in dust,
I, who nailed myself on the path of destruction in this fleeting life.
Let me lean upon you, Lord, staff of life,
body springing from the root of David,
inexplicably joined to your uncreated divinity.
I stand bowed and humbled before you, good Lord,

with my face turned to the ground
and my eyes raised to you on high,
gazing pathetically upon you
who hears our sighing,
perfectly compassionate, thoroughly sweet,
the lake of my light filled with tears,
I offer prayers of hope to your majesty.

C

O totally generous God, whose patience never ends,
hear me though I cause you bitterness.
You alone are the means of our salvation,
God of all, great beyond telling,
nature beyond comprehension,
truth beyond examination,
mighty power, able benefactor, completeness lacking nothing,
indescribable inheritance, fitting fortune,[4]
abundant preparation, unobscured wisdom,
sought-for gift, desirable offering,
longed-for bliss, peace unspoiled by sadness,
discovery beyond doubt, life that cannot be wrenched away,
estate that cannot be sold, exaltation that cannot be exchanged,
doctor of all arts, unshakable foundation,
who turns back the wayward, finds the lost,
gives hope to those who seek refuge, light for those in darkness,
forgiveness for sinners, a sanctuary for runaways,
calm for the troubled, salvation for the dead,
who liberates the captive, frees the betrayed,
steadies the slipping,
grieves with the scandalized,
suffers the doubters,
O vision of light, sign of rejoicing, rain of blessing,
breath of our nostrils, strength of our visage, covering of our head.[5]
O mover of lips, inspirer of speech, helmsman of the soul,
lifter of hands, extender of arms, who holds the reins of the heart,
O voice of a friend, called like one of the family,
genuine antiphon, fatherly minister of care,
name given in confession, venerated image,
boundless form,[6]
lordship before which we bow, eulogized memory,
gateway to joy, unfailing path, door to glory,
way of truth, ladder to heaven,
worthy of a multitude of other praises,[7]
of infinite forms and verses without end,
which an earthbound mouth cannot pronounce
and the body lacks the stamina to say
and the soul's yearnings cannot sustain.

D

All eyes turn to you, O God of all.
Incline your ear toward the prayers of the weeping voices
of your servants and handmaidens.
Accept the dew of my woeful song, the tears of my sore eyes,
upon the immaculate feet of your humanity, Christ,
as you did when the sinner Mary washed your feet with her hair and tears.[8]
Let me return to you professing faith with the kiss of my lips
upon tasting the communion of life's salvation, beneficent God,
mercifully having received union with the same spirit
and the same compassion as the sinful woman.
I hope for the pledge of your great gifts
in exchange for my meager faith.
And through the compassion of your love for me,
your servant who proclaims your cherished name,
may the severe winter winds become tranquil air,
the gusty storm become a pleasant breeze,
the misgivings of fear become great confidence,
the meting out of punishment turn into bliss,
the perils of grief become spiritual rejoicing,
the tossing waves calm into placid water,
the arm-wrenching helm turn toward a safe harbor,
the harvest of heavy sin be transformed into a stipend of grace.

E

And for the myriad of good things from you,
may your mighty name be magnified, proclaimed and honored with incense.
May the instigator of evil be embarrassed, rejected and persecuted.
May the mortgage of sin be annulled,
may the snares be cut loose, the traps removed,
may the ties be undone, the abyss eliminated,
may perils be lifted, deceit torn away,
may the mortgage of sin be annulled,
may yokes be thrown off, ploughs unhitched,
and instead of the gloomy darkness of evil transgressions,
and the siege of the armies of demons,
may the sun of your glory shine forth,
giving life, salvation and light,
from the right and the left, the front and the back.
And may the morning rays of the soul's springtime shine
upon those who await your coming.
For you are charitable and comforting in all things,
and all things are possible for you,
you who want life and salvation for all.[9]

F

O hand of Jesus Christ, giver of all gifts,
turn also toward me extending your grace.
Dwell in me, become a part of me and do not leave
my anguished soul, the chamber of love.
And may your indelible seal,
a token of the brilliant light beckoning us to Christian salvation,
stay with me to intercede for my entry
in the book of your legacy of eternal life,
Holy Spirit of the Gospel and heavenly creator.
And to you who are your own sole cause,
and to you the only begotten of the sole cause,
and to you who bear the sole cause,
three persons in one Godhead,
worthy of glory from the greatest of heavenly beings
and the ranks of saints,
forever.
Amen.

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[1] Mic. 1:1-7.
[2] Is. 58:1.
[3] Mic. 7:1, Jl. 1:15.
[4] Ps. 16:5-6.
[5] Gen. 2:7, Lam. 4:20.
[6] Rev. 3:5.
[7] Jn. 14:6.
[8] Lk. 7:37-50.
[9] Jn. 10:10.

Prayer 33

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Let this offering of words, compassionate God,
from the fruits of my soul rise to you with incense,
mixed by you with the sweet oil
used by the pious Mary,[1]
which you accepted with respect
just as you also accept offerings astonishingly
from prostitutes, fortunate to be making offerings.
May my humble words also praise you and may you
accept their reaching toward
your unreachable head, God on high,
in spite of the reproach of the Psalmist,
"Do not let the leafy boughs of my head
be anointed with the oil of the sinner."[2]

B

Let the perfume, the bouquet of this book
of confessions be redoubled and affect multitudes.
Let its memory be told everywhere and fill the world
like the fragrant oil in the house of Lazarus.[3]
For you are the same Lord who brought
the sinful plotting women to their senses.[4]
And their character you transformed in your true image,
as in the allegory of the prophet.[5]
By changing them you made me know
the perfection of your grace.
Instead of barley for livestock you provided
the abundant wheat of the bread of life.
Instead of tarnishing silver you presented your majestic image.
Instead of intoxicating wine, the cup of your saving blood.
Instead of the oil taken from the wanton women of old,[6]
you anointed me with your grace.
Instead of shredding burial bindings around the head,
there is an incorruptible cloak.
Instead of elaborate handcuffs, a free soaring toward
perfect virtue according to the law and the Gospels.
Instead of a splendid earring, the unfading memory
of your lordly voice.
Instead of a sparkling necklace, the bountiful inheritance
of the sweet yoke of your righteousness.

C

But am I proud of these writings,
rather than feeling shame again?
Why change my style in this prayer book,
in woeful song, to suit my fancy
and earn punishment as sin's wages?
Citing briefly the words of the prophet,
I enter this chamber solemnly like a stern prosecutor,
my charges prepared,
and rather than reveling in them,
I enter with weeping, a sighing voice in angry protest,
with bruising insults and grave wailing.
But your lovingkindness, O great God, that reaches everyone,
awakened in me hope as well,
whence comes my regret, confession,
good news, gifts, visions of light,
divine encouragement, splendid visions,
the source of hope for some,
the source of despair for others,
and for me, who willingly destroyed myself,
my portion of perdition.

D

If Ezekiel said that under
God's disguising cloak many people patch together idols,[7]
and act like harlots –
how much more severe will my punishment be
for cloaking my unclean self in God inside and out?
I am amazed that I am not consumed in flames.
I am astonished that I am not burning up.
I am confounded that I am not taken hostage,
tortured, abandoned, tormented, beaten,
pulverized, cracked, crushed, torn to shreds
in the jaws of Satan, our destroyer,
according to Scripture.[8]
All that is left for me
is the glimmer of a memory of
hope of salvation. For the Gospel of Christ
is truly life revealed where there is
for our sins, forgiveness,
for debts, grace,
for decay, renewal,
for iniquity, atonement,
for wounds, bandages,
for distress, calm,
for punishment, pardon,
for war, peace,

for fire, rain,
for condemnation, rewards,
for the dread of dying, lenience,
for the destruction of death, the salvation of life.

E

How can I enumerate so many things here yet neglect
to include what is beyond words? When speaking
of the exalted Father, we must remember our tie
to the Son, the only begotten son of the Father.
And remembering these two we must commune with
the Holy Spirit, remembering also
that with the cross comes salvation,
with the word, comfort,
with God's all-knowing judgment, the reward of good will,
with the life-giving font of baptism, the mediation of reconciliation,
as well as all other countless blessings, bestowed by God:
freedom from compulsion, freedom from the yoke,
freedom to rule oneself and not be ruled.
These are the comforting heralds of the life to come
in the midst the bitterness of death.
For if I did not have these things,
surely I would have perished long ago, as the Psalmist says.[9]
I do not glorify the Father by disparaging the Son.
Nor is the Holy Spirit subordinated by naming the Son first.
I hold the Trinity equal in glory and in creation
co-created, for there are prayers to the Holy Spirit
to be offered before the Divine Liturgy,
when the heavenly lamb is sacrificed I pray this way:

F

Almighty, beneficent God of all, who loves humankind, maker
of the visible and invisible, savior and creator,
defender and peacemaker, spirit of the Father Almighty,
we beseech you with outstretched arms, tears and prayers,
as we appear before you,
you, who strike terror in our hearts,
judge us as we approach with trembling and fear,
presenting first this sacrificial offering of words to your power
that is beyond understanding.
You share the throne, glory and creatorship of the undiminishing
honor of the Father.
You examine our deepest secrets and mysteries.[10]
O Emmanuel, who fulfill the will of your Father
who sent you as the Savior, life-giver and creator.
Through you is made known to us,
the three persons of the United Divinity,

of which you, who are beyond understanding, are recognized as one.
By you and through you did our forefathers,
the first generation of the patriarchal tribe, called prophets,
tell of the past and the future,
what has been and what is yet to come,
in plain words and images.
Spirit of God, Moses proclaimed you as the one
who brooded on the water, an unbounded force,[11]
taking the new-born under your protective wing with care,
and with lovingkindness revealing the mystery of the baptismal font.
Likewise, in the pattern of the archetype, before fashioning
the pliable substance with its final covering,[12]
you shaped, in lordly manner, all nature,
the full range of existence, all beings from nothing.
Through you all that has been created shall receive
the renewal of the resurrection
on the last day of this life
and the first day in the land of the living.
Christ obeyed you with unity of will as he did his Father,
being of the same family, of the same essence as the Father.
Being the first born son in our image,
he announced you, true God,
equal and consubstantial with his mighty Father,
He preached that blasphemy against you is unforgivable.
He silenced the mouths of those who spoke impiously against you,
as enemies of God, while pardoning his own enemies.[13]
He, the just and spotless, who finds all,
who was betrayed for our sins,
and rose from the dead to justify us.[14]
Through you glory to him and praise to you,
with the Father almighty, forever and ever.
Amen.

G

Again, I shall continue in this manner
until the assurance of the miraculous light heralds again
the good news of peace.
With all our souls
we pray and beseech you with tearful cries, glorious creator,
incorruptible and uncreated, timeless Holy Spirit of compassion.
You are the intercessor of our silent sighs to your merciful Father.[15]
You, who keep the saints, purify the sinners and build the temple,
of the living and life-giving will of the Father,[16]
free me now from all unclean deeds,
which are not pleasing for your dwelling place.
Do not extinguish the light of grace
in us and in our minds' eye,
for we have learned that you will join us,

through prayer and lives reverently lived.[17]
One of the Trinity is sacrificed and the other accepts it,
favoring us with the reconciling blood of his first born
so that you might accept our supplications.
Prepare for us honorable lodgings
for the partaking of your heavenly lamb,
that we might eat life-giving manna of the new salvation
and escape the punishments of condemnation.
May our blasphemy be purified in the refiner's fire,
as the prophet told of the live coal in the tongs of offering at the altar,[18]
so that your mercy is proclaimed in all things,
as the lovingkindness of the Father,
who embraced the prodigal son with fatherly inheritance,
and led the prostitutes to the bliss of the heavenly kingdom,
was proclaimed by the Son of God.

H

Yes, yes, and I too am one of them.
Receive me with them,
as one who is needy of your great love for humankind,
one who lives only by your grace, redeemed by the blood of Christ,
so that your divinity might be revealed and in all ways glorified.
You are honored equally with the Father,
with one will and one rule, worthy of praise.
For yours is compassion, ability and lovingkindness,
might and glory forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Mt. 26:6-13.
[2] Ps. 141:5.
[3] Jn. 12:3, Mt. 26:13.
[4] Gen. 38, Jos. 2:1-21, 6:22-25.
[5] Hos. 1-2, 3:2-3.
[6] Gen. 38, Jos. 2:1-21, 6:22-25.
[7] Ezek. 16:16.
[8] Dt. 32:24.
[9] Ps. 119:92.
[10] 1 Cor. 2:10.
[11] Gen. 1:2, Mk. 6:48-53.
[12] Gen. 2:5-6; thanks to Prof. Abraham Terian of St Nersess Seminary for his insightful reading of this passage.
[13] Mt. 12:31.
[14] Rom. 4:25.
[15] Rom. 8:26.
[16] 1 Cor. 3:16.
[17] Mt. 18:20, 1 Cor. 6:17.
[18] Is. 6:6-25.

Prayer 34

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Here is my profession of faith, here,[1]
the yearnings of my wretched breath to you
who constitute all things with your Word, God.
What I have discoursed upon before, I set forth again,
these written instructions and interpretations
for the masses of different nations.
I offer these prayers of intercession
in the thanksgiving prayer below.

B

I pray to your unchanging, almighty Spirit:
Send the dew of your sweetness upon my soul
to rule over the impulses of my senses.
Send the all-filling gifts of your merciful grace
and cultivate the reasoning fields hardened by my heart,
that they might bear the fruit of your spiritual seeds.
All gifts that flourish and grow with us, Teacher,
come from your all-encompassing wisdom.[2]
You who laid hands on the apostles,
filled the prophets,
taught the teachers,
made the speechless speak,
and opened the ears of the deaf.
You, of the same family, as the first and Only Begotten Son
of your consubstantial Father, carry all this out
through your mutual effort.
You, proclaimed God, co-equal of your Father,
grant me, a sinner, to speak boldly of the life-giving,
mystery of the good news of your Gospel,
that I might follow with soaring mind,
the infinite course of the inspired breath of your testament.
And when I embark upon the solemn interpretation of the Word,
send me first your compassion, and let it speak through me
in a manner worthy, useful and pleasing to you,
in glory and praise for your Godhead,
and for the upbuilding of the universal church.
Extend over me your right hand,
and fortify me with your grace.
Clear my mind of the fog of forgetfulness,
dispelling the darkness of sin,
that I might rise above this earthly life through wisdom.

May the dawn of that unobscured miracle,
the knowledge of your Godliness,
shine within me again, Almighty,
to be worthy to do and teach
and be an example of goodness for god-loving listeners.
To you all glory in all things,
with your Father almighty and
your only begotten and benevolent Son,
now and forever, without end.
Amen.

C

The creed of the consubstantial Holy Trinity,
the rule of life and grace of election,
I taught in the following way:
We confess and profess, honor and worship
the shared glory and unity of the Holy Trinity,
Godhead beyond description, always good,
of the same substance, equal in honor,
beyond the flight of the wings of our thought,
higher than all examples, beyond all analogies,
surpassing the limits on high.
Before the creation of eternal undifferentiated matter
and the categories of creatures
with blessing that cannot be translated,
crowned forever with the richest greatness,
setting time in motion and all that has taken shape as time unfolds,
himself the cause and shaper of everything visible and invisible,
who cannot be defined by name or denoted by label,
nor likened in quality, nor weighed in quantity,
nor formed by rules, nor known by kind,
nor spread to exhaustion,
nor occupying space,
nor appearing in a place.

D

Father of compassion, God of the universe, creator of everything
in heaven and on earth
except the only begotten Word, through whom all things exist,
creator and giver of breath to all things except for the
consubstantial Holy Spirit, through whom you formed all else.

E

One of three glorified persons equal in power and awe,
who descended from on high to here below,
who was indeed by nature indistinguishable from those below,
without relinquishing the throne of glory,

without leaving the watchful gaze of the parent of love,
merely entering the vessel of the virgin womb purely
and coming out joined with a body inseparable in essence,
without any flaw in his humanity and lacking nothing in divinity,
one and only Son of the only Father and
the first born of the Mother of God, Virgin Bearer of the Lord,
creator becoming a true man as originally created,
not in the fallen state of mortals,
but new and splendid with the sublime glory of kings,
not seen in the ages or existing in time.
The first born, as the Psalmist said,
higher than all the kings of earth,[3]
formed from an incorruptible combination
like us in body,
in the manner of the soul with body,
and as gold with fire,
or to put it more plainly,
light through air, neither transformed nor separated.

F

He submitted himself willingly to the cross of death,
like an innocent lamb led to slaughter,[4]
and girded himself with mighty self-discipline,
for the salvation of those he created.
He truly suffered like a mortal.
He was placed in a tomb with no special treatment for his divinity.
On the third day, in the hell of Tartarus, he preached to the
downcast captives and showed renewal and light.
And having carried out his providential mission of redemption,
he came back to life as God,
and ruled on the wings of the winds, rising upon the Cherubim,
covered in an inscrutable cloud.[5]
He ascended into heaven on high,
sat in splendor upon the throne bequeathed to him
from the beginning, equal with his Father,
from whom he had never been separated,
neither losing what had been acquired,
nor diluting that which was his own.
Therefore, he shall come for the final judgment,
examining the unseen with the scales of justice,
for which we wait and pray
with faith in his almighty Lordship over and through all,
who truly is one of the only one
in equal glory forever worshiped as one.

G

We always praise along with the Son and Father, the Holy Spirit,

which is of the same essence,
mighty, true, perfect and holy,
who from nothing brought into existence everything that exists,
who acts through itself and shares rule with the other two,
in the same indestructible, boundless kingdom,
who is the first cause, the awesome Word of his selfhood.
And the same exalted Holy Spirit,
good ruler, who dispenses the gifts of the Father,
in praise of the name and the glory of the only begotten Son,
who acted through the Laws and inspired the Prophets,
and commissioned the apostles
by the breath of your kin, the Son.[6]
In the form of a dove you appeared at the River Jordan,
for the greater glory of the one who had come,
shone forth in the writings of the evangelists,
brought forth sages, strengthened the wise,
filled the teachers, blessed the kingdom,
assisted the kings, appointed the guardians,
issued the decree of salvation, granted talents, prepared atonement,[7]
cleansed those baptized into Christ's death that you might dwell in them
a sacrament performed jointly by the Father and Son with the Holy Spirit,
who is God, honored as Lord, in all ways in all things.

H

Being named first among the Trinity does not make one greater than the other,
or being named after the other, less than the rest,
or by saying that they are one, that there is a confusion of persons,
or by dividing into three, a separation of wills.
For the Father would be diminished
if he did not have the power of the Word
so too if he did not have the Holy Spirit and was speechless,
lifeless and less powerful to command.
And the Word, if it were not known by the name of the Father,
would be abandoned like some orphan or just another mortal being.
Similarly the Holy Spirit, if not commissioned by its cause,
would be vagabond, an unruly wind.[8]

I

But if one presumes in a refutation[9]
to snatch the Father from his Word,
on the ground that there was a time when the Word was not,
believing that such speculations exalt the sublime greatness of the divine,
or if one subordinates the Spirit which proceeds forth
on the ground that it is not by nature spiritual,
thereby introducing an alien being or some unstable mixture
into the pure and sublime unity of the Holy Trinity,
we must reject such persons from our midst.

We must drive them away in disgrace
with our confession of faith
like a stoning of fierce demons or vicious beasts,
and cast a curse upon their devilish lot,
shutting the gates to the church of life in their face.
While we glorify the Holy Trinity in the same lordship of unified equality,
singing the Holy, Holy, Holy,[10] in parallel praise, uniform level,
blessed on earth and in heaven,
in the congregation of the nation of earthly thinking beings,
now and forever.
Amen.

J

Now, I offer to your all-hearing ears, almighty God,
the secret thoughts in this book,
and thus equipped, I venture forth in conversation,
not with the idea that my voice could somehow exalt you,
for before you created everything,
before the creation of the heavens
with the immortal choir of praise and the earthly thinking beings,
you yourself in your perfection were already glorified,
but still you permit me, a reject, to taste
your indescribable sweetness, through the communion of words.
And what good is it to mouth your royal command about
"Adonai, Lord," and not carry it out.[11]
I destroyed with my own hand the golden tables of speech,
bearing your message, written by the finger of God.[12]
That was true destruction.
And now, with ashen-faced sorrow,
I struggle to make a copy written in my hand.[13]
But since I have prayed much,
in a voice of passionate and sincere praise,
hear me, compassionate God, with this profession of faith.
May the voice of this prayer be joined with those offered
by clean worshipers obedient to your will
so that this meager offering, a dry loaf of unleavened bread,[14]
might be served with oil upon your altar of glory.

K

But you, beneficent and charitable in all things,
O Christ, of one God, mighty and powerful,
who surpasses all with your sweet and caring compassion
not only humanity in general and those like me
who are susceptible to all manner of contrariness,
but also the uncontaminated angels,
and even the pure and saintly, who give praise.
There was Elijah, for example,[15]

to whom austere signs on Mt. Horeb were shown in three ways:
a great earthquake, strong winds and burning fire.
But you act in the mildness of patience and the calm peacefulness of the sweet air,
for as the Scripture says, you delight only in mercy.[16]
And although our kind found joy in virtue
and otherwise adopted heavenly ways,
still they were earthlings, though chosen among humankind.
You, on the contrary, are not even capable of evil:
You are good in your very essence
and blessed in all things,
salvation for all, tranquility in all,
calm for all, cure for all disease,
the fount of life-giving water in the words of Jeremiah.[17]

L

Turn toward me and have mercy upon me,
O God, who so thirsts, hungers and longs for my salvation.
You have gone so far as to designate
a heavenly host of blessed immortals,
to act as priests and intercessors for man's salvation,
so that on behalf of us earthly beings,
for the reconciliation of the wretched and abandoned like me,
they might perpetually pray for your great blessed mercy,
with this light-giving phrase, "Have mercy upon Jerusalem,"
so that based upon your great revelation
the places left empty by the fallen angels,
might be filled by human beings,
who have joined you, in the manner of the earthly Jerusalem,
about which you sent us good news.[18]

M

Truly, you hear, kind God,
You listen, king.
You lent an ear, life and light.
You paid attention, heavenly one.
You respected us, almighty.
You noted, knower of secrets.
You saw, keeper.
You empathized, Lord beyond telling.
You humbled yourself, exalted one.
You became meek, awesome one.
You were revealed, Lord beyond words.
You were defined, boundless one.
You were measured, unexaminable one.
You focused light, radiant one.
You became human, incorporeal one.
You became tangible, immeasurable one.

You took shape, you who are beyond qualifiers.
You truly fulfilled the yearnings of those who pray to you.
With the voice of the wakeful angels,[19]
you were even for me, miserable soul that I am,
a kind intercessor, a living mediator,[20]
an immortal offering, an endless sacrifice,
a purification tribute, a priceless burnt offering,
an inexhaustible cup.
Merciful Lord, who loves humankind,
may you always show
the favor of your life-giving will and your
long-suffering patience toward me, a sinner.
To you glory forever.
Amen.

---

[1] This prayer, along with parts of Prayers 34, 35, 75, 92, and 93, is believed by leading commentators to be part of an earlier apologetic work that St. Gregory wrote circa 987, during a period of doctrinal tension between the Armenian and the Byzantine and Georgian churches. See, S. Boghosian, *Narekatsu Hetkerov*, 31.
[2] The next 6 lines from the Jerusalem text, since the critical edition was garbled.
[3] Ps. 89:27.
[4] Is. 53:7.
[5] Ps. 18:11
[6] Jn. 20:22.
[7] Rom. 6:3.
[8] Wis. 2:3.
[9] This section is an extended version of the Anathema and Doxology (attributed to St. Gregory the Illuminator), following the Nicene Creed of the Divine Liturgy. Thanks to Fr. Thaddeaus Zirekyants for this insight.
[10] Following Terian, *Narek*, p. 162, n. 27.
[11] Lk. 6:46.
[12] Ex. 32:19.
[13] Following Terian, *Narek*, p. 163, n. 32.
[14] Num. 6:15.
[15] 1 Kg. 19:8.
[16] Mic. 7:18.
[17] Jer. 2:13.
[18] Zech. 1:12.
[19] 1 Jn. 2:1, following Terian, *Narek*, p. 166
[20] Heb. 7:25.

Prayer 35

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, Lord of hosts,
awesome majesty, unwavering vision,
all expansive will, undiminishing bounty,
how can our dances and songs of joy
do honor to even one drop of your goodness?
You earnestly strive to prepare for my salvation,[1]
but let me write what is greater, that it might be told in the future.
You have not been called “angel lover,”
although the founder of their kingdom.
And of the heavens with their luminaries, all your handiwork,
never have you been described as loving them.
Rather to your greater honor and praise,
you preferred the love of humankind.
For this reason you doubly magnified your name beyond telling,
with frightening mystery.
You called the heavenly host dressed in light,
your servants and stewards of special missions,[2]
and us mortals, born below,
you adorned with your worshipful, lordly and godly name,[3]
exceeding again all bounds of measure and weight,
by the outpouring of your power and exceeding goodness,
you inspired endless testaments of praise.
And by becoming human, you, one of “the divine essence,”
your gifts of life, diverse talents,
splendid divine work and miracles,
poured down abundantly upon some who
asked for themselves, and others who
asked blessings for others.[4]
Moved by the faith of his nurses,
you cured the cripple,[5]
though he was lacking in faith.
How much more able, then, is your mighty word
to cleanse the disease from the bodies of those
who cry out to you in prayer?
For truly, Lord, it is a greater miracle
to keep a washed image pure,
and protected against the attack of unruly diseases
than to cleanse a corrupt soul,
for by the first, with the favor of the grace of the baptismal font,
you exalt the glory of the Father.

B

It is you, Lord, who cleanses us,
as you did first with your chosen, Moses.[6]
It is you, who looked over the tribe of Jacob
in their sin and lawlessness,
as they became accustomed to the dark pagan ways
of the land of Egypt.
It is you, who, in the words of the Psalmist David,
teaches the sinner to walk in the law of righteousness.[7]
It is you who replaces the stubborn, hardness of stony hearts,
with the obedient softness of flesh, receptive to the Word.[8]
It is you who can guide hearts to a single way,
respecting you with their full lives.[9]
It is you who instill respect, fear and faith,
to heed you, according to the voice of the Prophet.[10]

C

Like a key to the doors of my hearing,
may you sprinkle life-giving divine rain
from your blessed lips that created the world.
May you remove the poison of the cunning serpent,
that troublemaker Satan, and heal me.[11]
And with your almighty hand guide
my tongue and strengthen my voice,
which you have freely given to all,
that it might speak boldly,
and teach fittingly,
neither depriving me of hope or betraying me into nonsense,
by speaking impudently like our forefather Adam, goaded by the predator.[12]
Illumine again the light of my soul's darkened eye
with the touch of your life-giving right hand,
so the lamp of my boldness may not be extinguished
by the serpent's breath and be hidden under a bushel.[13]
Lift away my sins, Lord, and cast them into the depths of the sea,
an act so small compared to your greatness,
so that in the words of the prophet: the seas swallow up my evil.[14]
Restore confidence to my wrecked soul,[15]
so that a monument of disappointment not be erected to my hidden faults.[16]
Open, almighty and merciful, the handbook of life-giving cures,
so that the seeds sown and cultivated by the Destroyer here below
might be cut down and uprooted with the sickle of your will.

D

In the manner of Peter, seeking to follow you, God of all,[17]
I was swallowed by the waves of the sea of my sinful life.

Extend your life-giving right hand to help me, for I am foundering.
In the voice the Canaanite women, I pray from the bottom of my heart,
like a starving dog yelping, wretched and anxious, begging for scraps,
a few crumbs of the bread of life
from your bountiful table.
Save my physical altar,
Savior, who came to rescue me, a son of bitterness, when I was lost.
For yours is majesty, victory and power.
And you are atonement and healing, renewal and bliss.
To you all glory and praise forever.
Amen.

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[1] Is. 5:4.
[2] Heb. 1:14.
[3] Gen. 1:26-28.
[4] Mt. 8:2-3, 5:13.
[5] Mt. 9:2, Lk. 5:18-20.
[6] Lev. 10:8, Ex. 4:6-7.
[7] Ps. 25:8, 23:3.
[8] Ezek. 11:19, 36:26.
[9] Jer. 32:39.
[10] Jer. 32:40, Mal. 2:5.
[11] Mk. 7:33-35.
[12] Gen. 3:9-11.
[13] Mt. 5:15.
[14] Mic. 7:18-19.
[15] Ezek. 9:4.
[16] Ezek. 16:31.
[17] Mt. 12:30-31.

Prayer 36

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

No matter how great the mounting debt of my sins,
the saving grace of your trials
is greater by far.
You were nailed to the cross, the instrument of death,
on your all-embracing creative hands, which hold all souls,[1]
so that my disobedient hand might be stilled.
Out of compassion for my wantonness, you bound the motion of
your two life-giving feet,
so that they might be pawned for my miserable feet,
always racing toward brutishness.

B

You did not order the hands of those who beat your head to shrivel.[2]
You, who could cause the fig tree to dry up without effort.
This example gives me hope of reprieve.
You did not threaten those who acted wickedly, ,
though you are proclaimed God.[3]
You who darkened the Morning Star[4]
and grant rest with goodness to me a mortal.

You did not dry the evil mouth of those who cursed you,
you who tinted the image of the moon with the color of blood,
so you might strengthen my meek tongue to praise you.

You did not rebuke the wanton insulters,
you who shook the very firmament,
so you might anoint my miserable head with the oil of compassion.

You did not rip the jaws of the God-killers who called you a fanatic, charlatan,[5]
you who rent the hardness of the rocky tomb,[6]
so you might mercifully grant my soul,
though it is incapable of goodness,
a respite from the burden of emptiness.

You did not run the swords of the guards through their bowels,[7]
you who condemned the snake to slither on the ground,[8]
so you might preserve the bones of my tormented body,
to be worthy of resurrection.

You did not flatten and thrust into the abyss,

those who sealed the tomb upon the bearer of life,
in order that you might rest the token of your light
in the tomb of my soul.

You did not absolutely and for all generations strike down
those who rumored you perished and
your body stolen like that of a mortal,
so you might permit me, insignificant as I am,
to partake of that goodness which neither perishes nor can be harmed,
together with those chosen for salvation.

You did not turn into stone, as with Moab in days of old,[9]
your frenzied persecutors who twice stole silver bribes
from the offerings in your Father's sanctuary
to betray and degrade you,[10]
so that even though I waver and am sold to the powers of death,
I am redeemed by your blood
and you set me upon the steadfastness of your rock.[11]
.
You are blessed twice over and blessed again,
praised in all things, forever and ever.
Amen.

---

[1] Job 10:8, 12:10, Wis. 3:1.
[2] Mk. 11:13, 20-24.
[3] Mt. 27:45.
[4] Is. 14:12.
[5] Mt. 26:65.
[6] Mt. 27:51.
[7] Mt. 26:47.
[8] Gen. 3:14.
[9] Gen. 19:26, 37.
[10] Mt. 26:14-15, Mt. 28:12-13.
[11] Mt. 7:25.

Prayer 37

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now, of all your gifts and favors I have received and described,
merciful, beneficent, praised and powerful Lord,
only a few have been set forth here.
But they are all nobles of the kingdom.
They are like freemen with rich estates,
sons of military orders and offspring of the sublime,
great in glory, renewed in light, honored in miracles.
Proclaimed with the unfurling flags of victory, each gift
adorned with a crowning wreath on its heads and
bringing countless other dominions and estates, gifts
praising, endearing, meek, happy, peaceful,
from those regions closest to God.
Of these the prophet prayed,
"Awake, Lord, your heavenly forces and come to save us."[1]
Who is better armed to drive out sin,
fend off hail, melt the ice of despair,
and repel those first rebels from the heavenly ranks,
whose nocturnal ways love the darkness,[2]
and who from the beginning revolted against God?
It is impossible to recount all the good gifts
you have rained down on me, a weak,
belligerent and ungrateful servant.
But if one were to try to speak
about even the least of this abundance,
one would be at a loss,
recalling the dust we were made of.[3]
Like a puny weakling, one would be struck dumb
in defeat by the greatness of the maker.

B

After writing this much I testify again
to the flawed immaturity of my soul
when compared to your perfection, O creator, and
my unworthiness in comparison to your kindness.
However, the strength of your praiseworthy creative force,
your everlasting light, generous and abundant,
defends me against the ways of the Trickster, who
aims to harden the heart, making it
a rock of despair,
threatening to dry up the two springs [4]
of the Eden of my sentiments that were

established by the Gardener
to water and make the garden of good works planted in me flourish.
May we not be snatched again from our original paradise,
through the evil trickery of heretical illusions that parch our eyes
so that when the miraculously ascended God stands
as a mediator among the gods,[5]
bringing his gift of grace,
all the injuries of deceit and short-sighted anxieties,
will be pulverized as if dashed upon a hard rock,
or washed away by the trickling of a stream,
or blown away like the dust.

C

And so my reprimand shall come, as Job said, not from other people,[6]
but from your all-seeing eye,
of which I am in terror,
wrenched with anxieties, dread and fear.
But refuge for my broken spirit lies in your living,
incorruptible, constant hope,
that looking on me with mercy,
as one condemned to perdition,
when I present myself before your heavenly beneficence,
empty-handed and without gifts,
bringing with me the evidence of your untold glory,
I will remind you
who never slumber in forgetfulness,
who never shut your eyes,
never ignore the sighs of grief,
that with your cross of light
you may lift away from me, I beg you, the peril that chokes me,
with your comforting care, the vacillating sadness,
with your crown of thorns, the germs of my sin,
with the lashes of the whip, the blows of death,
with the memory of the slap in the face, the neediness of my shame,
with the spitting of your enemies, my contemptible vileness,
with your sip of vinegar, the bitterness of my soul.

D

For yours is all the boundless goodness,
Only-Begotten Son of God,
together with which, I remember my wrongs,
calling your all blessed name aloud
with supplications.
Look upon my embarrassed confessions of defeat
and grant pardon to this son deserving execution
and eternal death,
so that on my sins, again and again,

growing by leaps and bounds,
the goodness of your mercy might be proclaimed
with resounding solemnity in heaven as on earth.
And to you with the Father and Holy Spirit,
glory forever.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 80:3, 7.
[2] Rev. 12:12, cf. Is. 14:12, Zech. 3:2, Jude ;9, possibly an allusion to the Archangel Michael who cast down Satan or Lucifer, per the annotation of the 2003 Mughni edition of the *Narek*, p. 229. Thanks to Fr. Thaddaeus Zirekyants for this reference.
[3] Gen. 2:7.
[4] Ps. 69 (Arm. 68):3.
[5] Ps. 82 (Arm. 81):1.
[6] Job 21:4.

Prayer 38

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now, as I wrote in the beginning of this work, [1]
about the dark origins of the chief sins and
the workings of the bodily organs,[2]
by which I am dominated, human heir of death,
here, in this prayer, I recount, even if it is
a drop taken from the limitless expanse of the sea,
a few aspects of the spiritual life
that liberate those born in the light
through our Lord Jesus.[3]

B

Some of these are truly splendid, and should be
placed on a high throne,
their stores of grace, filled to the brim with kindness and wealth,
the king and his loving subjects,
the emperor and his nobles,
the crowned and their princes,
the famous and his good report,
the victor and his trumpets,
the general and his troops,
the hero and his glory,
the groom and his revelers,
the queen and her maids,
the best man and his company,
freedom and its benefits,
the visitation and its outstretched hand,
the promise and its satisfaction,
the protection and its right hand,
the gifts and their wrapping,
the sign of life and its indelibility,
the seal and its imprint,
the cloud and its shadow,
art and its miracles,
the spirit and its immortality,
the word and its perfection,
the taking of the oath and its fulfillment,
the force and its order,
the baptismal font and its miraculous work,
manna and its incorruptibility,
the living rock and its stream,
the pillar of fire and its rays,

thunder and its echo,
hope and its salvation,
the tree of blessings and its fruit,
the bough and its bounty.
And so that I shall not err by saying this,
I note my omissions,
for as the eyes are blinded when looking at the sun,
I have averted my attention from the greatest and presented the lesser
points that are within my meager ability.

C

I apologize for my always miserable, wretched soul,
because my composition mixes
the voice of good news with mournful protests,
bringing
justice and judgment,
decision and penalty,
investigation and spotlights,
scolding and torches,
nakedness and embarrassment,
revelation and shame,
innocence and reward,
error and punishment.

D

Again and again, I flinch doubly misfortunate and wretched,
for unbearable anger is coming,
with a sickle to harvest my ripened grain,
a judge for the court,
a strongman for the tribunal,
an accuser bringing doom,
an arm to carry out the judgment,
a rod to reprimand,
arms for revenge,
a shepherd for sorting the flock,
for the words you said to me,
shall judge me, the condemned, on the last day of judgment.[4]
Hurry, merciful Lord, with your sweet acceptance,
attend the faint sighs of my cowardly wavering
with the great strength of your blessed hand.
Do not be angry, but with your characteristic good will,
comfort, cure, forgive and save me,
at my last trial.
And to you glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

---

[1] See Prayer 6.
[2] Rom. 7:23.

[3] Rom. 8:2.
[4] Jn. 12:48.

Prayer 39

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Since I abandoned my former composure,
led on by the destroyer and
totally wasted by my own laziness,
now I address my former self,
recounting with heavy heart and pitiful sobs
the scandal of my ways
before the congregation of the multitude of nations.

B

I am a living book,
written like the scroll in the vision of Ezekiel, inside and out,[1]
listing lamentations, moaning and woe.
I am a city without walls or towers,[2]
a house empty without doors for protection,[3]
salt in looks but lacking taste,[4]
sea water, unfit to quench the thirst,
land, useless for cultivation,
field, barren and covered with briars.
My personal acres, provided by God,
I sowed with the devices of the Slanderer,
an olive tree that is wood without fruit,
a barren orchard to be cut down,[5]
a hopeless, twice dead, talking plant,
a burned out candle that cannot be lit.

C

Now again, in the same vein, I repeat
similar pathetic images
that await me, miserable soul, as bitter punishment for my shame.
Gnashing of teeth and endless wailing, for the eyes of my wretched self,
paternal anger that cannot be deflected by filial regret,
irreparable corruption for my sinful body,
new reprimands for me, an inventor of evil for my diseased soul,
the anxiety of doubt for my escape as a captive,
waiting to be visited by the heavenly host.
Testifying I am a miserable, wayward soul,
who deserves to be burned in the bundles of weeds,[6]
while a stern voice pronounces me, incorrigible refuse.

D

Truly, these are but the charming melodies of a harlot,
with her harp, strolling about and beating her breast,[7]
brazenly wailing, miserably and scornfully,
as the prophet Isaiah wrote in his admonition to Tyre.
If she could because of a temporary misfortune,
protest with all manner of fake moaning and groaning,
then in what kind of desperate voice should I cry out?
I who wait the coming of the Lord,
and yet have been caught unprepared and naked.

E

Now, if I recount again the fearsome judgment,
my repentance should be multiplied.
And if I present my tribulations realistically
terror should seize me.
And if I describe this vision in detail
my tribulations increase.
Even having recognized all this in advance, I did not repent,
even in retrospect. Nevertheless, please spare me,
merciful lover of humankind, mighty doer of good,
All-giving Christ, King, blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] Ezek. 2:9-10.
[2] Jer. 50:15.
[3] Jer. 51:30.
[4] Mk. 9:49.
[5] Lk. 13:10.
[6] Mt. 13:30.
[7] Is. 23:15-16.

Prayer 40

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Almighty God, doer of good, creator of all,
hear the sound of my sighs of distress
and my terror of imagined perils to come.
Save me with your strength, ridding me of my sins.
For you are capable of all things in all ways[1]
with your boundless greatness and infinite wisdom.

B

And seeing with my mind's eye in the distance
the terrible panorama of the life to come,
I observe in advance the day of light, the hope of the saints,[2]
and the day of darkness, the punishment of the sinful,[3]
from which none can escape nor find refuge,
neither in the deep abyss nor in the bottomless pits,[4]
neither on the heights of the mountains, nor in the caves in the stone,
neither on the hardness of boulders, nor in the cavity of a hole,
neither in the crevices of a pit, nor the gullies after a flood,
neither in the labyrinth of the basement, nor the loft of the attic,
neither behind the closed doors of my cell, nor in the darkness of the valley,
neither in the declines of the valleys, nor on the inclines of the hills,
neither in the blowing of the wind, nor in the undulation of the seas,
neither in the swirling of a whirlpool, nor in the distant ends of the earth,
neither in the sounds of lament, nor in the sighs of weeping,
neither in the trembling of fingers, nor in the lifting of hands,
neither in the prayers of the lips, nor in the cries of the tongue.
Out of this terrible inescapable lot
you, Lord Christ, are the exit and respite,
the ease and calm of the salvation for my ever sinning soul.

C

Now, look upon me besieged by overwhelming danger,
you who are alone sweet to all.
Cut me loose with your victorious sword of life, the cross,
and release me from the nets that have snared me,
nets that assail me on all sides as the captive of death.
Please steady my shaky feet on the crooked path and
heal the burning fever of my anguished heart.
Turn away the demonic whisper of temptation to sin against you.
Drive away the despair of my dark soul that dwells with evil.
Dispel the thick smoke of sin that has infused and obscured me.

Destroy the vile dark passions of my base needs.
Renew in my soulthe luminous image of
the venerable glory of your mighty name.
Fix your glowing grace upon my face and
the perception of my mind, an earthbound creature.
And cleanse my squalid sinfulness with your purity
so that you might restore and reveal your image in me.
With your divine, living, incorruptible and
heavenly light that envelopes your three persons.
For you alone are blessed with the Father and Holy Spirit
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Gen. 18:14, Lk. 1:37.
[2] Wis. 18:1.
[3] Wis. 17:20.
[4] Rev. 6:15-17.

Prayer 41

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Son of the living God, blessed in all things,[1]
inscrutably begotten by your awe-inspiring Father,
for you nothing is impossible.[2]
Before the dawning of the uneclipsed rays of the mercy of your glory
sins melt away, demons flee, transgressions are erased,
bindings are cut and chains undone.
The dead are born again, infirmities are cured,
wounds are healed, corruption is cleansed,
sadness withdraws, sighs retreat,
darkness flees, fog departs,
twilight vanishes, darkness lifts, the night passes,
alarm is banished, evil is destroyed, despair is exiled.
And your omnipotent hand rules, redeemer of all.

B

You who came not to destroy our mortal souls, but to give them life,[3]
forgive my countless wrongs with your abundant mercy.
For you alone are in heaven beyond words, and on earth beyond understanding,
in the substance of existence unto the ends of the earth,
the beginning of everything and the completion of everything in all ways,
blessed in the highest.
Glory forever to you with the Father and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

---

[1] Mt. 16:16.
[2] Lk. 1:37, Gen. 18:14.
[3] Lk. 9:56.

Prayer 42

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Lord God of compassion, salvation and mercy,
redemption and restoration, healing and health,
enlightenment and life, resurrection and immortality,
remember me, when you come with your kingdom,
O awesome, mighty, doer of good and creator of all,
living, praised, perfecter of all,
accessible to the sighs of all beings.

With the one who was crucified with you,
who was not captured for your sake and was not bound,
was not hanged and was not nailed,
was not beaten in your great name and was not disgraced,
was not tortured and was not treated with contempt,
was not crushed and was not killed,
I beg to be worthy of the Kingdom and
the most desired light that is the reward of the just.
And by the authority of saying the oath, “Amen,”
affirming that your gifts are unchanging,
are you glorified for giving the hope of salvation to those of us
that consider ourselves totally abandoned.

B

Blessed, blessed, and blessed again!
Having accepted me by that same faith,
raise me up from my fallen state, doer of good,
cure me of disease, merciful,
return me from the edge of death to life, lifegiver,
for I am yours, save me along with him, my refuge.
Grant the breath of life to my dead soul, O resurrection,
life, immortality, and inexhaustible joy,
boundless grace, unwavering forgiveness,
omnipotent right hand, all-governing hand, all-reaching finger,
you have only to will it, Lord, and I shall be saved,
only to think it, and by your mercy shall I be justified.
Say the word, and I will be found spotless.[1]
Forget my wrongs, and I shall regain my courage.
Cultivate me and I shall cleave to you,
you who are glorified in all things forever.
Amen.

[1] Mt. 8:2, 8.

Prayer 43

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

With every possible facet of the art of healing, Lord Jesus,
cause of all healthy life, mighty heavenly king,
God of all things apprehended by the mind and by the eye,
"Thou are in me," in the words of the prophet,[1]
"And behold, through this union with you through these words,
your light shall break forth in me to heal my breath and body,"
you who are mighty and invincible.

B

To heal our spiritual wounds, you do not need ointments,
nor time, nor means,
nor the passing of days,
nor the changing of prescriptions,
nor amputation, nor cauterization, nor surgery
as practiced by earthly medicine,
in which there is always trial and error,
and often grave uncertainty.
But for you, the creator of the soul and body,
all is illumined,
all is clear,
all is written,
all is easy,
all is possible,
wisdom leads,
promises are kept,
wishes are fulfilled.
Your testament is the gospel.
Your judgment is freedom.
Your lawbook is grace.
You are not limited by laws.
You are not bound by canons.
You are not hampered by deficiency.
You are not humbled by obedience.
You are not restricted by smallness.
You are not measured by boundaries.
You do not err out of anger.
You do not alter out of wrath.
You do not misjudge out of severity.
You do not simmer out of agitation.
You do not falter out of ignorance.
You do not waver out of soft-heartedness.

You do not diminish out of exaltation.
You do not abandon your duty of care.
You do not weaken your salvation.
You are the beginning and the end of all.
Everything is from you alone.
Therefore glory to you and worship forever.
Amen.

---

[1] Is. 58:5-8.

Prayer 44

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Boundless God, genuine son of God, inexplicable,
creator of everything, Christ King,
light for the dull hearts of those in darkness,[1]
perfectly with us and essentially with him who sent you,
who through our nature miraculously reveals yours.
Blessed by your heavenly Father,
who sent you and with whom
you share glory for creation.
You care enough for my salvation, an exiled slave,
that you delivered yourself to evil men[2]
and without resorting to your divinity
drank from the cup of death for me, a sinner,
according to the plan of your divine economy,
with true humanity and perfect divinity.
And the Holy Ghost is also of the same essence as you and the Father,
equal in honor with the Son and the Father,
one perfect trinity in three persons indivisible,
without beginning or time,
benefactor to all, life giver of all, peacemaker of all,
creator of existence and shaper of all things,
glorified with one indivisible nature.

B

For the sake of my transgressions for which I am condemned to death,
the merciful Father, heavenly, almighty, one of the divine essence,
has offered the only son of his bosom.
His beloved son, his equal in honor he did not spare,[3]
but willingly gave him to death by the arms of his tormentors,
as foretold by the prophet Zechariah:
“For raise the sword upon the shepherd,
and strike down the keeper of the flock,
and the flock shall disperse.”[4]
The Old Testament also gives another example[5]
of vows at the altar and the blood of the offering in
the story of Abraham’s sacrifice,[6]
which described to me how you wished to save the wretched.
So now, why do you grieve, my soul?[7]
You are not destroyed by God
but by your own doing.
And why am I upset,
my mind reeling with satanic despair?

I should trust in God, confess to him
and he will care for me,
as David wrote in the Psalms,
and the Prophet counseled.[8]

C

The ways of the creator surpass
the understanding of angels and mortals.
If I were to try ten thousand times, my words could not capture it,
for his good works are beyond comprehension and description.
One of the blessed trinity
sent another of the trinity
and to please the will of the sender
he died. And the third, according to
the wishes of the other two
worked together for the same good
with the same will.
As the soul is for the living beings and
thought for the rational beings,
as radiance is for glory, and form for substance,
as caring for life, and mindfulness for mercy,
as giving in charity, and resolve in salvation,
as abundance in generosity, flow in continuity,
as fullness for perfection, richness in inexhaustibility,
as long in forbearance, exalted in unreachableness,
they are one perfect trinity, of three persons,
blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] 2 Pet. 1:19.
[2] Jn. 3:16.
[3] Rom. 8:32.
[4] Zech. 13:7.
[5] Ex. 17:11-12.
[6] Heb. 9:19-21, Gen. 22:1-19.
[7] Ps. 42:6.
[8] Ps. 41:6-7, 12, 42:5; Is. 40:1, 31; Lam. 3:24-25; Nah. 1:7.

Prayer 45

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now, confess, my ruined soul
with hope in your heart for salvation
with the belt of faith tight over your kidneys,[1]
confess your thoughts to God
as if thoughts were actions,
as if plans were accomplishments,
as if invisible were seen,
as if the heart's secrets were voiced,
as if sinful intentions were committed wrongs,
as if words were deeds,
as if footprints were flight from God's will,
hands raised in anger as if they shed blood,
scoffing as if willfully discarding grace,
vows both reasonable and unreasonable
as if compacts with the devil,
haughtiness as if homage for our forebear's destroyer,
uneasiness of heart as if a lack of faith,
cowardice as if it were defeat,
complaints about passionate temptations
as if betrayals of a vow to the Lord,[2]
insolence as if it were impiety,
arrogance as if precious vanity,
pride as if fondness for the inventor of evil,
the involuntary as well as voluntary,
the forced as well as the consenting,
the extrinsic as well as the intrinsic,
the lawless as well as the ungodly,
the smallest as well as the greatest,
the few as well as the many,
the things I have left unspoken as if
they were spoken by the all-knowing,
the unwritten wrongs as if
they were carved upon a lodestone for the all-seeing,[3]
the slightest contentious thought as if
it were the gravest of burdens,
a hidden matter of measure as if
it were the just demand for payment of tribute
in the amount of four drachmae
from the mouth of a baby whale,[4]
buried deeds as if they were speeding to the ear of God.
Compile and compound them redoubling your effort,
and lament here again what was not done, as if it were.

Offer your vanquished soul to God
so that you might receive the forgiveness of sins,
like the sinner who through the Lord's grace was justified,
eloquently proclaiming the merits of repentance rather than faultfinding.[5]

B

Now compile and condemn your soul's sins,
reproach yourself with varied images, my soul,
in a relentless stream of words:
evil, disobedience, error,
desertion, surrender,
rage, impudence, stupidity,
stupor, daydreaming, slumber,
pagan thoughts, base words,
pleasure in dissolution, dalliance,
desire of what is hateful to God,
impious, incorrigible, uncivilized,
faulty, feeble, weak, stingy,
untethered, ridiculous, lusting,[6]
comic, scandalous, deceitful,
brazen, quarrelsome, outlaw,
suffocating the soul, shaking cowardice,
unruly branching bush,
dishonorable indulgence, contentiousness, sulking,
baseless hatred, lax titillation,
failure to weigh small things, breach of promise,
forgetfulness of vows, distortion of similarity,
disguised by veils, extravagance of glory seeking,
arrogance, roguishness, egotism,[7]
will to power, conspiracy with criminals,[8]
meaningless gossip, vicious behavior,
collaboration with the conniving tempter,
squandering of words, selling of life for the price of butchery,
loss of tradition, betrayal of homeland, attractive bondage,[9]
yoked to lawlessness like oxen,[10]
living in filth, abandoning the good,
giving in to bad impulses, worse than before conversion,[11]
new designs, untoward intentions, unstable will,
pointless shouting, letter over spirit,
lawlessness, despotic rule,
and other things that cannot be spoken, written, told
or countenanced.

C

And now, how shall you be cured, my poor soul,
after suffering so many slashes of the lance?
You are like an abandoned, exiled man, incurable,
as the Prophet wrote.[12] Anyone would be condemned

to death for the wrongs listed above, let alone if besieged
by the hordes of killers and vicious executioners.
And these descriptions fail to convey fully
the weight of my misfortunes,
like swarming scorpions that sting
with the deadly poison in their tails.
Although my skin-covered vessel may look
good from the outside, it is teaming with evil within,
a storehouse of ruination and mass of grief,
filled with agents of destruction and sowers of death.

D

And now, your store of iniquities,
the accumulated wages of your wicked ways,
my soul, are enough to condemn you twice to death.
Seeds sown by the enemy upon the grain fields of the world,[13]
which you willingly accepted in yourself,
unclean man, dishonest and lazy, completely hateful,
gluttonous lover of all that is filled with corruption,
for which the Apostle saved some of his most fearsome words of reprimand:
"And those who know," he said, "God's law, and still
do such things or are willing to do so, are deserving of death."[14]
Thus, I myself am deserving of double
condemnation to ruination and death, but still
I pray you, spare me, with your mercy,
O God, compassionate, living, mighty, obliging, able, potent,
blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] Ex. 29:13, Lev. 3:4, Jer. 12:2, Job 16:13, Wis. 1:6.
[2] 2 Cor. 1:3-6.
[3] Jer. 17:1.
[4] Mt. 17:24-27.
[5] Mt. 26:7, 13; Lk. 7:36-50.
[6] Jer. 5:8.
[7] Is. 3:16.
[8] Mt. 23:6.
[9] Lk. 15:13.
[10] Is. 5:18.
[11] 2 Pet. 2:20.
[12] Jer. 22: 28-30.
[13] Mt. 13:24-28, 37-39.
[14] Rom. 1:28-32.

Prayer 46

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now I am lost, forever punishable,
always immoral,
condemning myself to death,
shepherd of a flock of fetid sin, a flock of wild boars,
a despicable mercenary,[1]
a shepherd watching a flock of desert goats.
The image of the shepherds' tent in the Song of Songs
aptly applies to me, [2]
for I do not know or understand,
by whom, in whose image or why I was created.

B

Behold, you were formed like an angel,
on two feet that take and bring you,
as if in flight on two wings lifting you upward,
to gaze upon my father's realm.
O fool, why did you choose to be earthbound,
always preoccupied with the worldliness of the here and now,[3]
carrying on like wild asses in the desert?[4]
On the lamp stand of your body, encircling your head,
a chandelier with many arms was placed,
so that by its light you might not stray and might
see God and know what is everlasting.
You were doubly honored with reason,
so that you might speak with an unfettered tongue
of the victory of the good things given you.
And you were endowed with artful hands and nimble fingers
to carry out the practical affairs of daily life
like the all-giving right hand of God,
that you might be called God.[5]
You are assembled of 360 parts and five senses,
and no aspect of your physical being remains invisible
to your sight or unstudied by your mind.
For some parts are thick and strong,
some are small and others necessary,
some are sturdy but sensitive,
some are sublime, important and noble,
some are necessary but humble,
and the explanation of the image of these things is engraved on you
as on an uneraseable monument, wretched soul of mine,
so that like the elements of time

and the continuous train of days around the year
by some inner law these parts function
in unerring and inalterable order.

C

And now another spiritual image,
tied to the bonds of love uniting the church,
is also reflected within you.[6]
Like the yoke that mediates between the great and the lowly,
the assembled body
established in the name of Christ is sometimes impaired.
And as with the cutting off or loss of an unruly organ, infecting the body,
something is lost in your mortal structure, the feeling abode of humankind,
just as the usual shape of the person undergoes disfigurement.
And now when the uniquely miraculous structure
in the living image of God,[7]
is completely condemned, my enslaved soul,
that original likeness is stolen from you as
by breaking the law in the Garden of Eden.
But by the light of the baptismal font
the breath of the Holy Spirit is received and
the image is restored to God's likeness.

D

And now, why did you give up heavenly glory
like the original man Adam did in the earthly Garden of Eden?[8]
Why did you yourself close heaven and lock the door to ascent?
Why did you mix the clean water with
impurities of bitter tears?
Why did you soil newly washed clothes with dirty work?
Why did you put off the clothes given you
and put on the cloak of sin?
Why did you infect the purity of your feet
by taking the path of the fallen?[9]
Why did you repeat the violation of just vows of the Old Testament?
Why did you refuse the fruit of grace, as Adam did the tree of life?
Why did you willfully lose the unshadowed hope of eternity?
Why did you cover your face with brazen shame?
Why did you arm your enemies against you,
repository of stupidity?
Why did you venture into the snares of death,
abandoning the way of faith?
Why did you get caught on the fishhook of deception,
you who share the body of the life giver?
But again, relying upon him, call to him,
the redeemer of those seeking refuge, renewer,
savior, life maker and life giver,
merciful, caring, lover of humanity,

ungrudging, generously compassionate,
blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] Lk. 15:15.
[2] S. of S. 1:7.
[3] Col. 3:2.
[4] Job 39:5.
[5] Ps. 81:6.
[6] 1 Cor. 12:12-27.
[7] Gen. 1:26.
[8] Gen. 3.
[9] S. of S. 5:3.

Prayer 47

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

What can I be, but speechless
before your awesome might?
What can I be but embarrassed and silent
my words only quiet dust in my mouth,[1]
even as I reach out in hope of the good
as the prophets advised?
Even if I open my clamped lips,
what would flow but more mournful elegies?
Nothing but the voice of my many wounds
pouring forth.

B

And now, weeping with the great sinner,
who willingly committed mortal sin,
I join in his cry,
"I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned,
and to my lawlessness I myself am witness."[2]
Weaving this cry with the words of the 50th Psalm,[3]
I conclude that the wages of my innumerable sins are greater
than the grains of sand that make up the earth
and are scattered by the wind.
I have sinned against heaven and you.
Like the Prodigal Son, who though shamed,
received his father's forgiveness,
I make my entreaty, prostrate before you,
my face twisted in grief, pleading:
Father of compassion, God of all,
I am not worthy to be called even a worthless, irresponsible hireling,[4]
let alone "son," or even to have this word uttered about me.
Still accept me, a wandering exile, defeated by wounds,
faint with gnawing hunger.
Heal me with your bread of life,
welcome me with mercy, for you are my first refuge.
Clothe me, a lawless sinner, merciful and unvengeful God,
with the clothes of my former innocence.
Place, with your boundless generosity,
the ring with your seal of courage
on my sinful hand that lost everything by straying in sin.
Protect the soles of my bare feet
with the sandals of the Gospels.[5]
Guard me from poisonous snakes.

And even though I am wanting in virtue
you sacrifice the fatted calf of heaven,
your only begotten Son, out of
love for humankind.
Your blessed Son who is always offered and yet remains whole,
who is sacrificed continuously upon innumerable altars without being consumed,
who is all for all and complete in all things,
who is in essence of heaven and in reality of earth,
who is lacking nothing in humanity and without defect in divinity,
who is broken and distributed in individual parts,
that all may be collected in the same body with him at its head.[6]
Glory to you with him, Father most merciful.
Amen.

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[1] Lam. 3:29.
[2] 2 Chr. 33:1-20.
[3] Ps. 50:3-5.
[4] Lk. 15:3-32.
[5] Eph. 6:15.
[6] Jn. 11:52, Eph. 1:22-23.

Prayer 48

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Exalted and mighty God,
who has no beginning, no becoming, and no end,
who watches with an unsleeping eye,
parent of the only begotten, glorious and inscrutable,
before heaven and earth,
justify granting your mercy to me to whom it has been denied.
Celebrate my restoration to life.
Announce the good news for me who is dying.
Reveal your good will, O praiseworthy Lord, to all creation.
Be true to your name, ineffable, and grant me,
a miserable sinner, renewed salvation.
Wipe away the mortgage of my sins.
And commute the death sentence upon my soul
with the blood of your beloved Son.
With his blood assure salvation for the good.
Show the majesty of your mercy at the wedding feast of your kin.[1]
Do not shut me, a supplicant, out of the house of life.
Do not bar me from your banquet table and do not deprive me of your bounty.[2]
Do not keep the debts of my iniquity in your safe.[3]
Do not seal the vileness of my dissipation in your good purse.[4]
Do not cover my diseased body with the wounds of my sins.
Do not preserve the infectious deterioration of my aching body[5]
to be buried with me,
but lift away the corrupting decay with your mercy,
so that I might be restored to health.
For my grave ills, Father of compassion, prepare a strong balm.
For my fatal ailments, visit goodness,
for I am yours, Lord, lover of our souls.[6]
And although in one step I might commit a thousand sins,
still, would that I not be deemed as completely sinful,
beneficent giver of life,
having sought refuge in the grace of your gifts.
For to know you is complete justice,
and to know your strength is the root of immortality.
As the wiseman wrote in ages past,
your sovereignty causes you to spare all.[7]
And he is close to you; whenever you want you can find him.[8]

B

I take Solomon[9] as the model for my prayer of hope,
for no other has matched my sinfulness.

Once a beloved son, but later despised,
once a peacemaker for God's people, but later the sower of discord,
once the giver of the law, but later the mortgagor of death,
trampling divine service under foot and proclaiming an alien name,
instigator of discord, undeprived depriver,
contented thief, pampered complainer,
coddled fugitive, repulsive traitor, irresponsible vandal,
sweet curser, father-hating child,
betrayer of covenants, defamer of Moses, forgetter of favors,
wise delinquent, knowing transgressor,
shameless lamenter, wavering penitent,
sycophantic idolater, sluggish convert,
doubtful acceptance, vacillating reconciliation,
shadow of the future, ambiguous salvation,
uncertain discovery, trace of a remnant,
deceitful slave, half-liberated but slavish at heart,
a gluttonous brute, ingenious schemer.
And from the clashing of these two streams of words,
more reports of pity and praise,
with great shame and little honor,
as on a person whose ruin is self-inflicted and
mourning is mixed with blame,
his copious writings have encouraged people of all ages toward virtue,
but his vices bring forth moans of grief from all lips.

C

I am amazed, I faint, seized with doubt.
If Solomon strayed this much, what will become of me?
Why did the exalted fall?
Why did the steady falter?
Why did the sturdy collapse?
Why did the follower become alienated?
Why did the chosen son stray?
Why did the dear one flee?
Why did the shining tarnish?
Why was the teacher no longer an example?
Why did the famous turn obscure?
Why did the glorious become dishonored?
Why was the exalted humbled?
Why were the pious perverted?
Why was the chosen rejected?
Why was the covenant with heaven broken?[10]
I am ashamed to say that he consorted with the Devil,
for what business did he have with idols?
Whence his love for graven images?
Why did he yearn for cults?
Did he not remember Samuel's reprimand to Saul –
"Paganism is a sin"? Yet he labored and sacrificed for the household gods.[11]
Why did he not remember the ancestral reproof?

“Idols,” it said, “are breathless, pagan demons.
And so are their priests.”[12]
Did not Moses scold his people with scorn,
“Only the Lord leads them, and there is no other god for them
but the one known to their fathers.”[13]

D

Where is the death-bringing grotesque statue of Peor?[14]
Where is the ugly, infamous, accursed
female statue of the Sidonites?[15]
Where is the embarrassing statue of a woman?
The image which the prophets condemned as ungodly and
bestial and the demon of intemperance.
This woman who shoved Solomon’s ancestors into destruction,
he mistook as a sign of favor.
Arrogance got the better of his wisdom.
Haughtiness enslaved it.
Pampering stupefied it.
Silver enslaved it.
The weapons of the Destroyer deadened his soul,
and torn from the embrace of God, he strayed to the path of iniquity.
Luxury killed him, sloth numbed him.
Intemperance poisoned him.
O, easily deceived mortal body,
with what cries shall I mourn you?
This contradiction is found not only in him,
but with all those who err, all who willfully do wrong.
For he proves that it is wrong to take pride
in the knowledge of the body[16]
unless guided by God’s judgment.
For even if a person is stupid,
if he places his will in the hand of God,
he shall not succumb as Solomon did.

E

In addition, Solomon has left a horrifying account of his perversion,
filled with self-accusatory reproof for being
truly dead to worldly honor.
To learn this truth, one need only read the book of Vanities,[17]
or the books of the Priests, or the writings of Ahijah the Shilonite.[18]
In these he describes with sorrow the torments and error of his ways.
Vain effort, fruitless labor,
mindless devotion, aimless wandering,
capricious activity, alien fantasies,
groundless praise, rotten harvest,
improper conjecture, trivial concept,
house built on sand, collapsed estate,
contemptible tasks, struggle against oneself,

judgment upon one's own soul,
useless sweat, dangerous attraction,
road to destruction, wayward path,
ruinous education, unwholesome practices,
flawed eyesight, garish eye painting,
whorish get up, infectious germ,
revolting color, tragic splendor,
stifling smoke, vanishing steam,
easily pilfered goods, fragile temple,
inappropriate cries, baseless ridicule,
despicable ambition, self-incriminating writing,
destructive path, ungodly thought,
lying speech, vexing stories,
empty faultfinding, crazed inquest,
shameful display, scandalous revelations,
impending dishonor, injurious acts,
sordid story, slothful example,
hidden pit, dark prey,
deathly gorge, bottomless abyss,
murderous company, foolish prattle,
bandits' hideout, dilapidated house,
shaken building, broken bridge,
fleeting phantom, deceptive flatterer, inhumane traitor,
antagonism toward the one on high.
Ecclesiastes put these confessional thoughts
into our hearts as a prod to repentance
so no one gets high and mighty, wounding oneself or one's friend
with the arrows of disparaging words.
For a person who looks pious but whose acts displease God
is like a pagan under a veil.

F

As we now see, Solomon sinned as much as he atoned for,
so let us not blame him but remember the good,
and let this be our hope as supplicants at the Lord's feet,
so when he descends with the Spirit in undivided divinity
to redeem the confessed,[19]
we, the living, are assured of the good news by the example of the dead.
With Solomon whose wisdom I lack, but whose sins I surpass,
I make this plea to your glorified greatness.
Fill my humble scribbling with his felicitous genius.
May my supplications mingle with the prayers of that penitent king,
and may they be answered through the intercession of that sublime monarch,
whom you set as a precursor of your only begotten Son,
and by whose lineage we have partaken of the glory of your co-equal Son.
Save your servant, all powerful, almighty, and awesome.
Increase your glory as creator
by granting repentance for our unforgivable sins.
In recognition of his good counsel, redeem Solomon too,

for he has preached your divinity in the Old Testament
with words of sweetness, eloquence and edifying stories,
thus leaving the church footprints toward goodness
by teaching us to turn toward you, Father,
showing that except for a drop of despair that
dampened his heart's fervor and spurred him toward repentance,
he was not far from salvation.

G

Now remembering your boundless goodness,
embrace him with compassion and restore him to beatitude, instead of
the blame with which he has been trampled and pilloried for ages.
His repentance filled the banquet hall with a torrent of tears
that gushed over the roof.[20]
And in passionate penitence he exceeded his father.
May your long-suffering forgiveness will blend
his tears with the tears of your Son, the Word,
who subjected himself to our frail human condition.
May the Psalm sometimes
thought to be addressed to Solomon
rather be addressed to your Son, co-equal in glory,
thereby granting him the sweetness of salvation
along with the other wretched of the earth.[21]
For a certain pious poet, it was ample reward for his words[22]
to be mingled with Solomon's
and to be offered on his behalf and
in harmonious prayer to you.
My justification for this plea is this:
his work, the parable of Job, the man from Uz,
is a work of miraculous talent and prophecy,
that alone earns Solomon a place of honor in the ranks of God's defenders.
Hence, it is acceptable to plead for him rather than speak ill of him.

H

Now I too, with greater confidence, hope
my cries will be offered to you with his,
for if you destroy us, judging us by our deeds,
your glory will not be diminished, for you will be judged as just.
But if you accept us, you will be exalted
as befits your majesty.
Return then, Lord, incline yourself in sweetness with compassion
and freely give the gift of love to comfort us,
who like Solomon are chronically feverish with incurable grief and turmoil.
Lay your hand of salvation on us.
Renew us, forgive and defend us
from the destruction of sin.
And to you alone, who are the beginning without beginning,
the source of all beginnings,

the holy Trinity and One Divinity,
to you alone are due
glory and dominion forever.
Amen.

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[1] Following Terian, *Narek*, p. 207, n. 4.
[2] Mt. 22:3-16.
[3] Dt. 32:34.
[4] Job 14:17.
[5] Ps. 37:6.
[6] Wis. 15:2-3.
[7] Wis. 12:16.
[8] Wis. 12:18.
[9] 1 Kg. 2:1-8.
[10] 1 Kg. 8.
[11] 1 Sam. 15:23.
[12] Ps. 95:9, 96:5-7.
[13] Dt. 32:12.
[14] For "Peor," "Pagora," *see Narek*, Mughni edition (2003) p. 278, n. 3. Thanks to Fr. Thaddaeus Zirekyants for this reference.
[15] 1 Kg. 2:5.
[16] 1 Cor. 1:29, 10:18.
[17] Ec. 1:2.
[18] 2 Chr. 9:29.
[19] 1 Pet. 3:19.
[20] Ps. 6:7.
[21] Apparently a reference to Psalm 71, which is inscribed "To Solomon," see, Ps. 71:4, 13.
[22] Sir. 47:22; Some commentators interpret this as a reference to Sirach; others to St. Gregory of Nyssa. *See* Russian academic translation (1988), p. 362, n. 38; *Narek*, Mughni edition (2003)p. 248, n. 6. Thanks to Fr. Thaddaeus Zirekyants for this reference.

Prayer 49

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now,
God of light for all,
do not let iniquity rule me, whom you fashioned in your regal likeness.
Do not let the haughty rebel steal the grace of your breath,
from this creature you made.[1]
Do not let sin trap and rule my mortal body,
enslaving me.[2]
No king rules my soul except you, Christ,
who without force submits me to your easy yoke,[3]
who lifts away my sinful passions with your all-powerful word,
who redeems me with your blood and nourishes me with your body,
who sets forth and establishes the unchanging covenant of life,
who by setting the stamp of your spirit on me as your cohort,[4]
presents me to your Father as a co-heir,[5]
and in the name of your sacrifice and memory of your torment,
emboldened me to pray to the same benevolent God.
Creator of all life,
you are the God of all souls[6]
who made this gift of grace greater than all your other miracles.
Neither the heavens with all their raiment, nor the angels in their brilliance,
nor the earth and humanity and their wonders,
nor the expanse of the seas and all in them,
nor the abyss in its infiniteness and all in it,
exalted you as sublimely as your sympathy toward me,
when you said through the prophet, our hope of sweet goodness,
“Who is a God like me, always pardoning sin
and canceling the debts of iniquity?”[7]
Behold your words are honored with incense, merciful God,
and your good works proclaimed,
glorified, deep mystery and worshiped, overflowing grace.

B

Indeed, no one is able to convey with human speech,
even a small part of the acts of compassion which you have shown me, creator.
For the power to restore what is worn to its former grandeur
is greater than creating anew.
And since weakness is not yours, mighty in all things,
you who with but a word can carry out all deeds,[8]
arise, doer of good, and be glorified,[9]
and reclaim those whose salvation was beyond hope,
so that by the exercise of the covenant,

the voice of your blessed good news might be more exalted,
and known for the grace of your forgiveness,
more for the light of your mercy dispensed,
than for the process of creation.
For in one we recognize the creator,
whereas in the other, creatorship is recalled as well as grace.
We recognize
not only the one who fashioned us, but also the one who atoned for our sins,
not only the one who invented us, but also the one who did good for us,
not only the one who established us, but also the one who took pity on us,
not only the one who formed us, but also the one who gave us possibilities,
not only the one who authored, but also the one who humbled himself for us,
not only the one who designed us, but also the one who performed miracles,
not only the one who started us, but also the one who gave us light,
not only the anointed, but also the shepherd,
not only the healer, but also the caretaker,
not only the protector, but also the physician,
not only a supporter, but also a commander,
not only a victor, but also a king,
not only a creator, but also sweetness,
not only the giver of all gifts, but also a generous sponsor,
not only always patient, but also forgiving,
not only not angered, but also unvengeful,
not only sharing our sorrows, but also reading our hearts,
not only providing comfort, but also refuge,
not only supremely compassionate, but also God,
not only endless goodness, but also blessed in all things.

C

Now, as you created me, before I existed,
and you revealed yourself as my sustenance,
and I pray that you might reinstate my soul
together with the tabernacle of my body in the spotlessness
of the clean holiness of their former being so
that your limitless marvels
might be bestowed more amply, frequently and increasingly
upon the ever-renewing present rather
than upon the fading shadows of the past.
And when recounting my sins,
however much the wings of my mind can bear to remember,
may I be justified in your name, Almighty,[10]
in confessing my own stains upon my soul, and
may you forgive the baseness of the many sins I have revealed,
Almighty, seer of secrets, savior of all, so
that I might not, due to lack of good news,
slide back and long for my former ways,
envying with the Psalmist those saved by baptism,[11]
and wounded in my soul by the thorns of sin,
may your hand not press on me again more heavily,[12]

making the burden of my transgressions greater than the sweetness of your gifts.[13]
Rather, free me through your blessed Holy Spirit,
I pray you, Lord of all, from the laws of sin and death.[14]
Spare me from falling with weakness before reaching the dawn of your truth,
as written in the Scriptures.[15]
For wherever forgiveness reigns, sin is banished,
and wherever your living word gives encouragement, there is no despair.
And wherever your gifts abound, debts are dissolved.
And the hand of God being close by, nothing is impossible.
Rather, everything basks in light, filled with strength
and invincible potency.
Yours is salvation, life, renewal, mercy, and at the same time,
a sweet kingdom, incorruptible and glorified forever.
Amen.

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[1] Gen. 2:7.
[2] Rom. 6:12.
[3] Mt. 11:29-30.
[4] 2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13.
[5] Rom. 8:17.
[6] Num. 27:15-16.
[7] Mic. 7:18.
[8] Mt. 8:8, Heb. 4:12, Gen. 1:3.
[9] Is. 33:10.
[10] Acts 13:39
[11] Ps. 31:1, 37:5.
[12] Job 19:21.
[13] Ps. 31:4, 37:5.
[14] Rom. 8:2.
[15] Rom. 8:3-4.

Prayer 50

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Since there is no salvation for souls without Christ[1]
and there is no light without the sight of the eyes,
nor is there sweetness of the sun without the rays of dawn,
in the same way there is no remission of sins
without confession of secrets and the baring of the soul.
For what good is purity,
if you are judged with the Pharisees?
Or what harm are my transgressions,
if I am to be praised with the tax collectors?[2]
Where is it written that Joel was punished,
for repeating three times the distress of his soul?[3]
Might a holy man be blamed for reminding us of the Last Judgment?[4]
Is it possible that Isaiah can be called a man of unclean lips,[5]
when he stood apart from the deeds of the house of Israel?
And how can God, who took on Adam's body out of sympathy for me,
be considered blameworthy for praying to his Father like a sinner?[6]
How can the proverb be interpreted:
"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth."[7]
For he, who does not confess the error of Adam to his own heart,
and like the fortunate king who took upon himself the sins of his ancestors,[8]
consider the sins of all his own[9]
shall lose his righteousness, like one who thinks our human nature incorruptible.
And as it is written, a heart cannot make a merry countenance
in expectation of the good news[10]
if one does not, as taught by Christ's apostle
experience sorrow and repentance.[11]

B

Now, I must memorialize
the ancient counsel of the sage,
advice even our Lord saw fit to repeat[12]
when the ungodly gather,
do not go sit at the head of the table among the haughty[13]
the place David and Jeremiah advised,[14]
as a hard and fast rule, to avoid.
But rather sit with the contrite, those humiliated by sin,
and stricken by the fear of retribution on the great day of judgment,
those who have humbled themselves willingly
with the least of those on earth.

With them God on high rejoices.
And I dare to be deemed worthy of this rule
in order to be ranked among the chosen on the seats of bliss
and to escape the rebuke of the prophet, who remarked
about the arrogant:
"Do not come near me, for I am pure, and who can look upon me?"[15]
Thus drawing upon blessed David's immeasurable humility,
I say with him:
I am like an animal,[16]
deprived of sensibility and besieged by evils.[17]
My wounds have festered and become putrid
because of my incorrigible stupidity.[18]
And even like certain of the chosen in Assyria, who were
spotless in soul, but who by their own willful impudence
condemned themselves,[19]
I say with them in the words of the great priest Ezra,
"I am unable even to lift up my face to you, God."[20]

C

I, like a mirror of all earthly beings,
mix with their sins my own,
and doubling the bitterness of my own with theirs,
I sigh with them.
Although there was no need to paint in harsher tones,
an already ugly picture,
yet I sinned here,
without thinking, I did what was not pleasing to you
with many condemnable errors.
Look upon me with compassion, Lord, for
like Peter caught in the act of denial,[21]
I am completely empty.
Shed light upon me with the rays of your mercy,
you who are benevolent in all ways,
that I might receive your blessing, Lord,
that I might be justified, live and be cleansed
of my inner turmoil, not of the life with which you endowed me.
I do not dare spread my sinful hands before you
until you offer your blessed right hand
for the renewal of my condemned self.
Now, vanquish again my impudence with your meekness,
visit upon me your lovingkindness toward humanity.
And with your might to do all in all with all,
forgive my wrongdoing, original, middle and last,
Christ, king of the light of the just,
for whom the impossible is possible.

D

I am not worthy to mention your blessed name,
for, before you, who do only good,[22]
I am guilty of ruinous acts:
defiling the seal, the grace, the breath of life,
the gifts, the legacy, the talents,
the image, the stamp, the anointing,
the name, the son-hood, the majestic honor,
the bounty, the courage, the friendship,
the life, the light, the blessedness,
the hope, the glory, the majesty that cannot be laid low,
the incorruptible halo, the promise of secrets,
which through you, Lord Christ, was conveyed to me in manifold ways.
I am as impudent as a serpent or adder,
with deaf ears, shut tight with wounds,[23]
which in the face of your ever growing goodness,
multiplied yet more my wrongdoing,
and completely destroyed me,
denied me life, and bound me with death,
a slave to decadence.[24]

E

Now you who alone are fair and just in your benevolent judgment,
who are blessed in compassion,
I have sinned against you. I have transgressed. I have been unjust.
For these I am ruined, corrupted, guilty, debased.
I did not obey your confessed, worshiped, praised word.
You who revealed yourself among us with your love beyond telling,
the mere writing of which is great and the meaning of which is overwhelming,
to you justice and glory and eternal praise,
and for me, ashamed before you, my caretaker,
atonement, mercy and healing,
help and protection for heart and soul,
praised in all forever.
Amen.

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[1] Acts 4:12.
[2] Lk. 18:9-14.
[3] Jl. 1:15.
[4] Jl. 2:1-2, 11
[5] Is. 6:5.
[6] Heb. 5-7.
[7] Ec. 7:4.
[8] Ps. 106:6.
[9] Rom. 5:12.
[10] Pr.15:12.
[11] 2 Cor. 7:10.
[12] Pr. 25:6.
[13] Lk. 14:8.

[14] Ps. 1:1, Ps. 26:6, Jer. 15:17.
[15] Is. 65:5.
[16] Ps. 73:22.
[17] Ps. 40:12.
[18] Ps. 38:5.
[19] Dan. 3:28-30.
[20] 1 Ezra 9:6.
[21] Lk.22:61.
[22] Lk.22:63.
[23] Ps. 58:5-6
[24] 2 Pet. 2:19

Prayer 51

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now, should I, a mortal who has strayed in every way,
plead with another earthly being,
to whom it is vain to cry out?
To a mere rational mortal,
on whom it would be false to place hope of salvation?[1]
To a frail human,
whose strength is as feeble and faltering as his word?
To the princes on earthly thrones,[2]
whose trappings are as transitory as their beings?
To a blood brother,
who likewise is needy of contentment?
To my earthly father,
whose care diminishes with his dwindling days?
To my mother, who bore me,
whose compassion waned with her retreating life?
To the kingdoms of this world, perhaps,
who are always more artful in killing than giving life?
Or to you, beneficent God, glorified in the highest,
who live and give life to all and
who after death are able to work incorruptible renewal.[3]

B

For if we flee, it is you who come after us.
If we are weak, you give us strength.
If we falter, you set us on the right and easy path.
If we faint, you encourage us.
If we are ailing in body and soul, you heal us.
If we wallow in sin, you wash us.
If we lie, you justify us with your truth.
If we stumble into the abyss, you direct us to heaven.
If we do not turn from our willfulness, you guide us.
If we sin, you weep.
If we are just, you smile.
If we are estranged, you mourn.
If we approach, you celebrate.
If we give, you receive.
If we become stubborn, you are patient.
If we are ungrateful, you grant abundantly.
If we quit, you are sad.
If we are brave, you rejoice.

C

The blessed and wonderful Psalm One Hundred Three[4]
comforts my failing heart,
and heralds the good news of the hope of life.
It is an assurance of salvation,
that triumphs over demons and the doubts of the Slanderer,
It is like the Lord's cross, a sign of good fortune, glorious and resplendent,
unshakable in its exalted light,
invincible in the strength on high,
standing as an irresistible champion,
unmovable forever
against the immoral ways of Satan's tyranny.
For the discerning soul, it is a treasure of spiritual goods,
showing the defeat of death and the absolution of sin, plus
double hopes for each, now and eternally.
It promises restoration for the righteous.
Its rules preach goodness and give life as
written by the Spirit of God.
The Psalms were songs of everything for the pure in heart:
a testament of life, written for all people.

D

For the Old law was a faint image of the New,[5]
holding in its bosom good news and assurance
of the great, blessed victory over death
and heavenly life like that of the angels forever, beyond telling.
They were passing writings and replaceable rules.[6]
Their function was to condemn the frailties of transgressors,[7]
and they were to be taken as earthly commitment and
weak as an intercessor for reconciliation.[8]
They leave undone the words of those who prayed.
Although they show the salvation of Manasseh,[9]
who after so many unforgivable sins,
in the trustworthy account of the prophet,
guilty of spilling the blood of the righteous in
the city of his ancestors, a city
renowned for its miracles and dedicated to the great king.[10]

Even the greatest of the seers, his teacher[11]
and the steward of the estate built by his forebears,
was hacked in two by Manasseh with horrific torment.
As a symbol of his revolt, cutting off the last hope of his salvation,
he committed yet another brutal misdeed and still
he had the arrogance to enter into unlawful battle with the Most High.
Never even having respected the honor of the creator
and having denied the name of him who dwells in the altar,

he persecuted the spirit of God and pledged himself to Satan.
And that very temple of the Lord,
designated by God for adoration with incense,
the most renowned gathering place,
revered by the nations as a sacred place,
where angelic visions and triumphant divine signs
appeared in brilliant revelation.
In that place reminiscent of heaven, awesome, resplendent,
he erected the four-faced idol Kevan as a competing deity,[12]
turning it into a vile cult center, a wasteland of rubble,
and altar for satanic sacrifices,
dispossessing the heavenly king of his regal dwelling place,
stripping the most bountiful of his belongings.
Transforming the landlord into a vagabond with no place to rest,
he built a splendid tabernacle to Beelzebub,[13]
and expelled the awesome name from there.
Taking the legacy of the praiseworthy hostage,[14]
wretchedly degrading the stature of the most merciful,
he turned the hall of light into a small fox hole
and for him who holds the world in his hand,
he left not even a hut from his own creation to cover his head.[15]
He tore down the sanctuary of the Holy of Holies,
where the mysteries of blood sacrifice were conducted,
and in their place installed fortune tellers.[16]
He opened many ways to sinfulness.[17]
Like a shepherd of destruction he led his flock to slaughter,
a frenzied priest of waywardness.
And all this he did, knowing full well the religion of the Laws,
having as a father the great King Hezekiah, the likeness of David.[18]

E

He was so resourceful in his evil-doing that
he blasphemed and contested God's honor
with which he had been granted the glory of the kingdom.
He butchered the multitude of the pious at prayer,[19]
a traitor to his family, a bane to his associates,
murderer of his intimates, killer of his companions,
he could not turn toward God, for he had rejected him.
He could not remember Abraham, for he had become estranged.
He could not pray by Isaac, for he had cursed him.
He could not take pride in Israel, for he had been banished
from the glory of that name of great mystery.
He could not sing a song of David, for he had reprimanded him.
He could not approach the place of penitence, for he had befouled it.
He could not take refuge in the tabernacle of God,
for he had replaced it with a molten idol.
He could not call to Moses, for his sins against him were unforgivable.
He could not pray to Aaron, for he was guilty before him.

He could not turn to the group of prophets close at hand,
for he had killed them all.

Nevertheless, he was granted forgiveness of sins
and regained his rule over the kingdom,[20]
so that you, Lord who does good, might multiply and inspire
praise beyond words that cannot be silenced,
through the peoples of all nations and the ages of all times,
so that you might keep the gates of hope open for entry,
for the glory of your exaltation
and as salvation for condemned people like me, to whom
Christ gives the gift of immortality.
Praise forever.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 108:12 (Arm 107:13).
[2] Ps. 146:3 (Arm 145:3).
[3] Phil. 3:21.
[4] Arm 102.
[5] Heb. 7:18.
[6] Heb. 10:9.
[7] 2 Cor, 3:7-9.
[8] Heb. 10:3-8.
[9] 2 Chr. 33:11-20.
[10] 2 Kg. 21:1-16
[11] referring to Isaiah.
[12] Am. 5:26, Ezek. 8:3, 2 Kg. 21:5. Kevan has been identified in various ways, including the Assyrian god Kaiwan/ Kiyyun, which Eusebius describes as having four eyes, and later is used in Arabic and Syriac to refer to the planet Saturn.
[13] 2 Kg.1:2, Mt.12:24, name for Baal.
[14] This has been identified as the treasures King Hezekiah. 2 Kg. 20:13
[15] Mt. 8:20
[16] 2 Kg. 21:6.
[17] Mt. 8:13.
[18] 2 Kg. 18:3-6.
[19] 2 Kg. 21:16.
[20] 2 Chr. 33:13.

Prayer 52

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Blessed in holy essence,
boundless and unchangeable, truly good,
worthy of adoration, happiness professed by all the earth,
most complete revelation of persistent hope, compassionate and merciful,
without grudges even for a blink of an eye
despite the sin of many years.[1]
Lord, with a new showering of grace and streams of mercy from on high,
who delights in pouring forth enlightenment miraculously without end,
more abundantly than upon the nations of old
and who opened and broadened those narrow windows[2]
through which knowledge glimmers as Solomon said,[3]
for him, and with him for me, a wretched sinner.
You lift the screen which blocked the entry[4]
of God's freely given mercy,
the good news that was foretold
in the Old Testament obliquely, for example:
"Turn toward me and I will turn toward you,"[5]
and "when you turn and regret, then you shall revive."[6]

B

For he changes the gloom of twilight
into the brightness of snow,
and people drenched in blood he washes white as wool,[7]
as Isaiah and Zechariah wrote.
In the midst of anger you still remember mercy.[8]
The deserted cities of Israel are inhabited anew.[9]
The overgrown byways abandoned by men are trod again.
Those wasting from the famine of the soul are restored by your hand.
God withdrawing in anger, returns in mercy,[10]
granting pardon and refuge, and
in the midst of reprimands grants double protection.
With his heartache, he also feels compassionate caring.

C

The venerable voices of the prophets, foretold
the liberating mission of your blessed coming,
which is beyond human telling.
For the manifestations of the revelation
of your good news
and the salvation of the cross,

are countless and varied,
faint and feeble,
old and fleeting.
You raised your altars everywhere as testimony to
the blood of your new covenant,
which echoes more resoundingly
than the condemnation of Abel's murder.[11]
Your victory in the battle for goodness,
for a new, immortal life of grace, baptism, resurrection, and renewal,
for our kinship with you and union with your Holy Spirit,
for forgiveness, liberation, and enlightenment,
for eternal purity, true bliss,
in communion with the angels, in unfading glory,
is the plea for reconciliation upon our lips voiced by our Lord on high.
And what is more awe-inspiring,
for it is a monument to your magnanimity: even to become divine
by grace of your election,[12]
uniting us with you, Creator, by partaking of your body,
and sharing in your light of life,
the fulfillment of the good promise,
which, in Paul's words, the Old Law did not have.[13]
You, Savior, came with your father's bounty,
perfected and fulfilled in perpetuity
our undiminishing hope in you, Redeemer of all.
To you glory with your Father,
with praise and blessings to the Holy Spirit,
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 103 (Arm. 102):8-10.
[2] 1 Kg. 6:4.
[3] S. of S. 2:9.
[4] 2 Cor. 3:8-18.
[5] Mal. 3:7, Zech. 1:3.
[6] Is. 30:15.
[7] Is. 1:18, Zech. 9:7.
[8] Hab. 3:2.
[9] Is. 6:11, Is. 44:26.
[10] Hos. 5:15, Hos. 6:1-3.
[11] Heb. 12:24.
[12] 2 Pet. 1:3.
[13] Heb. 7:19.

Prayer 53

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Lord, Lord almighty, king of all creation,
blessed mercy, God of all,
who surpasses the limits of the widespread expanses,
you are the sum of all infinities,
The solid is fluid for you, and the fluid solid.[1]
There is nothing impossible for you, O terrifying, triumphant power.
Fire is a refreshing mist[2] and rain a consuming flame.[3]
You can make a stone into a speaking figure,[4]
or turn a speaking figure into a breathless statue.[5]
You honor the repentant sinner,
and the seemingly pure you scrutinize justly and condemn.[6]
Those approaching death you release with the joy of grace.[7]
And the humiliated you restore, anointing their faces with cheer.[8]
You rescue the one who has stumbled into a snare.[9]
And the one who wavers you set confidently upon a rock.[10]
The one who is afflicted and sighing you make happy.[11]
And the impudent you put in his place.[12]
And when our resources are exhausted
you perform the greatest miracles.
For you forgive sins and erase our iniquity;
you pardon our injustices and forget our sins
as the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah foretold.[13]

B

When I consider, deeply grateful,
the grace of your new salvation
I am dumb struck by its breadth.
For this inexhaustible favor of your light,
which you have bestowed upon a stubborn wretch like me,
I shall pray to you with the prayer you taught,[14]
while continuing my writings,
filling the leaves of this book of mournful psalms,
with grieving and sighs of the heart.
But in doing this I have, for the pleasure of the Giver,
mixed the cure with the pain,
encouragement with disappointment,
the name of our creator with discouragement,
comfort with sadness,
the sweetness of our Savior with my bitterness,
grace with the retribution of the Law,

your liberating blessing with cursed punishments,
complete renewal with the death of the body.

C

I believe in your almighty word, hence I bear witness.[15]
Hear the silence of my heart, Lord Jesus, and
the great clamor of my voice crying perpetually for you,
who came to share our body and our image, who came also
as a high priest not under the Law, but throwing off the yoke of the Law.[16]
Instead of animal sacrifice, you offered your blessed body,[17]
perpetually sacrificed without dying and
without diminishing the pardon you grant,
not just for those of few sins,
but also for those whose expectation of life is cut off.
With these bodies so inclined to sin,[18]
how could we reach salvation, even if we tried for ten thousand years?
But you God of all, for this reason,
willingly made yourself the sacrifice,[19]
and suffering death are shared in communion for our pardon.
Not that you, O fountain of purity, are forced to be
sacrificed daily; rather you chose it through the Holy Spirit
and with the approval of the Father for our reconciliation.
You are continuously sacrificed.
And you, inscrutable God of all,
taking on my nature for my sake and in my stead, for my salvation,
as if I were united and participating in your very being
through your all-embracing body.
And you, benefactor, for me and those like me,
taking my sins upon you,
though you are sinless, and accepting death,
which was the punishment I, a mortal sinner, deserved,
and on my behalf bearing guilt,
so I may suffer with you who
willingly dies but remains living.
You are offered in the divine mystery and
distributed in indivisible parts,
not by the hands of those who deny you,
but by the faith of those who confess to you.

D

A certain pagan priest who had converted from idolatry,[20]
once made a weighty decision,
with presumptuous expectations for a person such as he, saying:
“I believe that with the death of my passing body,
I will more readily attain glory and bliss through communion
than through martyrdom or even,
through right living, wretch that I am.”

And from his paradoxical observation I concluded
that he actually believed, that even the pious,
without partaking in communion,
cannot be truly fulfilled,
until they are united in spirit through this great mystery.
When he said, “You were sacrificed twice for me a sinner,”
he meant, “you truly became me,
exchanging my vileness with your savor,
sacrificing your material body,
through the wafer of the life of light.”
For these reasons, at the last supper in the upper room,
at the first partaking of this grace,
as the cure for incurable diseases,
he distributed his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.
This he deemed higher than martyrs’ shedding their own blood.
By this example of hope, he sought to show God gives more weight
to this sacrifice of faith,
than through other efforts to obtain pardon, mercy or grace.
So much greater is the force of the divine compared to the human,
and the willing sacrifice of the Lord’s body united with divinity,
than the offering of animal sacrifices.[21]
the immortal, not the mortal,
the awesome light, not the shadowy darkness,
the eternal, not the passing,
the exalted, not the earthly,
the uncreated, not the created,
goodness in its essence, not corruption by nature,
especially since his is the willing and his the giving of life,
and he is the occasion for blessing, not a cause for cursing.

E

Now, I pray you, compassionate Lord, grant me, broken in heart and spirit,
the salve of life from heaven on high.
Come sweetly to me, ill with sin.
Pardon my debts, in your omnipotence.
And for my part, the truth and trustworthiness of these words lie in this:
You, creator of all, dwell in the saints.[22]
And in the true words of Paul, as we sow, so shall we reap.[23]
And, the infirm of sight cannot bear the glare of sun.[24]

But you, doer of good, who created everything from nothing,
look kindly upon those who truly have believed in you,
deeming this enough for salvation.
You who are not limited by law,
but prevail over it, breaking loose from its legalism.
For all us sinners in our bewilderment,
you remain the only condition for the good news.
To you with the Father and the Holy Spirit,

glory and power forever.
Amen.

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[1] Num. 20:8, Ex. 14:22.
[2] Dan. 3:25.
[3] Gen. 19:24; Wis. 16:17-19.
[4] Mt. 3:9, Lk.19:40.
[5] Gen. 19:26.
[6] Lk.18:9-14.
[7] Acts 12:11, Dan. 13 (Arm).
[8] Mk.5:25-34.
[9] Ps. 145 (Arm 144):14.
[10] Ps. 40 (Arm 39):2.
[11] 2 Kg. 20:1-8.
[12] 2 Kg. 20:8-11.
[13] Is. 43:25, Jer. 31:34.
[14] Mt. 6:7-9.
[15] 2 Cor. 4:13.
[16] Heb. 5:1-10.
[17] Heb. 9:11-14; 10:1-18.
[18] Rom. 7:23-24.
[19] Gal. 2:20, Eph. 5:2.
[20] Commentators believe this to be a reference to a Zoroastrian priest who converted after seeing the great faith of the Armenians at the battle of Vardanants in 451. Critical Edition, p. 1061, n. 13.
[21] Heb. 9:11-14.
[22] Ps. 22 (Arm 21):3-4.
[23] Gal. 6:7-8.
[24] Yeznik Koghbatsi, *Refutation of the Sects*, 1.1.

Prayer 54

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, in all and for all, your mercy is hope,
Lord Jesus, the first light of our eyes and our hearts,
all good deeds, life and immortality are from you.
Turn with compassion toward me
and make my soul return to you rejoicing.[1]
For without you I cannot be transformed anew,
and if your will is not in sympathy with me,
I am unable to save myself since I am condemned to death.
And if you, my guide, did not show me the way,
marking the footsteps on the path that leads to you,
I would fall into the abyss on the right and the left.

B

I am not proud, for I am justly scorned.
I am not arrogant, for I am blameworthy.
I am not haughty, for I am abandoned.
I do not boast, for I am reduced to silence.
I do not rebel, for I am mocked.
I do not rejoice, for I am pitiful.
I do not justify myself, for I am wicked.
A horse does not go straight without someone at the reins,
nor does a ship sail forth without a helmsman,[2]
nor does a ploughshare make a furrow without a plowman,
nor does a pair of oxen move properly without a driver,
nor does a cloud float in the sky without the wind,
nor do the stars appear and disappear without a scheduler,
nor does the sun course through the zodiac without the action of air.
Nor do I, like them, do anything except at the pleasure of your commandments,
doer of good.[3]
For you alone give life to thinking beings.
And you alone maintain order in the cycle of creatures.
And you alone are my salvation, as the Psalmist said,[4]
and you proclaim in joyous voice the good news,
which resounds in the ears of the attentive of all ages –
“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest and cleanse you of your sins.”[5]

C

But what does it avail me to be cleansed,
if I am only to be soiled again?[6]

And what use is taking communion,
if I am to be damned to Hell?[7]
Or why should I glory in Abraham,
if I have strayed from his deeds,[8]
I, the abominable son of an Amorite father,
and a Hittite or Canaanite mother,
in the words of the Prophet, as if written for me. [9]
I deserve to be the disinherited offspring of the Ethiopian,
and not the fruit of Sarah's womb,[10]
in the prophet's words, apt to me.[11]

I am the brother of Samaria and Gomorrah.[12]
I am a child unwashed and unsalted,
the unripe fruit of the unripe womb of Aholah and Aholibah,[13]
doubly condemned by the Prophet Ezekiel.

D

And like one imperiled on the high seas,
tossed by waves whipped up by the winds,
I am in terror and torment,
swept away by the wild currents,
clawing with my fingers this way and that to hold on,
as if borne away in the torrents of a river flooding in spring,
in an involuntary and pitiful downward course.
Gulping water, unable to breathe because of debris I have swallowed,
muddy, foul, slimy, tangled weeds,
dragging me into the pangs of death.
Like a drowning man, carried by the flow,
I am wretched:
They speak, but I do not understand.
They call, but I do not hear.
They shout, but I do not wake up.
They clamor, but I do not budge.
They trumpet, but I do not rally.
I am wounded, but I do not feel.
Like an abominable idol,
devoid of any sense of goodness,
my true essence is more evil
than this example,
more heinous and reprehensible,
deserving to be brought before the tribunal of Christ.

E

And since I leave readers this testament
recording my misdeeds along the path of no return,
that they might pray to God through my words day by day,
may this book remain as a guide for repentance,

continuously lifted in voice to you, almighty Lord,
its letters like my body, its message like my soul,
always yearning for you, O boundless God.
Accept my pleas as from an innocent petitioner,
compassionate God, who loves humankind,
blessed through all eternity.
Amen.

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[1] Jer. 31:18.
[2] Jas. 3:3-4.
[3] Jn. 15:5.
[4] Ps. 62 (Arm 61):2.
[5] Mt. 11:28.
[6] 2 Pet. 2:20-22.
[7] Heb. 6:4-6.
[8] Jn. 8:39-40.
[9] Ezek.16:2-3, 45.
[10] Gen. 21:2.
[11] Am.9:7.
[12] Ezek. 16:46
[13] Ezek. 23:3-4.

Prayer 55

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

On the wings of my soul I have soared
through endless generations of humankind,
weighing them in the scales of my rational mind.
I found none my equal in sin.
Therefore, I have adopted the Psalm of David as my theme,
like a stern reprimand delivered with the overseer's staff,
"Who equals me in my wrongdoing and iniquity?"[1]
And since these words literally apply to me, a mortal man,
I again testify against myself, under oath, roundly condemning myself,
rather than letting others be banished for my words,
so that perhaps you might pardon me,
as I forgive my debtors.[2]

B

Now, here in this book, what prayers, what fragrant incense
shall I offer pleasing and acceptable to you,
blessed heavenly king Christ?
If not a prayer that you
bless those I have cursed,
release those I have bound, free the condemned,
comfort the outcast, reconcile the antagonized,
console the mournful, heal the afflicted,
care for the shunned, protect the betrayed,
minister to the souls of those whose bodies I have wounded.
Thus, when I greet people with blessings, hear me,
and when with curses, pay no attention, compassionate Lord.

C

I am most wretchedly tormented,
the least of those who pray to you with this book.
I have forgiven my debtors with all my soul,
so that you might block the cruel wishes of my spiteful voice.
And on my knees repeatedly, I have prayed, with all my heart,
for reconciliation with those who have betrayed me.
I pray for them along with those who have shown kindness.[3]
For as you are greater than I,
may you visit a comparable portion of mercy upon me,
praiseworthy guardian,
you who are life for mortals like me,
strength for the frail,

might for the unsteady,
fountain of wisdom for the stupefied.
For I am always stumbling in error,
like an inexperienced diver in dark waters,
unwittingly in the snare of death,
I did not comprehend the danger.
I did not recognize the trap.
I did not see the hidden devices for capturing the quarry.
I did not suspect camouflaged traps.
I did not sense the ambush on all sides.
I did not feel the hostage-taking fishhook net.[4]
As the Psalmist said,
"Evils visited me, and I was unable to recognize them."[5]

D

And as a certain foreign philosopher aptly said,
"Evil is death that comes without warning or reason."[6]
I shall confirm it in my own case:
Like dumb cattle,
we die, but are not terrified.
We perish, but are not astonished.
We are buried, but are not humbled.
We are shunned, but are not contrite.
We are corrupted, but are not regretful.
We are worn down, but do not care.
We are robbed, but we do not gather ourselves.
We proceed, but without precautions.
We are enslaved, but are not aware.

E

That happy man, Job, called mortal death rest,[7]
and with that holy man I too would agree,
had I not the heavy burden of mortal deeds and were I not
on the path of the hidden traps, where
the trap-setter is invisible,
the present is non-existent,
the past unknown, and the future questionable,
I am impatient and my nature is skeptical,
my legs shaky and my mind reeling,
my passions are unruly and my habits intemperate,
my body is laced with sin and my inclinations toward the worldly,
my rebelliousness innate and my character contradictory,
my dwelling clay and the rain pelting,
my needs innumerable and perils on all sides,
my mind fond of evil and my desires hating the good,[8]
my life ephemeral and my joys rare,
my delusion stupefying and my pastimes childish,

my work vain and my pleasures illusory,
my hoarding is of nothing and my storehouse filled with the wind,
my likeness is of a shadow and my image ridiculous.
For when the law caught up with me,[9]
as St. Paul wrote,
it found me unprepared.
Sin came alive when confronted by justice
and I died for life and came alive for death.

F

As the Good Book foretold[10]
alien, evil forces, stole the wise treasure of my heart.
Wisdom waned in me, as the Proverb teller says,
and evil impulses waxed.[11]
I did not fix the eye of my soul on the head of my life, Christ,
who would have led me down the straight path.
For in trying to run too quickly, I dug myself in deeper.
In trying to reach the unreachable, I failed to reach my own level.
In pretending to greatness, I slipped from where I was.
From the heavenly path, I sank to the abyss.[12]
Trying to avoid harm, I was permanently debilitated.
Trying to be completely pure, I was corrupted completely.
I dodged to the left, and left myself open from the right.
Chasing the second, I lost the first.
Seeking the insignificant, I forfeited the important.
Keeping the small vow, I broke the covenant.
Trying to break a habit, I picked up a vice.
Avoiding the petty, I fell prey to the weighty.
What I did, I did to myself,
which is the worst testimony against me.
Only you are able to deliver me, a captive slave, from these things,
restoring to life a soul devoted to death.
For you alone, Lord Christ, revered doer of good,
with the boundless glory of the Father and the Holy Spirit are
blessed forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 94 (Arm 93):16 (Armenian version).
[2] Mt. 6:12, 14, 15.
[3] Mt. 5:44.
[4] Ps. 140 (Arm 139):5.
[5] Ps. 40 (Arm 39):12.
[6] Commentators differ on the identity of this reference. Some cite evidence from Davit Anhaght that these lines refer to Plato and his dialogue Phaedo. Others believe it is based on a citation from Eghishe, *History of the War of Vartan*, p. 14). Critical Edition, p. 1063, n. 4.
[7] Job 3:22.
[8] Gen. 8:21.
[9] Rom. 7:9-11.
[10] Job 17:2 (Armenian version).

[11] Pr. 30:2-3.
[12] Is. 14:13-15.

Prayer 56

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

As for the agents of death,
the roots of the bitter fruit of the tree of damnation,
hostile kin, intimate adversaries, traitorous sons, I now
shall describe them in detail by name.
They are
my sinister heart,
my gossiping mouth,
my lustful eyes,
my wanton ears,
my murderous hands,[1]
my weak kidneys,
my wayward feet,
my swaggering gait,
crooked footprints,
polluted breath,
dark inclinations,
dried innards,
mushy mind,
inconstant will,
incorrigible depravity,
wavering virtue,
banished soul,
dissipated legacy,
wounded beast,
arrow-struck bird,
fugitive on the precipice,
apprehended criminal,
drowning pirate,
treasonous soldier,
reluctant fighter,
undisciplined warrior,
slovenly laborer,
faithless worshipper,
worldly cleric,
impious priest,
officious minister,
haughty clerk,
deranged sage,
grotesque rhetorician,
immodest manner,
shameless countenance,
insolent grimace,

repulsive tone,
subhuman mold,
lurid beauty,
rotting meat,
sickening flavor,
weed-choked orchard,
worm-eaten vine,[2]
garden of briars,
rusted ear of corn,
mouse-infested honey,
threadbare outcast,
haughty desperado,
closed-minded heretic,
irreconcilable sectarian,
fast-talking charlatan,
herd mentality blowhard,
brutishly wicked, hellishly greedy, unashamedly arrogant,
frenzied atheist, assassin ready to strike,
sower of thorns, woeful contentment,
debased majesty, defiled splendor, wasted ability,
humbled greatness, trampled glory,
persistent disobedience, willful error,
negligent steward, treacherous adviser, alienated friend,
corrupt official, covetous associate,
stingy boss, crooked supervisor,
soul without compassion, wish without charity,
hateful habit, insatiable appetite,[3]
imprudent actions, invisible damage,
secret curses, antagonizing events,
careless merchant, gluttonous exploiter,
drunken official, duplicitous treasure warden,[4]
dissension sowing emissary, sleeping doorman,
proud beggar, rich ingrate,[5]
dishonest secretary, untrustworthy custodian, back-biting relatives,[6]
tardy messenger, wayward courier,
vexing envoy, foolish mediator,[7]
banished ruler, feeble king, broken-spirited emperor,
rogue prince, plundering general,
biased judge, capricious rabble,
for enemies – cause for snickering,
for friends – cause for tears,
for writers – cause for reproach,
for adversaries – cause for accusation.
For though I was indeed called by the highest names,
by my works I earned the worst of these descriptions.[8]
Thus, these are the multitude of seductive devices,
which I allowed to deceive me in my naiveté or
I allowed to prevail over me in my weakness,
condemning myself willfully to death.

B

Now, which of the things listed above,
abhorrent to you and devastating for me,
shall I offer in service to you?
Which of these things wrapped in corruption
shall I present before your holy majesty?
For how long will your patience
bear this many sins?
How much will you forgive?
How will you remain silent?
How will you even bear to listen?
How can you spare the rod,
when I am worthy of being beaten to death?
But you visit the mercy of your light
in the pitch blackness of the dark side of the soul,
to cure, pardon and give us life.
O force that cannot be deterred,
to you glory in all things,
Amen.

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[1] Is. 1:15.
[2] Dt. 28:39.
[3] Pr. 12:10; Rom. 1:30.
[4] Lk. 12:45.
[5] Sir. 25:2.
[6] Ps. 50 (Arm 49):20.
[7] Acts 15:24.
[8] From the General Confession, "I was called to the profession of Christianity, but was found unworthy of it by my deeds."

Prayer 57

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Christ God, awe-inspiring name, vision of majesty,[1]
inscrutable image of sublimity, infinite force,[2]
model of the light of salvation, defender of life,[3]
gate to the kingdom of heavenly rest,[4]
path of tranquility,[5]
refuge of renewal that ends sadness,[6]
almighty sovereign of all being,[7]
call to blessing,
voice of good news,
proclamation of bliss,
salve of immortality,
indescribable son of the one and only God.
What is impossible for me is easy for you.[8]
What is beyond my reach was put there by you.
What is inaccessible for me is close to you.
What is hidden from me in my fallen state
is within view for your beatitude.
What is impossible for me is done by you.
What is incalculable for me is already tallied by you,
who are beyond telling.[9]
What is despair for me is consoling for you.
What is incurable for me is harmless for you.[10]
What is sighing for me is rejoicing for you.
What is heavy for me is light for you.
What is erased for me is written for you, almighty.
What is lost for me is conquered for you.
What is inexpressible for me is comprehensible for you.
What is gloom for me is radiance for you.
What is infinite for me you hold in the palm of your blessed hand.[11]
What is somber for me is refreshing for you.
What sets me to flight, you withstand.
What holds me in check, you handily turn back.
What is fatal for me is nothing before your almighty essence.

B

But you, merciful God of all, Lord Christ Jesus,
if you take pity on me, you can instantly find a way out of my predicament.
For the sake of the name of the majestic glory of your blessed Father,
for the sake of the compassionate will of your Holy Spirit,
look with favor upon this relentless expression of contrition for my wrongdoing

and the reproach I heap upon myself from the depth of my heart.[12]
Look upon the distracted unreadiness of my nature.
Grant healing for my wounds,
and a way out for me, for I am lost,
deliverance from my multiple symptoms of impending death,
and the path of life, for I am wayward,
renewal for me who am corrupt,
and entry into the light for me who am impious.
And if I have displayed unprecedented will,
how much more will you show your characteristic goodness?
And if a sweet fruit came forth from a thorn bush,
how much sweeter is the taste of immortality from the tree of life?
If I begged for mercy for those who hate me,
how would you not grant me, one of yours, a second portion,
Almighty, of your undiminishing abundance?

C

Now, look at your greatness, Lord most high,
and then look at my smallness.
Accept this meager confession of my innumerable sins,
you who see everything in its totality.
And as you overlooked the fall of the Rock,[13]
may you ignore my vacillation, a small grain of sand.
And as you immediately pardoned him for his sins,
when David said "I have sinned,"[14]
may you do the same with your long-suffering forbearance
for the voice of my sighing heart,
for you grant to all generously and fairly,[15]
merciful creator of all.
Like a good and judicious conqueror,
who does not disdain me, the least of your captives,[16]
you did not destroy me, but renewed me,
who am sustained by your blood, compassionate Lord.[17]
For yours is salvation, from you is pardon,
and to you is befitting glory in all things forever.
Amen.

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[1] Jn.12:45, 14:9.
[2] Col. 1:15.
[3] Jn.8:12.
[4] Jn.10:9.
[5] Jn.14:6.
[6] Rev. 21:4.
[7] Col. 1:16.
[8] Mk.10:27.
[9] Is. 40:12.
[10] 2 Cor. 12:9.
[11] cf. Is. 40:12.
[12] Ps. 51 (Arm 50):17.
[13] Mt. 26:69-75.

[14] 2 Sam.12:13.
[15] Rom. 2:11.
[16]cf. Paul, a prisoner of Christ: Eph. 3:1, Philem. 1:1; 1:9.
[17] Some mss. “and nourished by your bosom.”

Prayer 58

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Lord Jesus, blessed with the Father,
by favor of your Holy Spirit and
all blessed are blessed through your blessedness,[1]
blessed only son of the blessed,
no other king other than you, Christ, rules over my breath.
As the prophet Isaiah said,
the blessing of Jacob will come when I lift away his sins.[2]
Now, have mercy upon me, Lord, with lovingkindness,
as you did in the past
and bless me, your speaking, thinking vessel,
as you did the voice of David and Moses,[3]
by the visitation of your word of salvation.
May I receive pardon with your blessing.
Merciful heavenly ruler,
work a miracle upon me divinely,
as you did for those gathered in the porch in Bethesda,[4]
who were bedridden for many years.
Among them was a doubly suspicious person,[5]
a paralytic who had been stricken for thirty-eight years,
whom you did not refuse to heal by laying on of hands,
even when knowing of the incurable malice
that awaited you on the day of your betrayal,[6]
on the bitter night of the battle against the Lord,
our assurance, great and beneficent.

B

Lord, though you admonished him,
“Do not sin so that nothing worse befalls you.”[7]
But that did not deter him from being one of the first
of the cruel accusers to condemn you to the cross.
And for such a crippled, bewitched, ill-fated man,
brought to his knees by death, you took pity.
Lord, you are goodness beyond telling,
wonder-filled human kindness,
astonishing forgiveness, perplexing forbearance,
unending sweetness, glorious mildness.
You, over whom compassion prevails, but do not settle scores.
You are overwhelmed by mercy, but are not criticized.
You are impelled by lovingkindness, but are not blamed.
You are compelled by goodness, but are not disparaged.

You act out of love, but are not ridiculed.
You seek my return to you, but do not grow weary.
You run after me in my obstinacy, but do not give up.
You call out to me though I do not listen, but do not lose patience.
You rush after me in my sloth and are not stopped.
In the face of my evil, you are good.
In the face of my total indebtedness, you are forgiving.
In the face of my sinfulness, you are indulgent.
In the face of my darkness, you are light.
In the face of my mortality, you are life.

C

This is the message of all the books inspired for our benefit,
which often bear heavenly fruits, indescribable and amazing.[8]
Say to me also, wretched soul that I am, Lord, blessed and revered in all ways,
"Arise, take the bed of your infirmity, the place of your destruction,
and go to the tranquil repose of the life without toil."[9]
Sever, with the omnipotent sword of your commanding word,
the wrappings of the grave that hold me in the bonds of the underworld.[10]
Release me from the strangling noose that brutally demands my soul.
Deliver those deserving death, like me, to the liberation of unending bliss on high
by your life-giving and divine word.
Do not hesitate, do not delay day by day,
so the heavy burden of sin does not break my back,
and destroy me, bend me downward, looking to hell,[11]
so that the haughty one with tyrannical violence
disarms my spiritual defenses and turns me into a slave of death.
Come to my aid, good Lord who suffered
with us the pangs of death's torment.[12]
Having lifted from me the cross of perdition,
as you did once from the shoulder of the guard,[13]
to erect the fitting monument to your courageous might,
with steadfast faith and unshakable hope to be nailed with you inseparably.
To you with the Father and the Holy Spirit, glory and dominion, forever.
Amen.

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[1] Gen. 22:18.
[2] Is. 27:9.
[3] Ps. 67(Arm 66):2, Num. 6:24.
[4] Jn. 5:3.
[5] Jn. 5:15.
[6] Jn. 5:3.
[7] Jn. 5:14.
[8] 2 Tim. 3:16.
[9] Lk. 5:18-24, Jn. 5:8.
[10] Jn. 11:43-44.
[11] Lk. 13:10-17.
[12] Heb. 4:15.
[13] Mt. 27:32.

Prayer 59

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

I believe and bear witness in sound mind,
through the insights of my soul and
the visions of my conscience inspired by you,
that for you, doer of good, the prayers of a sinner are
more desirable than the petitions of the just.
For the first, baring the defeated soul, awaits your grace
and being well acquainted with the limits of human nature,
rises up like a stern accuser,
a combatant bent on self-mortification,
a bitter critic and prosecutor who sees secrets.[1]
Whereas the second, looking upon his good works,
places the hand of confidence on his soul,
forgets the limitations of his nature
and awaits rewards, rather than mercy.[2]
For that reason, the first is the subject of innumerable accounts
trumpeting your mercy,
and the second has been passed over in silence,
O inscrutable, awesome, and all-caring Lord!
I shudder at the thought that my accounts,
the accounts of a mere mortal go too far. [3]
So come Lord, do not let the gestures of a human hand
seem grander than yours.
Do not let your mercies be meted out in mortal measure.

B

But those who have healthy organs are not in need of a physician's care,[4]
and those who with good vision have no need of a guide,
and those who are well off do not beg at the doors of the wealthy,
and those who are well fed do not wait for crumbs of bread from the table,[5]
and those who lead a saintly life are not needy of mercy,
so heavenly Lord almighty on high, take mercy on me,
a tormented wretch,
for if I were like Job,
I would say my soul was upright and pure like his.[6]
And if I were like Moses,
I would confidently say with him,

"The Lord recognizes his own."[7]
And if I were like David, I would say,
"I have done judgment and justice."[8]
And again in words that exceed our physical nature:
"If I see sin in my heart, may the Lord not hear me."[9]
If I were like Elijah, I would call myself a man of God.[10]
If I were like Jeremiah, I would emulate your truth in my soul.[11]
If I were like Hezekiah, I would proudly say, with justification,
"I walked before you with righteousness."[12]
Or if I were like Paul, I would call myself
the dwelling place, oracle and receiver of God's word.[13]

C

But I, lawless despite knowing the law,
not only cannot present my soul to you,
with respectful words like them, I cannot even
mention myself, who am totally corrupt,
to you in the same breath as these good souls,
for my impious tongue is not worthy to utter your name praised by all creation.
But you, who are capable of everything,
grant me the spirit of salvation,
the sheltering right arm,
the helping hand,
the command of goodness,
the light of mercy,
the word of renewal,
the cause of pardon,
and help of the staff of life.
For you are the hope of refuge, Lord Jesus Christ,
blessed with the Father and Holy Spirit,
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Lk. 18:13.
[2] Lk. 18:9, 11.
[3] Lk. 18:12.
[4] Mk. 2:17.
[5] Mt. 15:27.
[6] Job 33:9.
[7] Num. 16:5.
[8] Ps. 119 (Arm 118):121.
[9] Ps. 66 (Arm 65):18.
[10] 2 Kg. 1:9-10.
[11] Jer. 11:19 (Jeremiah is depicted as a lamb led to slaughter, in the manner of Christ).
[12] 2 Kg. 20:3, Is. 38:3.
[13] Gal. 2:20.

Prayer 60

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Long ago I learned that blessings
should not come from the mouth of a sinner,[1]
therefore, how can I, even regretfully,
continue saying Psalms in worship
that earn only scorn for me?

How shall I praise my injuries and build monuments
to my disgrace while gathering thorns in my bare chest
instead of lilies?

How shall I dare to say with David:
"You have broken the teeth of the ungodly."[2]
Or "The wicked shall not dwell before your eyes."[3]
Or "Judge me, Lord, according to your righteousness,
according to the integrity that is in me."[4]
Or "Let wickedness be visited upon the sinful."[5]
Or "Break the arms of the sinner and wicked,"[6] and all that follows.
Or "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone."[7]
Or "The Lord shall cut off flattering lips and the boasting tongue."[8]
Or "You have tested my heart and found no iniquity."[9]
Or the next verse, "My steps have held fast to your path."[10]
Or "I shall behold thy face in righteousness."[11]
Or "I was upright before him."
Or the next verse, "The Lord paid me according to my righteousness
and the cleanness of my hands."[12]
Or how can I cover up my lies, yet say with the holy,
"I wash my hands in innocence."[13]
Or wallowing in baseness brag, "I do not consort with the impious."[14]
Or proudly put on a happy face, pathetic though I am, and say,
"Vindicate me, Lord, for I have walked in integrity."[15]
Or I, the stranger to goodness, beg you, knower of secrets,
"Do not count my soul among the wicked."[16]
Or when cursing others although I deserve cursing,
I dare say, "Requite them, Lord, according to their works."[17]
And shall I dare continue?

B

If I should add to the previous verses,
my grief would double, my bitterness multiply.
My tears dammed up within me, daily seek the comfort of
the familiar scolding voice of the Psalms, accusing me.
If I add the last part of Psalm 50,[18]
which dooms me as abominable,
gags my speech and exposes my guilty soul
to the prosecuting voice of God,
hope of life is lost.

I am pelted from the ramparts by deadly missiles.
It is a misfortune to be cursed by others, but
it is worse to curse oneself. And if it is hard to be
reproached by friends, how much more chilling,[19]
alarming and tormenting to be exposed before
the one who sees all.

But if one surrenders to humiliation and lashes
one's soul with the reproaches of one's own tongue,
one earns the blessings of the glorious and all-powerful
Lord for expressing one's return to him
without covering the traces of the past,
for the sake of love he cut the root of our[20]
transgressions, undeterred by nay-sayers.

The sheep of Christ's flock have found
the cure, the balm for their inner wounds.
Yet amidst green pastures blooming
with life-giving counsel, intelligent beings
irrationally and willfully choose
to graze in poisonous fields of delusion.

C

And now, since this reprimand suits me exactly
and describes the evil situation
where I myself fuel the consuming fire
poured from on high upon my head, the organ of thought.

What did I profit from the Psalms,
when I remained fruitless despite my repeated chants,
failing to sing with my soul as instructed by Paul?[21]

How shall I mix our Lord's words with those of the Prophet?
How can I, the greatest of sinners, the pinnacle of neediness,
say with the Saint, "Get away, you workers of iniquity"?[22]

Or how shall I, who has not fulfilled any of the multitude
of commandments relating to grace or the law,
cry with the happy man who has practiced all he preached, saying,
"For I, your servant, have kept these commandments"
and the words that follow?[23]

How shall I, who am devoid of life's wisdom,
praise the Lord with the God-fearing?[24]

And how shall I add my prayer to that of the great one,
who said, "I sought but one thing from the Lord,
to behold his splendor and to serve in his temple"?[25]

How shall I seek what I am deprived of,
when I hear, "It is fitting to bless the upright"?[26]

How shall I curse my soul with my own lips, saying,
among other things, "The gaze of the Lord is upon evil doers,
whose memory shall be wiped from the face of the earth"?[27]

Or again in another verse,
"The evil soon shall perish"?[28]

Or as in my case,
"The arms of the wicked shall be stricken"?[29]

Or how can I pray for my destruction,
"Behold how the sinners perish"?[30]

How shall I utter these blessed words with
my unruly tongue: "I shall guard my way so that
I do not sin with my tongue"?[31]

How shall I boast with the innocent when I choke
on thorns of sin: "But you have upheld me because of
my integrity"?[32]

How shall I, a sinner deserving double punishment,
complain: "Deliver me, O God, from deceitful and unjust men"?[33]

D

How shall I dare say with David,
as if I am not a hypocrite and idolater,
“Have we forgotten the name of our God,
or spread our hands in prayer to a strange god”?[34]
For only one laid low in the baseness of sin,
erects bestial statues and images,
inciting infidelity and harlotry such as the statues to
female Ashtoreth, Chemosh, the male Milcom,[35] and
the vile Tharahad,[36] with lewd, naked parts like donkeys.[37]

How then shall I not be ashamed to pray with the martyr
who always held fast to the good:
“For your sake we are slain all day long,”[38]
and the rest of this psalm?

How can I, the most foolish and perverse of humans,
say: “My mouth shall utter wisdom, and my heart, understanding”?[39]

How can I, a flattering hypocrite, wish
for the bones of sycophants to be scattered?[40]

How shall I recall the twice-repeated blessing of the Psalmist:
“May I walk before God in the land of the living”?[41]

How shall I with my countless sins say:
“I have no sin or transgressions,
I walk without sin and am upright”?[42]

Or how shall I condemn myself by saying:
“Spare none of those who treacherously plot evil”?[43]

How shall I say: “Like candle wax melts in the fire,
so sinners, before the face of God”?[44]

E

How shall I, who have indulged in mortal vices, utter:
“I have humbled myself with fasting,”[45]
or in the similar, “When they were sick, I wore sackcloth,
and bowed down as in mourning and grief”?[46]

How shall I remain calm,
when the punishment facing my ilk looms before me:

“All wicked of the earth shall drink it
down to the dregs of God’s unceasing wrath,”[47]
and “He will cut off the horns of the wicked”?[48]

How shall I mock Jacob’s ingratitude,[49]
when I myself embrace shadows as the truth
and succumbing to their charms,
forget Christ’s salvation through the divine
miracle of the cross, this being more condemnable
than failing to recognize the miraculous power of Moses’ rod,
given us as assurance of divine providence?[50]

How shall I point to the perils of attacking demons,
as if they are foreign barbarians, saying:
“They have given the bodies of the righteous among us
as food to the birds,”[51] that is, to the demons of the air?

How can I claim that the alliance of my will with evil
can be holy, when it is “like the seed of the word
fallen by the wayside”?[52]

How can I name those holy who pursue the hostile path
of wickedness, namely the rebellious conflicts of my camouflaged mind,
in collaboration with the devices of the Slanderer?

And for these reasons I cannot pray, “God, be not silent,
do not hold your peace,” or “They have plotted against
your holy people and said . . .”?[53]

For it is quite proper that through these words we recognize
the virulence of demons and their cohorts,
causing trouble at every turn.

F

Protect us, Lord Christ, exalted son of great God.
Fortify and surround us with your heavenly host,
defend us from the gusting winds of the Deceiver
with your cross of light.
For although any number of offenses may be found
in me, blasphemy is not among them.
For you were not gratified by
the destruction of the impious likes of me.
Rather with melancholy tenderness,
you are doubly aggrieved by the destruction

of the iniquitous in the flood,
considering their death intolerable and repugnant,
and saying in your heart the amazing words:
"I shall never again curse the earth because of the deeds of man."[54]
And you are greatly consoled and rejoice in the deliverance of
unclean men worthy of destruction,
as in the parable of the plant that shaded Jonah,[55]
where you spared those deserving of destruction, O merciful Lord.
And in another instance how greatly were you annoyed[56]
by the delay of the rain which would salvage those who denied you.
And in your last days you did great deeds
beyond telling, worthy of celebration,
commanding your disciples to spread your sweet
gospel of peace to the Gentiles and all peoples far and wide.[57]
Sprinkle upon me the dew of your compassionate
fatherly love, living God, so I too may find salvation
through the pardoning of my sins by your generous visitation.
And to you, with the Father through the Holy Spirit,
glory forever.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 50 (Arm 49):16.
[2] Ps. 3:7.
[3] Ps. 5:4.
[4] Ps. 7:9 (note that St. Gregory writes "your righteousness," whereas the KJV reads: "my righteousness."
[5] Ps. 7:10 (according to the Armenian version, whereas the KJV states "let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end.")
[6] Ps. 10:15.
[7] Ps. 11:6.
[8] Ps. 12 (Arm 11):4.
[9] Ps. 17 (Arm 16):3.
[10] Ps. 17 (Arm 16):4.
[11] Ps. 17 (Arm 16):15.
[12] Ps. 18 (Arm 17):23-24.
[13] Ps. 26 (Arm 25):6.
[14] Ps. 26 (Arm 25):4.
[15] Ps. 26(Arm 25):1.
[16] Ps. 28(Arm 27):3.
[17] Ps. 28(Arm 27):4.
[18] Ps. 50(Arm 49):22.
[19] Ec. 7:21.
[20] Lk. 7:47.
[21] 1 Cor.14:15.
[22] Ps. 6:8, Mt. 7:23.
[23] Ps. 19 (Arm 18):11.
[24] Ps. 22 (Arm 21):23.
[25] Ps. 27 (Arm 26):4.
[26] Ps. 33 (Arm 32):1.
[27] Ps. 34 (Arm 33):16.
[28] Ps. 37 (Arm 36):9.
[29] Ps. 37 (Arm 36):17.
[30] Ps. 37 (Arm 36):20.

[31] Ps. 39 (Arm 38):1.
[32] Ps. 41 (Arm 39):12.
[33] Ps. 43 (Arm 42):1
[34] Ps. 44 (Arm 43):20.
[35] 1Kg. 11:4-8.
[36] See Movses Khorenatsi, Book II, ch. 27, where he lists the statue to Tarata, an Assyrian god, among the idols removed by King Abgar from Edessa upon conversion to Christianity. Some scholars link Tarahat with Molech of the Old Testament.
[37] Ez. 23:20.
[38] Ps. 44 (Arm 43):22.
[39] Ps. 49 (Arm 48):3.
[40] Ps. 53 (Arm 52):5.
[41] Ps. 56 (Arm 55): 13, Ps. 116 (114-115):9.
[42] Ps. 59 (Arm 58):4-6 (pursuant to the Armenian version).
[43] Ps. 59 (Arm 58):5.
[44] Ps. 68 (Arm 67):2.
[45] Ps. 35 (Arm 34):13
[46] Ps. 35 (Arm 34):14.
[47] Ps. 75 (Arm 74):9 (pursuant to the Armenian version).
[48] Ps. 75 (Arm 74):11.
[49] This verse refers to Jacob's unwillingness to follow Moses to the promised land and also to his unwillingness to recognize the miraculous power of the rod of Moses.
[50] Ex. 4:2-5.
[51] Ps. 79 (Arm 78):2.
[52] Mt. 13:4.
[53] Ps. 83 (Arm 82):1-3 (pursuant to the Armenian version).
[54] Gen. 8:21.
[55] Jon 4:6-8 (the castor oil plant, in Armenian – a pumpkin vine).
[56] 1 Kg. 17:1, 18:1 (delay of the rain on account of Elijah).
[57] Mt. 28:19-20.

Prayer 61

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

To what end should I recite the Psalms,
to what purpose sing them daily
with the harp of my voice when
in unison they condemn and curse me?

How can I adopt the persona of
the happy Psalmist, to say with him,
when I am doomed, “let perverseness
be far removed from my heart”?[1]

How disconcerting are the many virtues
ascribed to kings, militant prophets
and commanders of the Old Law,
described in terms befitting the angels?

How can I recite them without
despondence at my life,
I the preacher of the good news,
I disciple of the New Covenant,
when I am devoid of those virtues?

How can I, in the manner of the righteous,
“Be armed to destroy the wicked at dawn,” [2]
and always be ready and vigilant[3] as told in the parable,
when I have not tamed and disciplined my own body?

How can I emulate the great valor of David
and cleanse the Lord’s city of the unrighteous,
when I have not uprooted the shortcomings from my own soul?

How can I lie to one who has already recorded
what has not yet been revealed,
saying “I have eaten ashes like bread”?[4]
How can I who have not mixed one tainted drop
of my remorse with the pure springs of the Psalmist’s eyes,
say with him, “I have mingled my drink with tears”[5] and
“I have drenched my bed with tears”?[6]

How can I confess my mortal sins,
when he who loved God with all his heart,
assumed the sins of his forefathers as his own,
saying, “We have sinned with our fathers
and have done wickedly,”[7]
while all that follows is more rightly written
for me than for Israel.

How can I be counted among the good,
when I have not used those remedies considered effective
by human lights – fasting to the point of death,
and frequent mortification of the flesh until the body is spent –
as practiced even by the Jews and the pagans according to their religions?

Why then should “my righteousness endure forever,”[8]
when I have done nothing to attain it?

B

But so that I do not become tedious and long-winded,
let me compress my words,
words I say echoing the blessed David
in his inspired voice, “I seek you with all my heart.”[9]

How shall I say with him something greater than this,
“I hold back my feet from every evil way”?[10]
How shall I add this to what has already been said,
“I have laid up your word in my heart so
that I might not sin against you”?[11]
How shall I express my emptiness as if it were fullness
along with the saints, saying, “Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way”?[12]
How shall I place my lies beside the true vows of the meek,
pledging fidelity, saying, “I have sworn
to observe your righteous ordinances”?[13]
How can I repeat the verdict of the angel of death,
“Salvation is far from the wicked”?[14]
How shall I, who am truly wicked, put myself among the good,
who receive their just reward from the Lord, repeating,
“Do good, O Lord, to those who are upright in their hearts”?
How shall I, who have strayed, sentence myself justly,
“But those who go off on their crooked ways,
the Lord will lead away with evildoers”?[15]
How shall I so ashamed, cloak myself in pious dignity,
saying, “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,

my eyes are not raised too high,”[16]
and the verses that follow?

And how shall I, who has laid up my treasure in hell,
take words beyond human understanding
as a sign of encouragement to the weary,
and say with the anointed of God,
“Even before a word was on my tongue you knew,
O Lord, there was no cunning in it,”[17]
and the rest of this psalm from its first letter to the last?

How shall I, who conspire with miscreants,
a condemned man and depraved son, call out,
“Do I not hate them that hate you, Lord,”[18]
and the verses that follow?

How shall you, my soul, the most pitiful in the world,
with the confidences of that sublime soul,
offer your spirit without condemnation
and presume to boast with him who has earned his halo, saying,
“Test me, Lord, and see if there is any iniquity upon my hands,”[19]
and all that follows?

How shall I, being what I am, pray to be delivered from evil
and join my voice with those who hope in God, saying,
“Guard me, Lord, from the hands of the wicked and
preserve me from violent men”?[20]

How shall I arise to pray with worthy David saying,
“You are my refuge and my portion in the land of the living”?[21]

How shall I pray as if I had been in combat with evil,
to offer the prize of victory to God the king,
repeating these unreasonable expectations,
“The righteous will surround me;
for you will deal bountifully with me”?[22]

C

How blessed is the spiritual message of the Psalmist,
which recalls our Lord’s own act of rebuffing his tempter,
despising all others and preferring only the first cause of all creation, saying,
“Happy the people whose God is the Lord!”[23]

How sublime the exaltation of grace
expressed with prudent forthrightness, inspired by heavenly goodness,
“Your saints shall bless you!”[24]

How great the desire for the intimate kinship
of spiritual communion
to hope in God and built upon him
in the joyous words of the psalm,
“The Lord fulfills the desire of all who fear him,”
from which the Psalmist concludes:
“The Lord preserves all who love him,
but the wicked he will destroy.”[25]

Thus, in the last chapters of songs of praise,
the Psalmist puts the just and unjust
on notice of their fates, repeating
the themes that grow out of and resonate with each other:
“The Lord lifts up the downtrodden,
he casts the haughty to the ground.”[26]

What calamity, then, awaits me
if, “the Lord takes pleasure in his holy people,
and adorns the humble with victory.”[27]
Where shall I stand?

And if “God is blessed among the saints as Lord,”
where do I fit, a stranger to saintliness?
And if next to those other warnings
I set the reminder,
“Love the Lord, all you his saints!
The Lord preserves the faithful,
but punishes the haughty.”[28]
In what camp do I find myself,
captivated by the clever inventor of evil?

D

For like the leaves of the cedar tree
wavering in the tempest, which stream down
in the battering winds,
so too the evil spirit tries to break
the fruitful branches of my life’s upward striving,
shaped by your nurturing hand, O uncreated Gardener.

Restore these broken branches and
let them take root in the field of life and
under the care of your good will,
bear new imperishable fruit.
O Christ King, who
bestows all good gifts,
blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 101 (Arm 100):4.
[2] Ps. 101 (Arm 100):8.
[3]Mt. 25:1-13 (Parable of the Oil-bearing women), also possibly a reference to St. Gregory's name, since Gregorios means 'vigilant' in Greek.
[4] Ps. 102 (Arm 101):9.
[5] Ps. 102 (Arm 101):9.
[6] Ps. 6:7.
[7] Ps. 106 (Arm 105):6.
[8] Ps. 112 (Arm 111):9.
[9] Ps. 119 (Arm 118):10.
[10] Ps. 119 (Arm 118):101.
[11] Ps. 119 (Arm 118):11.
[12] Ps. 119 (Arm 118):104.
[13] Ps. 119 (Arm 118):106.
[14] Ps. 119 (Arm 118):155.
[15] Ps. 125 (Arm 124):4-5.
[16] Ps. 131 (Arm 130):1.
[17] Ps. 139 (Arm 138):4 (pursuant to the Armenian version).
[18] Ps. 139 (Arm 138):21.
[19] Ps. 139 (Arm 138):23-24 (pursuant to the Armenian version).
[20] Ps. 140 (Arm 139):4.
[21] Ps. 142 (Arm 141):6.
[22] Ps. 142 (Arm 141):7.
[23] Ps. 144 (Arm 143):15.
[24] Ps. 145 (Arm 144):10.
[25] Ps. 145 (Arm 144):19-20.
[26] Ps. 147 (Arm 146):6 (pursuant to the Armenian).
[27] Ps. 149:4 (pursuant to the text).
[28] Ps. 31 (Arm 30):23 (pursuant to the Armenian).

Prayer 62

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now, why should I not add to the Psalms
I have quoted passages from the Prophets?
But what pleasure is there from nourishment
if my sense of taste is numbed by pain as I eat?
And what advantage can I derive from the Psalms
if I cannot take them to heart?
For I curse myself with them, but I remain oblivious.
I am washed, but I am not purified.
The sun dawns, but I am not enlightened.
I eat honey but am not sweetened.
I am filled with balm but am not cured.
I rise early for prayers each day and return feeling empty.
I am mocked endlessly but never learn.
I am warned but do not come to my senses.

B

Truly, my sin and lawlessness dwell in me
and I am worn away by them,
as the Prophet said of the transgressors,[1]
and the Lord taught in the parable
of the new wine in old casks.[2]
For as Isaiah foretold,
“Rebels and sinners shall be destroyed together.”[3]
And the same is in store for me, wretch that I am,
for I recite the psalm, “The Lord abundantly requites
those who act haughtily,”[4]
to which I link the prophecy,
“The Lord has a day against all who are proud
and haughty,”[5] when I recite,
“The wicked go astray from the womb . . .”[6]
and I add, “Let the wicked of the earth be destroyed”
and “the haughty be wiped from the earth”[7]
and “the unjust shall be uprooted from the earth.”[8]

C

Weep for me when you read,
"As the tongue of fire devours the dry grass,
so shall sinners be consumed in the furious flames."[9]
Weep for me also at the psalm, saying,
"Let burning coals fall upon them."[10]
And pray I might be pardoned from divine judgment,
foretold by the Prophet, "If you refuse to heed me,
you shall be devoured by the sword."[11]

Weep at this psalm:
"Death shall be their shepherd."[12]
Prepare salty tears mixed with the sighs of my heart,
when the Lord on high says to me, along
with Israel, "My people did not listen to me."[13]

Sigh "alas!" for me, when another Prophet says the same:
"Woe to them, for they have strayed from me!"[14]

Trumpet the words of the heart, heavy before crying,
when God who sees all puts me to shame,
reprimanding me with the insolent house of Jacob,
"Look, you, wicked nations, and see; wonder and be astounded."[15]

D

O great God, reconsider and withhold the terrible
sword of your righteous anger,
menacingly raised over me.
I am fear-stricken before you
as you extend the bounteous care of
your right hand over me.
Bestow the anointing oil of life
upon your supplicant. And glory to you
in heaven on high, and from mortals
on earth below, throughout all the nations
and reaches of the earth,
forever,
Amen.

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[1] Is. 59:12.
[2] Mt. 9:17.
[3] Is. 1:28.
[4] Ps. 31 (Arm 30): 23.
[5] Is. 2:12.
[6] Ps. 58 (Arm 57):3.

[7] Is. 16:10, Ps. 104 (Arm 103):35.
[8] Pr. 2:22.
[9] Is. 5:24.
[10] Ps. 140 (Arm 139): 10.
[11] Is. 1:20.
[12] Ps. 49 (Arm 48): 15.
[13] Ps. 81 (Arm 80): 11.
[14] Hos. 7:13.
[15] Hab. 1:20.

Prayer 63

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

One and only king, compassionate, long-suffering,
doer of good who loves humankind,
honored with your Father and praised as the Lord of all,
Son of the living God,[1] never the cause of my destruction,[2]
who is not tempted by evil,[3]
who does not seek the death of a sinner,[4]
who offers salvation by your will,
who turns the storm of sin into the breeze of pardon,[5]
and transforms the fire of anger into rain,[6]

who turned the woman that looked back from your goodness,[7]
into a single statue with two natures,[8]
placing her neither with the just nor unjust,

who transformed the liquidity of the sea,
into a wall of stone,[9]

who caused a stream to spring and flow
like a waterfall from the hard rocks of the desert,[10]

who stopped the rushing waters of the Jordan
into a pool for cleansing the pagans[11]
and fortified the walls of Jericho
symbolizing the destruction of Satan's tyranny,
demolished by you as if it were straw,[12]

who sweetened the poisonous waters
with miraculous salts, as a metaphor
for the conversion of evil to good,
that is, the salvation of the Canaanites,[13]

who turned the bitter waters of Marah,
the symbol of disbelief,
into drinkable water with the staff of life
that you shouldered,[14]

who took colorless water from the river
and made it red as your blood, shed on the land,

in the new crimson color from Bozrah.[15]

who transformed the rod into a serpent
to prefigure your taking of our nature
and to show how Gentiles might join the elect,

who with the blessed right hand of Moses
foretold both your incarnation,
O Lord on high, and through your grace,
the cleansing of my corrupt body
through an immutable transformation,[16]

by these great signs, you have foretold
the rescue of long lost sinners
by the caring art of your love,
blessed and compassionate Lord.

B

Almighty Lord, you who make the lifeless seed sprout green from the earth,[17]
who command the immobile as if they could move.[18]
who call those born of the unexalted womb, in your image,
who give children teeth to chew,
who make the beard grow,
who turn the black foliage of hair into snow,[19]
showing that you reign over all.

You who transform the natural movements of the lips,
in the words of Job, into meaningful expressions,[20]
who shake the earth and its pillars from their foundations,[21]
showing that through all creation,
only you are indestructible.

You who vary the elements in their passing states
and combine them in stable compounds,
showing that for the multitude of sins
you are likewise able to remember and forgive.

You train the inanimate Morning Star Venus as if in a bridle,
showing you can, if you wish, tame
the evil impulses of nature.

And you regulate the speechless globe of the moon
so that it is empty or full,
providing illuminating hope to on-lookers

that you are able to restore a sinful body
depleted of goodness
to its original state of innocent fullness.

You who gather and scatter the speechless constellations,
like a flock of sheep, symbolic of the hope
of life that you, Lord, with your sweet providence
dispense in your abundant mercy
even to the slow of tongue who do not petition you.

C

You who chart the safe path on the sea[22]
between death and life, testifying that even
in that perilous place we are protected through you.

You who, when the water is boiling in the cauldron
like a furious storm of sin, calm it with the word
of your will.[23]

You, whose mere glance toward the earth causes tremors,[24]
rouse the animals to alert the thinking beings.

You who shake the limitless density of the land
like a small sailboat tossing on the waves,
by which you put all creatures on notice
that you are decisively in control,
holding the whole world in your hand.[25]

You who sow dead bodies in the earth,
keep them whole and bring them to life again,
receiving the perishable create the eternal,
who join the spark of life with mortal matter,
who with but an utterance created the entire universe
in an instant and adorned its barrenness in every way.[26]
Yours is the strength and the power,
that varies the seasons of the year,
each with its fitting splendor.

You who command the unspeaking things as if they were alive,[27]
you who by merely giving the signal set them into motion,[28]
you alone weave the daylight and darkness
with your creative art that is beyond telling.[29]
You who after the first order of creation
still performed miracles

to the amazement of blessed Job.
You fashioned yet more permanent creations,
and during your incarnation performed other
celebrated acts without number.

D

You who took our transgressions upon yourself,[30]
you who graced us with your righteousness,[31]
you who offered yourself as the ransom of our reconciliation,[32]
you who never abandoned mercy, [33]
turn the impious toward good, God-fearing works,
the stupefied toward the sobriety of a vigilant heart,
the impure toward the holiness of shining character,
the sinners toward the purity of the tranquil saintly nature,
the broken toward wholeness impervious to accidents,
the weeping toward the joy of unclouded bliss,[34]
the hopeless toward the love of union,
the embarrassed toward firmness,
the people who live in darkness toward the light of endless joy,[35]
the captives of death toward life incorruptible.
For your name is glorified, Lord Jesus,
professed in all ways with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
in heaven on high and on earth below among all the inhabitants therein,
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Mt. 16:16.
[2] Lk. 9:56.
[3] Jas. 1:13.
[4] Ezek. 18:32, 33:11.
[5] 1 Kg. 19:11-12.
[6] Dan. 3:17-26 (Arm version 3:50).
[7] Gen. 19:17, 26.
[8] Rocksalt is neither salt, like the just (Lot and his daughters), nor rock, like the unjust (Sodom and Gomorrah)
[9] Ex. 14:21-22.
[10] Ex. 17:6.
[11] Jos. 3:15-16.
[12] Jos. 6:20.
[13] 2 Kg. 2:21.
[14] Ex 15:23-25.
[15] Isa. 63:1 following Terian, *Narek*, p. 276, n. 16.
[16] Ex. 4:2-9.
[17] Ps. 104 (Arm 103):14, Jn. 12:24.
[18] Mt. 21:18-22, where Jesus curses the unproductive fig tree following Terian, *Narek*, p. 277, n. 21, teaches that faith can move mountains; also, Lk. 19:38-40, the Lord can make the stones to speak.
[19] Mt. 5:36.
[20] Job 12:20.
[21] Job 9:6.
[22] Wis. 14:3.
[23] cf. Mt. 8:23-27.

[24] Ps. 104 (Arm 103):32.
[25] Ps. 24 (Arm 23):1-2.
[26] Gen. 1:2, Ps. 148:5.
[27] Ps. 147 (Arm 146-147):5.
[28] Bar. 4:33-35.
[29] Am. 4:13.
[30] Is. 53:4-5, Jn. 1:29.
[31] Rom. 5:17-21.
[32] Jn. 19:17.
[33] Ps. 103 (Arm 102):8.
[34] Mt. 5:5.
[35] Lk. 1:79.

Prayer 64

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

In everything and toward everything you are upright, O God.
You judge justly and weigh fairly.
You measure truly and dispense blessings.
You act with goodness and uphold steadfastness.
You seek clarity and embrace enlightenment.
You admonish with experience and examine with forbearance.
You are without guile and arrogance,
but in all things show gentleness, tranquility and compassion.

B

You showed your justice, heavenly wisdom of
the Father's unchanging genius,
which those adopted by grace confirm through
the witness of their unstinting praise.
As told in the holy sayings of the Gospel,
"They wailed, but I did not mourn,
they played their flutes, but I did not dance."[1]

You advised me in my lawlessness, "Do not break the law,"
but I persisted in errant ways.

To me a sinner, you said, "Do not lift your horn,"[2]
but I opposed you. Oblivious and wayward,
I never noticed that you lift and lower the royal trumpets,
as told by Habakkuk,[3] David[4] and Zechariah.[5]
You wanted blessings for me, merciful Lord,
but I lean toward the damnation I deserved.
I preferred anger to calm,
groping in darkness without light,
as the Scripture says,[6]
I answered your compassionate voice with impudence.

Through Isaiah you said, "Even the worm is immortal,
the fire unquenchable,"[7] the condemnation unending,
the place eternal, the image terrifying.
As in the words of the Psalmist, I neither heeded
nor understood, but walked in the darkness of

intellectual blindness.[8]

C

Through prophecy you revealed, “he who upholds
the law shall be blessed,”[9]
while I was quick to cut corners.
Lord Jesus, you raised David with his writing,
as a spiritual monument, a rock inscribed by you,
while he, one of the elect, said,
“I shall keep your law at all times,”[10]
and repeated, “for ever and ever” for good measure.
But I, despite these words of warning and
encouragement, was unmoved.
I rushed to worship Baal instead of God,
as Elijah said in his satirical admonition,[11]
I stumbled along the path of doubt,
being of two inclinations, then
I abandoned the right.
I have the example of Moses with his laws
returning from the dead and I have the letters of the prophets,
written on the tablet of my heart
and the books of the apostles as bindings on my fingers.[12]

And you, Lord of all, who through your good news,
raised countless dead from the grave,[13]
still I remained on the blacksmith’s anvil,
inert, with a heart of stone,[14]
more disbelieving than the five brothers of[15]
that rich man, who in that apt parable,
were as numb as my senses, yet like Belial,
I was unrepentant.[16]

D

But grant your mercy nevertheless upon my forsaken self,
good king, who inspires awe, loves humanity and
cares for his people, living and holy Lord who always enlightens us
by the power of the mystery of your exalted cross.
In my barren fields, hardened by sin,
filled with folly, with fruitless heart,
I am still sustained by your compassion, Almighty.
May my soul be refreshed with springs of water
and my sore eyes quenched with streams of tears,
offered for purification and salvation and released

by your acceptance, all-giving Lord, who is glorified forever. Amen.

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[1] Mt. 11:16-19.
[2] Ps. 75 (Arm 74):4-5 (pursuant to the Armenian version of the Psalms).
[3] Hab. 3:4 (pursuant to the Armenian version).
[4] Ps. 75 (Arm 74):11.
[5] Zech. 1:21.
[6] Job 12:25.
[7] Is. 66:24.
[8] Ps. 82 (Arm 81):5.
[9] Ps. 84 (Arm 83):8 (pursuant to the Armenian version).
[10] Ps. 119 (Arm 118):44 (the Armenian version, says “kept the law”).
[11] 1 Kg. 18:21.
[12] Pr. 7:3.
[13] Mt. 27:52.
[14] Mk. 8:17, 10:5, 16:14.
[15] Lk. 16:28-30.
[16] Satan, the rebellious angel; 2 Cor. 6:15.

Prayer 65

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now, I foremost among the impious and
chief among sinners, the leader among the unjust,
the first among debtors, the epitome of a criminal,
the Attica of vice, not of virtue,
have dared to say what is unspeakable:
I have boasted of my humiliation,
I have exposed my secrets,
disclosed what I have covered up,
shown what I have hidden,
spread what I have stored up,
splattered the gall of my bitterness,
divulged my collaboration with the evil one,
squeezed my pus-filled wound,
acknowledged the abyss of my sins,
put on the mask of hypocrisy,
lifted the veil from ugliness,
stripped away the clothes from shamefulness,
laid open my baseness,
thrown up the dregs of death,
revealed the abscessed wounds of my soul to you, Christ high priest.

Not sparing my soul from peril,
not conceding to the love of my body,
I examined down to the oldest roots.
Showing no leniency for the human condition,
cutting my tie with the brotherhood,
destroying the castle of my heart,
I struggled with the stalking of my desires, as if ambushed by death,
laying open the storehouse of secrets,
setting forth before great God this hoarded treasure,
appearing before the judge as a prosecutor,
foreseeing the ominous things to come,
breaking my pact with the Devil,
I recanted my vows to the Deceiver.
I took refuge in you, Lord Jesus, for a victorious end to this battle,
marshalling the troops for war,
placing my hope in the word of God to fend off attacks,
I delivered the forces of darkness to those armed with light.

B

And now, Christ, maker of all creation,
Son of God on high,
I have been blamed with these words,
and struck with these blows,
please do not reproach me again at the Last Judgment,
you, who are our immortal, almighty king,
who does good in ways we cannot understand or express.
Do not reproach me with my self-abasement and self-accusatory humiliation,
by which I of my own volition condemned myself relentlessly,
and through this book of psalms confront the face of Satan with his shame,
and strengthen the stamp of your cross upon my face, wretch that I am.

Let the glow of your seal add luster to my countenance,
the sign of your steadfastness be stamped upon my face,
the shape of your cross be fixed upon my cheeks,
the glory of your miraculous work be marked upon my forehead,
the luster of your seal not be taken from me,
the radiance of your blessing not fade from the sight of my eyes,
the token of your assurance not be removed from my head,
the glory of your scripture not waver upon the firm threshold of my mouth,
your praiseworthy armor shield the sentiments of my heart,
your four-winged radiance spread through the four elements of my being,
the power of your cross of salvation come to the aid of my outstretched hand, and
may the sanctity of your valor realize the goodness
of the offering for which my hands were made.

C

When I depart this life, may holiness not abandon me.
When I am wrapped in shrouds may your honor not leave me.
May my soul not reject your unwavering salvation.
May your image engraved upon my soul, Giver of life, not be effaced.
May the mark of your blood not be erased from my soul's altar bearing your seal.
May it dwell with me in my grave.
When my miserable body is worn out may your anointing grace stay with me,
that I might on the day of renewal meet you, groom of glory,
that I may be known as one of yours,
that I may be clothed with your accomplishments,
that I may be honored by the assurances of your greatness,
that I may be adorned with the robe of your baptism and pardoned with mercy.

Give me, O compassionate Lord, your cloak of incorruptibility,
for my body racked with sin.
Do not let the Blasphemer gain control over what is yours.
May the one who wears out my soul waste away.
May the tricks of those who live on the dark side not haunt me.
May the abyss of my final rest be blessed in your name, O merciful Lord.
May the cell of my captivity be filled with your mercy.
May the place of my torture be broken open through you.
May tranquility reign, my keeper, in my prison of terror.
May that dark womb nourish me toward resurrection.
May your hope preserve me that chamber of anxiety.
May your hand protect me upon the cot of my torment.
May your wings shield me in the house of anguish.
Stay with me, Lord most praised, in my room of peril.
A thousand woes upon me,
for once I was angelic, but now I am in the abyss,
once I was celebrated, but now I am pitiful.

D

Now again, you who are blessed by all creation,
by the heavenly and the earthly,
and by the denizens of Hades,
are blameless for my banishment,
for it was I who strayed and was estranged,
I who was stupid, lost, and found worthless.
I was abandoned, extinguished and destroyed.
I erred, I was caught, I was rejected.
I was alienated, enslaved, and degraded.
I was cursed, I became wretched, drunken and wasted.
I was swallowed up, I was deceived, I rebelled.
I was corrupted, died and destroyed completely.
You had no hand in this evil,
for you are only unchanging good.

E

Now, when your will is upon me, darkness becomes light for me.
When your lamp of hope is there, night is like the dawn.
When your body is taken during communion, I live down my shame.
But I do not consider my soul living,
for death is inevitable.
Nor do I consider it dead,
for renewal is not doubted.
And though I see the path to life closed before me

because of my unpardonable sins
still paradise is open before me
because of the good news of salvation.
For the discouragement of bad news makes me less anxious
than the encouragement of your hand extending salvation.
Therefore, grant mercy, O Lord,
for all those who raise voices in thanks,
Lord blessed forever.
Amen.

Prayer 66

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now, whoever believes in the healing prayers
in this humble book, praying sincerely
even if he be one of the sinful,
I too join him with my words.
For if he is among the just,
may we find mercy together through these prayers.
And if he finds happiness,
leaving misery to me alone,
I shall nevertheless bear witness for him.
But may he remember Solomon and his inspired words:
“Who can say, I have a pure heart,
or boast of being clean of sin?”[1]
For no man born on earth is free of sin.[2]
And not one of us is special because of our swiftness,[3]
not even if wings carry us to the heights.
Therefore, we should be careful, think twice,
for if we are on a pedestal, as Paul taught,
we may fall to the ground,[4]
like the just judge who formulated this rule.[5]

But let the righteous take this warning as a crown,
so as not to fall from the unreachable heights.
And may the condemned see this as hope of salvation.
by which to rise from the perdition of spiritual death,
and live in hope.
As for me may this message be like words
carved in stone, never to be effaced,
a token of my wretched mortal soul
crying out forever, unsilenced,
with the echoes of uninterrupted sighing.

May my bones, undone
in the earthen cloak of the tomb,
confess this with a soundless voice,
and my body turned to dust
deliver these prayers to you
with an indiscernible cry, seer of secrets.

B

Lord of compassion, fount of mercies, bounty of goodness,
Son of the one on high, Lord Jesus Christ,
have mercy, save and love us humans.
Look upon my peril.
Gaze upon my broken heart.
Attend to my misery.
See the confusion of my unending anxiety.
Come to my aid in my time of mortal torment.
Touch me, curing my most wretched infirmities.
Lend a kind ear to my pitiful sighs.
Listen to the silent cries from the depths of the abysmal grave.
May the voice of my failing body in prayer reach your all-hearing ears
and since the pledge for my life's redemption is imperishable,
so too let your love be also constant.
Gently help me, enfeebled with infirmity as I am.

C

Do not hold a grudge against me, the image of death.
Do not berate my breathless figure.
Do not strike me while I am suffering the pangs of death.[6]
Do not deal harshly with the cracked clay vessel of my existence.[7]
Do not double your wrath: I am crushed by your sentence.
Do not condemn to destruction my already dilapidated structure.
Do not throw stones at me: I am already like a dead dog.
Do not fulminate at me sternly: I am like a crushed flea.[8]
Do not roar at me mightily, as if upon some braggart: I am lower than dirt.[9]
Do not summon me for trial by ordeal: I am but cast away ash.
Do not view me, who am but vanishing dust, as your opponent.
Do not deem me, who am loathsome sediment, to be your foe.
Do not ward me off, a contemptible abomination, as if I am a warrior.
Do not set me aside as material for hell: I am worthless refuse.
Do not scold me again, who by this multitude of words already
has been admonished many times over.

D

So these are the fruits of my broken and contrite heart
offered in prayer from my wretched tomb shrouded in darkness.
Establish your blessed word in me indelibly[10]
according to the yearnings of my heart.
For although I speak among the living,
I am dead to you, who are beyond reach,

yet on the day I succumb to death's destruction,
may I be saved through my faith in your all-powerful orders.

Now, I pray you, Lord Jesus Christ,
look upon me with compassion
and do not let me be the cohort of Satan.
At the time of my pitiful burial, in the lifeless sepulcher
echoing with death, attend to the voice of my sighing heart lifted in reconciliation,
Lord, our sole benefactor, who cherishes our spirits,
almighty God, who loves humankind.
May your kind Spirit dwell with me,
shedding light upon me in the darkness.[11]
May the venerated relics of your life-giving passion stay with me,
like a treasure deposited with you,
so they may bestow the gift of renewed life.
With these inexhaustible weapons I am equipped
as stones of a slingshot made of the spirit,
to ward off the legions of evil.
With you on my side Lord,
the battle waged against me shall be checked,
when enemies rise up and attack me,
thinking that the citadel has no troops,
and the alarms make no sounds.
But I have you, Lord, as my eternal keeper
who slumbers not, nor sleeps.[12]

E

For even now, if the evil one in anticipation of the Day of Judgment
rushes to prepare a prison without escape for me,[13]
I will deliver the Lord's prayer like a deathblow.
If he tries to knock me down, I will kneel before my creator,[14]
if he tries to bow my face to the dust,
may my bowing down to God turn him back.[15]
If he tries to torment me with pain,
may the abundant sweat mixed with the blood of
our Savior of the world frustrate him.[16]
And if he takes my breath hostage
so I cannot travel the path to goodness,
may the bindings of the creator of the universe free me.[17]
If he forces me to renounce the gifts of the light,
may your patience in the face of mockery by the enemies of God,
silence them, just as you did.[18]
If he should barrage me with secret arrows,
may the arrowheads from the Father's glorious quiver befall him.[19]

If the veil of darkness should make my eye shameless,
may the blow to his blindfolded head[20]
by the creator knock him down.
If he ventures to bind up my firm hands,[21]
may the reed placed in the right hand of the creator silence him.
If with jeering mockery he toys with me,
may the Almighty's fortitude in the face of ridicule mock him back.[22]
If he conjures a spell upon me,
may he be severely rebuked by the Almighty,
whose face was slapped.[23]
If at twilight he attacks shamelessly under cover of darkness,
may he be confounded by the radiance of the light of your revelation, Lord.
If in the heat of noonday he thinks he can dry my roots
with scorching blasts of the sun's furnace,
may he be uprooted and dried by the power of your sign of light.
If he plots to deprive me of the grace of your breath,
may he be humiliated by the spit, which the Lord of the cherubim endured
for me, a sinner.

F

If he dares show his biting teeth,
may the silence of the mouth of our heavenly Lord shut it.[24]
If he causes desires to gnaw at my soul,
may the nails that pierced the creator hurt him.
If he tries to lead me astray along the path of unjust thoughts,
may the nails in the feet of our Lord, beyond understanding, hold him fast.[25]
If he tries to make me drink a vile potion,
may the vinegar mixed with bile that was given
our Savior to drink, embitter him.
If he lures me into eating from the first wood, the tree of the forbidden fruit,[26]
may the terrible spectacle of the second wood seize and completely vanquish him.
If he tries to teach me to rebel against God's commandments,
may the nod of the infinite Godhead destroy him.
If he tries to kill me by wounding and persecuting me,
may the lance that pierced the side of the Creator of Adam cut him down.[27]
If he envelops me in the pangs of hellish pain,
may the burial shrouds of the Lord who holds all creation, wrap him up.
If he tricks me into gazing into the abyss of death,
may the living God who survived the stone tomb kill him.
If he takes joy in my mortal errors,
may he, with his crooked will, lose again,
when the immortal God, resurrected in glory,
renews all mortals.
If he is cheered by the prospect of release from these small bindings after a thousand years,

may he tremble again for the later chains that will bind him forever
in the place of unremitting torment without end.[28]
If the first blow is bad news for him,
wait till he finds out about the inextinguishable fires of hell,
that await him and his angels at the Last Judgment.

G

And for me, who has sought refuge in you, Lord Jesus,
our only king, absolute and mighty,
creator of heaven and earth
and every beauty in it,
I await your coming with anticipation
and hope in the mercy of my Savior.
I fall at your feet and kiss the traces of your footsteps.
I confess my sin and publish my wrongdoings.
I beat myself up and entomb my heart in sighs.
I am wounded by pangs of conscience and smolder with fiery breath.
I burn with the salty dew of tears and my insides are on fire with grief.
I am parched by winds of despair and suffocated by the foul fumes.
I am weak with words of grief and shaking with wretched cries.
I suffer with sorrowful afflictions and my soul shakes in alarm.
I am tossed on the waves of the storm and jolted by the crashing of the waves.
I shudder at the news and am devastated by the memory of terror.
I melt at the sight of the tribunal and am mortified by your threats, great Lord.
Hear me, compassionate Lord, who pardons us, who loves humankind,
who is patient with us, sweet beyond words,
good day, dawn of our longing,
for you are capable of all things
and when I give up my spirit, you will be my great salvation.
To you with the Father and the Holy Spirit, glory forever.
Amen.

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[1] Pr. 20:9, Job 4:14.
[2] 1 Kg. 8:46.
[3] Ec. 9:11.
[4] Ps. 40(Arm 39):2, 1 Cor. 10:12.
[5] The reference is to Solomon, who though just, sinned greatly.
[6] 1 Sam. 31:8-9.
[7] Is. 30:14.
[8] 1 Sam. 24:14.
[9] Sir. 10:9.
[10] Jn. 11:25.
[11] Ps. 18:28.
[12] Ps. 121 (Arm 120):4.
[13] Rev. 2:10.
[14] Lk. 22:41.
[15] Mt. 26:39.
[16] Lk. 22:44.

[17] Jn. 18:22.
[18] Mk.15:29-32.
[19] Is. 49:2.
[20] Lk. 22:64.
[21] Mk.15:16-20.
[22] Mt. 27:29.
[23] Jn.18:22.
[24] Mat. 26:63, 27:12, Lk. 23:9.
[25] Jn. 20:27
[26] Gen. 3:6.
[27] Jn. 19:34.
[28] Rev. 20:3-10.

Prayer 67

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

But since your judgment, Christ God,
is much more lenient toward me
than toward Satan the forefather of evil,[1]
and because of him, “Christ was revealed
that He might destroy the works of the devil,”[2]
whereas for me, he came to restore my worn-out image,[3]
taking our image in its essence,
he, the true image of great God, joined it to his own,
in indisputable unity.[4]
He granted Satan none of this bounty,
and upon me he poured forth everything in abundance.[5]
He did not suffer on the cross for Satan,
but for me he is continuously sacrificed.
Satan does not partake in life,
but I am eternally favored with salvation.
Satan is not protected by the cross,
but I am fortified by this sign.
Satan is banished from the light,
but I am joined with glory.
God did not promise him peace even on earth,[6]
but he made me an owner of heaven.[7]
God cut off his guarantee of hope,
but continued mine forever.[8]
God confined him to a herd of pigs,[9]
but in me God dwells more firmly.[10]
God compared him to a scorpion,[11]
and he called me the light of the world.[12]
God made him resemble a snake,[13]
but he placed the seal of his name upon me.[14]

B

But I abandoned the favors of God,
who created so many good things, and I
gave in to my inclination toward evil,
gazing downward with him at the bottom of the abyss:

Look at me,
I am
unworthy of good,
undeserving of favor,
incapable of love,
drawn in by the strands of sin,
wounded in the depth of my inner organs,
a broken palm tree,
spilled wine,
damp wheat,
breached mortgage,
ripped up verdict,
counterfeit seal,
deformed image,
singed garment,
lost goblet,
sunken ship,
crushed pearl,
buried gem,
dried up plant,
broken beam,
rotten wood,
mutilated mandrake,
collapsed roof,
dilapidated altar,
uprooted plant,
oily filth on the street,
milk flowing through ash,
a dead man in the battalion of the brave.

C

My pitiful soul, though you heard the warnings from Jerusalem
and were told parables about Babylon by the prophet,
you did not listen, leaving me
ridiculous on the one hand,
and scandalized on the other;
here accused, there reprimanded;
here mocked, there insulted;
here scorned, there opposed;
here confused, there abandoned;
here weeping, there sobbing;
here doubt, there finality;
here grief, there chastisement;
here calamity, there the court of judgment.

Here I am,
with no right to speak, nor opportunity to plea,
where days are without number and time has no end,
where there is no bridge of hope, nor door of mercy,
no protecting right hand, nor a helping hand extended.

D

But you are refuge and you yourself are salvation,
you are rescue and you are pardon,
you are bliss and through you is blessing and mercy,
O Lord, who alone is mighty, living, and beyond words.
Lord Jesus Christ, God who does good, be
blessed, blessed and blessed again,
with your Holy Spirit exalted forever,
in the glory of your great Father's essence,
forever and ever.
Amen.

---

[1] Lk. 12:48.
[2] 1 Jn. 3:8.
[3] Phil. 3:21.
[4] Following Terian, *Narek*, p. 297.
[5] Jl. 2:28.
[6] Mt. 8:29
[7] 1 Cor. 2:9.
[8] 2 Cor. 1:21-22.
[9] Mt. 8:31-32.
[10] Jn. 17:23.
[11] Lk. 10:19.
[12] Mt. 5:14.
[13] Lk. 10:19.
[14] Mt. 28:19.

Prayer 68

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, recalling the stern wrath described above,
that awaits me from God,
how can I stop these new laments
and how can the flow of tears from my eyes be dried?

Were I to take the rushing streams of the four rivers[1]
that water Eden and the rest of the earth to its farthest reaches
and direct them to the springs of my eyes,
they would not cool the flames
of my soul's mortal sins.

Or were the prophet's wishes to come true for me[2]
and my head were inundated with water
and upon my light of vision, fountains of tears were to gush,
still it would not suffice to measure the pain of my broken soul.

And were the tragic cries of a wailing woman,
heart and soul pierced with pain, joined together,
they would not suffice to incant the melody or the harmony
of the lament of my soul's devastation.

B

The day of my birth was cursed,
and not that of Job[3] or Jeremiah,[4]
for their birthdays are to be celebrated and not erased,
since the world is not worth even one of them.[5]

But looking at me, who does not deserve the light
or any portion of goodness, they should curse the day I was born,
a son of perdition,[6] deadly neighbor, sower of sin and satellite of iniquity.
I, who did not honor the covenant of life
that you established, God, doer of good,
and did not walk in the path of your life-giving salvation.

I did not gather the harvest of grain,[7]
to store for my sustenance
when snowy days of trouble come.

I did not build firm walls
and did not put a roof on my house
to protect from the stormy gusts of air.

I did not lay aside a store of food
for the endless journey to cure the turmoil of my hunger.

I did not address you with prayers of supplication,
so that I might have the audacity to stand before you.

I did not amass the reward of salvation through good works
to assure the renewal of my soul.

C

On my life's journey I did not settle accounts with my adversary,
so that I might here and now escape the stern hand of the judge.[8]
I did not approach with hands filled with blessings and
in hope of exoneration with the lawgiver.[9]
I did not look forward,
nor did I protect my back,
nor was I armed to the right,
nor was I shielded from the left,
to be spared harm in the battle.
I did not dress my cavalry in armor
nor did I equip my foot soldiers with arms
that I might send them to the front.
I did not gather the early fruit,
nor act in time for the late harvest,[10]
and now I am in limbo, bereft of goodness.
I do not have the flower of innocence,
nor the oil of mercy.
Here, in the darkness of the night, without a flicker of light,
I doze in the stupor of mortality,[11]
while the trumpet call summons me.
Once again I have arrived without wedding clothes,
and have left the oil of good works behind.
And the door to the wedding feast has closed before me.[12]

D

How shall I find comfort for this much grief?
How much of the light of hope can I mix
with the darkness of doubt?
Where should I dig in my heels?

On what shall I fix my eyes?
What calm can I await?
To what peace shall I lift my hands?

Should I look for the vault of the heaven from where
the fiery rain fell on Sodom, as written?[13]

Or where earth
opened its voracious throat
to swallow Dathan with the army of Abiram?[14]

Dare I flee my keeper
to be captured by terrible leviathan?[15]

Or should I travel among those beasts, who
would be quicker to ask vengeance from the creator against
than Elisha did against
the pagan youth of Bethel?[16]

Or shall I turn to the expanse of clear skies
covering the Egyptians in thick darkness?[17]

Look to the birds on high
that feed like vultures on bloody carrion?[18]

E

What good is it to be brave as
a lion among the weak
and then be devoured by wasps?[19]

Or to be delivered from the bears' claws,[20]
only to be engulfed in blood-sucking flies?[21]

If I sit down to rest,
impudent fleas swarm around me like flecks of flaming ash from a fire.

If I escape being impaled on the horn of a unicorn,
my flesh will crawl with the chewing of little worms.

And even huddled in the darkest corners of my closet,
I could be accosted by the foulness, like heaps of dead frogs, to disgust me.[22]

If stand in the middle of a field,
I can be surrounded by swarms of gnats.[23]

But let me leave aside the grasshoppers and caterpillars,[24]
a mighty army, together with the palmerworm and seemingly lifeless canker,[25]
and the hardened water pellets of hail and the destructive frosts,[26]
which may to the eye seem less destructive,
but when wielded by God with his eternal wrath and strength
have struck down, laid low, and driven out the high and mighty Pharaoh
with his rod of violent repression, vanquishing him.

These then are the visible manifestations of the hidden afflictions,
the spiritual chastisements and unseen inner torment,
suffered by the Egyptians for their injustice.

F

But you, almighty creator of everything, Lord of all,
who rise up at my enemies and scatter them,[27]
have mercy on me, with a double measure of compassion.
Extend your hand of salvation to me,
perplexed, weary, wayward, and worthy of death.
For you alone are known as God,
glorified forever, with the Father and your Holy Spirit
unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

---

[1] Gen. 2:10.
[2] Jer. 9:1 (Arm. 8:23).
[3] Job 3:3.
[4] Jer. 20:14.
[5] Heb. 11:38.
[6] cf. Jn. 17:12, *Prayer* 7C, 19D, Zirekyants, *Reflections* on the Twelve Clauses of the Instruction from the "Canon of Baptism for Adult Catechumens," p. 244 [Cl. V, n. 6].
[7] Pr. 6:6-8.
[8] Mt. 5:25.
[9] Ex. 23:15.
[10] Jas. 5:7.
[11] Mt. 25:3-8
[12] Mt. 22:11.
[13] Gen. 19:24.
[14] Num 16:31-32.
[15] Jon. 1.
[16] 2 Kg. 2:22-24.
[17] Ex. 10:21.
[18] Ezek. 29:17-20.
[19] Ex. 8:16-28.
[20] 2 Kg. 2:23-25.
[21] Ex. 8:21-24.
[22] Ex. 8:11-14.
[23] Ex. 8:21.
[24] Ex. 10:4.
[25] Jl. 1:4, 2:25.

[26] Ex. 9:25.
[27] Ps. 68:1 (Arm. 67:2).

Prayer 69

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, by your hand, great Lord and God,
artisan who with infinite ingenuity shaped my being
in the crucible of your love where
I am daily refined but never purified,
continuously stirred but never smooth.
It is in vain, O silversmith, my heavenly architect,
that you squander effort working on me.
As the prophet said in his well-known parable,
my wickedness does not melt away.[1]

Because I am woefully misguided
I dare speak out of turn
like some pathetic, possessed maniac,
increasing the burden of my sin
instead of finding a means of reconciliation.

And so that the punishment awaiting me in the next life
does not come as a shock,
extraordinary event, or unprecedented calamity,
he planted as a reminder here in my body
the token of that first curse,
that through this small insignificant speck the larger illness might be examined.

B

For in the womb are born and spontaneously multiply
all manner of squirming worms,
intestinal worms gnawing in secret,
burning blisters, stinging ulcers, abnormal growths,
and host of other sweaty, noisome, disgusting, annoying, itching conditions.
Plus other savage marauders,
like demons attacking in the night,
barbarous mercenaries from the legions of darkness,
with the ferocity of Arabian wolves,
stalking with their head curved down, their melancholy color,
their crooked, hooked jaw,
resembling that of a scorpion,
piercing with crude thorns,

sucking, drawing blood,
to turn the bed of rest into an instrument of punishment.

And when one lifts one's hand to give them their due,
they sense the danger in advance that man poses
and immediately take flight
with their hairless bodies and dwarfed size,
and hopping this way and that like grasshoppers they scatter,
and with the slyness of foxes conspire against the good,
escaping through secret places, as if they have found deliverance from death.

And such vile and miserable beings,
not only pursue the vulgar and motley mob,
but also powerful and fearsome kings,
driving them to the attic of their habitations,
or even forcing them to live outside.

Courageous and brave men, who rule crowds
and govern peoples and take cities of nations,
have witnessed defeat at the hands of this virulent force, saying
"We were not able to resist these tyrants, stronger than ourselves;
therefore we took flight and reached this point."

C

And why have I discoursed about
such miniscule and abject things worthy of ridicule?
Only because they are the most powerful and irrefutable advocates for the Divinity,
reminding me of what awaits me in the next life, these bitter fruits
of my unruly body.

Such deadly diseases happen upon us and
eat away relentlessly, from which there is no riddance.
They are a foretaste of the physical pains and
punishment that is to come.
And there is no place to seek refuge,
to escape them by fleeing.
For without your order,[2]
human efforts and methods fail.
But you, who do good, hold in ample measure the life-giving cure for everything.
You have but to will it, in order to save, renew, pardon, cure and give life.
To you glory forever and ever.
Amen.

[1] Jer. 6:29.

[2] Lk. 7:8.

Prayer 70

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now let me lift this discussion
from the lowly things of earth
unworthy of being considered part of creation
to the higher things.
Let me speak of God's serious and stern Last Judgment
from which there is no escape.
Even those the closest to God such as the Patriarchs
or the most saintly such as the Prophets,
or the most spotless such as the Apostles,
or the truly chosen such as the martyrs,
if you did not grace them with your love toward humankind,
with your undiminishing goodness, unchanging providence
and unending mercy, they would be no use for my salvation.

B

For even if I were to call to Abraham himself
with a parched mouth, as taught by
the parable of the rich man,[1]
Abraham would not provide so much as a drop of water,
since he too is bound by our common humanity.

And if I were to call to Moses, also a captive of human frailty,
it would be useless for he could not save even the man
gathering branches on the Sabbath.[2]

And as for Aaron, he himself needed an intercessor.[3]
And David, he too was blamed despite his abundant good deeds.[4]
Then there are Noah, and Job and Daniel,
as the prophet Ezekiel explained, inspired by God:
"As I live, said the Lord God, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters
from the fury to come, only they themselves shall be saved."[5]

As for Peter, the rock of faith,
no sooner was he out of your providential care
than he succumbed to human anxieties.[6]

I leave unmentioned multitudes of others
humbled by various human frailties
who are, nevertheless, among the eternally blessed,
for example, the prophet Joash who blasphemed even
at the altar during the divine liturgy.

Like these there are many more making up
an inexplicable mystery
susceptible to various interpretations.

C

And since human power to reach salvation is finite,
we are objects of your mercy, beneficent God,
and fortified by you, Almighty,
called by you, God protector,
and pardoned by you, God for whom everything is possible,[7]
graced by you, God our liberator,
and cured by you, God our healer,
granted life by you, God incorruptible,
and granted light by you, God our renewer.

Therefore, acknowledging the limitations
of my earth-born nature,
but taking courage from those you have comforted,
I petition only you, Son of the living God,
Christ blessed in all things.

What is written above is further justified
when we recall the wisdom written
in the same spirit as this prayer:
"It is better for a happy wise man
to fall into the hands of the Lord,
than to fall into the hands of men,
for the greater the power, the greater the mercy."[8]

These words also suit David,
who when faced with three penalties posed by God[9]
willingly chose a horrible death, displaying faith
reminiscent of the living Christ,
preferring death to the two lesser penalties
that involved torment without mercy.

And if I apply these words to myself
searching to sustain my lost soul,
it would not be stretching the truth.
For in this book of lamentations
I seek not to disparage
those who have been rescued,
for without them how would we approach the Lord?
Instead I aim to glorify the name of our Savior,
and praise his grace before all people,
proclaiming those who have
been raised by high deeds
through the forever coveted salve of compassion.

D

Even as you are life, you are salvation,
you are the cure, you are immortality,
you are bliss, you are enlightenment.
Grant me peace from the torment of my sins,
so that you might also have rest
from my incessant, whining self-reproaches,
you who thrive on nothing but the salvation
of us humans.
Blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] Lk. 6:19-31.
[2] Num. 15:32-36.
[3] Ex. 32:25-35.
[4] 2 Sam. 12:1-12.
[5] Ezek. 14:14, 16, 18-20.
[6] Mt. 14:30, Mk. 14:71.
[7] Lk. 1:37.
[8] Sir. 2:18.
[9] 2 Sam. 24:10-17.

Prayer 71

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now let us turn to the happy and glorified ranks of the saints,
some of whom stumbled slightly but were steadied,
some who doubted a bit but were enlightened
by the radiant purity of the Holy Spirit,
thus exhibiting the faults of the ordinary humans
on the one hand, while on the other,
the ways and virtues of angels,
transcending the laws of nature.

And now, those who are blessed
by the mouth of the Godhead, Father of Christ,[1]
commanding all alike, the chosen, celebrated, adored, and praised,
who are worshiped as members of the body of Christ
and who are prepared as temples of the Holy Spirit,[2]
in whom there is no hint of darkness,
but who are instead completely guileless
and glow with righteousness
and are godly as much as humans can be:
their faces are open and unashamed,
their piety uplifting and intrepid,
their lives sober and irreproachable,
their worship stalwart and unwavering,
their ways courageous and unflagging,
their truth uniform and unshakable,
their valor strong and indomitable,
their vision is bright and unconfused,
their wisdom is heavenly and invincible,
their image is clean and incorruptible.
By their examples and in the memory of their names
God taught us to pray[3] and
through them find help amid troubles,
as your word, Creator, teaches.[4]

B

But I am unworthy in all things,
and fail, as much as I try.
Although I am awake, I dream.
Although I seem alert, I am dazed.
While worshiping, I blaspheme.
While praying I err.
In my work I balk.

While seeking forgiveness I sin.
In my resting, I am restless,
While advancing, I retreat.[5]
When I walk, I walk backwards.[6]
To the light, I bring darkness.[7]
To sweet flavors, I add the bitterness of absinthe.
Into the warp of goodness, I weave the woof of evil.
After being lifted up, I stumble again.
I blossom, but do not bear fruit.
I speak and do not act.[8]
I promise but do not perform.
I make vows I do not fulfill.
I reach out but pull back.
I display but do not offer.
I bring forth but do not give.
While tending my wounds I reopen them.[9]
While reconciling I cause friction.
I complain without cause and am justly condemned.
I am enrolled and immediately removed.
I set sail and immediately lose course.
I set out and do not reach the harbor.
I poise myself and yet I fall.
I am filled and yet drained dry.
I am put in order here and fall apart there.
I am gathered here and set afire there.[10]
I lay a foundation but do not finish building.[11]
I gain little and waste thousands.
I save almost nothing and spend without end.
I give others advice I do not practice.
I study constantly but never learn the truth.[12]
Even when the evil is extinguished I keep stoking it.
I take heart a bit, then feel yet more abandoned.
I gear up and then as quickly slacken.
I patch this and rip that.
I pull up nettles and sow thorns.
I try to ascend and am dragged down.
I go to the nest as a dove and come out a crow.
I arrive almost white and leave totally black.
I pledge myself to you and then dedicate myself to an assassin.
I face forward but turn back.[13]

C

I am cleansed but am covered with soot.
I am washed but am soiled just the same.
I pretend to be David and act like Saul.
I mouth truths and lie in my heart.[14]
I give with my right hand but steal with my left.
I cultivate wheat but sow tares.[15]

I have retreated from the heights of wisdom and become as I was.
I put on the face of an angel but have the mind of a devil.
I am steady on my feet but wavering in my mind.
I confess my shortcomings falsely but really err.
I feign righteousness but am truly false.
I pretend to be in the choir of the meek but strut with the demons.
I am praised by humans but reproached by you, all-seeing God.
I am blessed among the earthly but
pitiful among the children of light.
I am pleasing to the most vulgar but have fallen
from your eyes, great king.
I flee your just tribunal but plea before the impious.
I reject the noble but cavort with the repulsive.
I dress my body up with finery
but my soul in spotted feathers of a jackdaw.[16]
I approach to make a pact but I am rejected as a traitor.
Today I am pure and filled with the Spirit
but tomorrow I am a crazed fool.
I disobeyed the Lord's commandments but
followed the serpent's suggestions.[17]
I became high and mighty but submitted like a weakling.
I bear the burdens of the day but leave
without my portion at pay time.[18]
I talk big at a distance but am nonplussed when called to account.
At sunrise I appear prosperous and at sunset I loiter empty-handed.
I sit upon the elder's chair but take counsel from fools.[19]
I fall asleep complaining and awake in terror,
I plough the fields of my desires with special care for evil.
I who am
ever the prodigal son,
banished forever, unrepentant, wayward,
inconsolably dejected, in self-imposed captivity,
servant of death and corruption,
mercilessly tormented, condemned beyond salvation,
cut off beyond rejoining, extinguished beyond resuscitation,
bruised beyond healing, destroyed beyond hope of restoration.
And if sterner reproaches than these are needed
against my unruly soul,
I hereby commit them to writing,
I heap them like kindling
to fuel the flames of Hell.[20]

I am the jealous offspring of the new, heavenly Adam
as Cain was in the first instance toward the old and earthly Adam.
And in this world I bear upon my soul the mark of blame,[21]
not with the respiration of breath, but
through the wordy torment of my conscience.

D

And where is salvation now?
Now when the father of faith, Abraham, in our desperate damnation,
turns my cruelty in life back on my soul after death?[22]
When the great prophets stone me with the harsh words?[23]
When the brave one adorned in glory, kills me with the thrust of a javelin?[24]
When the image of the true Lord wipes me from the face
of the earth with Achar?[25]
When the most sublime of God's chosen delivers me
to the vengeance of the Gibeonites?[26]
When the seer born of the prophet slays me
before the Lord with the Amalakites?[27]
When the zealot of God lays waste
with fire from heaven?
When the consummation of the dim images
of the old covenant and the herald of the new covenant
pours upon us the winnowing of the chaff? [28]
When the chief of the disciples takes my life with Sapphira's?[29]
When the one judged admirable by the Holy Spirit
mixes the stench of death with teaching of life?[30]
Meanwhile, the assembly of the blessed are
impartial toward me, both angel and human,
those valiant forces poised to obey God's command,
the universe of the world, and the elements,
the inanimate and the living,
by whom I am forever scolded and condemned
and reminded of terrors to come
unsettling the tranquility and stability of my life
like waves whipped by storms.

And if one were to study with wisdom
the diverse sea creatures
from the smallest to the largest,
countless without number
swarming in infinite schools, bustling
and gliding this way and that through
the sea of my body, the truth of all
I have written would be confirmed.

E

But you yourself blessed, immortal king,
kind, heavenly Christ, who loves humankind,
only-begotten Son of the living God,
almighty exalted beyond understanding,
beyond telling, who pardons us,
awesome God,
scold the undulating agitation of my soul

whipped up by the winter tempest,
calm the uncontrollable commotion in my troubled heart,
whip in the reins and subdue the wild urges of my mind.

By the grace of your command, O great God,
may the storm that constantly pelts me with
icy gusts be calmed.[31]
Put to rest and banish forever
the multi-headed ghosts of secret shame
which attack like pirates in their vulgar ways.
Consider my constant prayer
whose letters are written with ever
renewed compunction in this book of the sighs of my grieving heart.

Lift me out of the abyss of death's depths
and grant me miraculous life among the redeemed prophets.[32]
Receive my repentance, my self-reproaches
offered with savory smoke.
Console me, for I am out of hope,
and ease my afflictions and sighs.
To you with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
glory, honor and dominion forever.
Amen.

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[1] Mt. 25:34.
[2] 1 Cor. 6:15-20.
[3] Gen. 20:7
[4] Job 42:8.
[5] Phil. 3:13.
[6] Lk. 9:62.
[7] Lk. 11:35.
[8] Lk. 23:3.
[9] 2 Kg. 8:8-10.
[10] Jn. 15:6.
[11] Lk. 14:29.
[12] 2 Tim. 3:7.
[13] Jer. 2.27.
[14] Is. 29:18.
[15] Mt. 13:25.
[16] Based on a fable about a bird that donned bright feathers for a ceremony only to be unmasked and recognized for the plain bird that it really was. Critical edition, 1083, n. 7; 'jackdaw,' following Terian, *Narek*, p. 318, n. 20.
[17] Gen. 2:17, 3:1-6.
[18] Mt. 20:12.
[19] 1 Kg. 12:6-11.
[20] Jn. 15:6.
[21] Gen. 4:4-15.
[22] Lk. 16:19-25.
[23] Ex. 32:21-29, referring to Moses.
[24] Num. 25:7-8, referring to Phineas.
[25] Jos. 7:23-26, referring to Joshua, also referred to as Achan.
[26] 2 Sam. 21:8-9, referring to David.
[27] 1 Sam. 15:32-35, referring to Samuel.
[28] Mt. 3:11-12, referring to John the Baptist; Is. 40:3, Mal. 3:1.
[29] Acts 5:10, referring to Peter.

[30] 2 Cor. 2:15-16, referring to Paul.
[31] Mt. 8:26.
[32] Jon. 2:10.

Prayer 72

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now to you, monastic brothers,
communities of disciples,
you who, bared-handed, have enlisted
as the Lord's soldiers, in expectation
and hope of infinite good gifts,
for you I set this table with
my burnt sacrifice of words.

Accept this testament of confession
for the edification and salvation of your souls.
Know through it the frailty of the body.
Remember the warning words of the prophet
and the apostle: "No flesh should exult
before God." And, "No one,
not a single person, is just."[1]
Do not forget the word of the Lord:
"Even when you have done the things commanded,
admit, we are useless servants."[2]
Do not permit yourselves to become the prey
of the Deceiver. Take heed from the scriptures.
"The chosen are also Devil's food."[3]
For even I, who nourish you with these meager fruits,
willingly blaming myself
with myriad accounts of all the incurable sins,
from our first forefather through the end
of his generations in all eternity,
I charge myself with all these, voluntarily,
taking the debt of all your wrongdoing upon me.[4]

B

I once heard of someone who most unfittingly claimed
to be sinless in the presence of the One
before whom no earthly being can be justified,[5]
and it was not pleasing as he boasted,
"I have never committed adultery
or fornication or tasted any other mortal pleasures
of this world." Saying this is no less impious
than those deeds. May God forgive him,
for even if what he said were true
by bragging he shows he has not progressed
as far as he has fallen.

Repeating Zechariah's words to the people of Israel:
"Praise the Lord that we are great,"[6]
echoing the voice of the Pharisee who exalted himself.[7]

C

But since I am condemned before the all-knowing God,[8]
who has placed the unseen passions of the mind
onto the scale of justice and seeks to judge me
by these in the most just way, I shall not
    pretend before the all-seeing,
    deceive the one who scrutinizes everything,
    lie to the one who counts faults when conceived, not when committed,
    use trickery to favorably impress the Great One,
    mask my unruly debauchery with the appearance of a good person,
    take on airs of self-discipline while being forever weak,
    dress in other's costumes,
    bask in other's splendor,
    put on finery to cover the ugliness of my body.
No one is so sinful as I,
so unruly, so impious,
so unjust, so evil,
so feeble, so misguided,
so foolish, so crafty,
so mired, so embarrassed, so blameworthy.
I alone, and no one else,
I in all, and all in me,
not the pagans, for they did not know,
not the Jews, for they were blind,
not the ignorant, for they were confused and lacking wisdom.

D

I was dubbed, "Master," which testifies against me.[9]
I was called, "Teacher, teacher,"
detracting from the praise of God.
I was said to be good because of my miserable plight.[10]
I was considered a saint by men,
though I am unclean before God.
I was proclaimed just, though by all accounts I am ungodly.
I reveled in the praise of men,
thus becoming a mockery before the tribunal of Christ.
I was called, "Awake" at the baptismal font,[11]
but I slumber in the sleep of mortality.
On the day of salvation I was named "Vigilant,"
but I closed my eyes to vigilance.

So here are judgment and blame,
new reprimands and old sentences,

shame to my face and turmoil to my soul,
pleas about seemingly small things and very grave matters.

E

But you alone Lord God,
who loves humankind without revenge and with forbearing,
on the day of the terrible last judgment
when my sinful soul is judged, take into account
these heart-rending words of self-reproach
and contrition that I myself have written instead
of waiting to hear them from you, God of compassion.

Now lift away and annul the instances of my unruliness
for I am bound to you with all of the desires of my soul.
Take away the reproaches of shame and scandal.[12]
Cover the ugly appearance of my naked body
with your mighty right hand.
Lead me to your rest,
for I am worn by the burden of sin.[13]
Set me on the path of goodness toward you,
refuge and life.
Remember me in mercy
even after death, O perfect life.[14]
Blessed in heaven and honored on earth,
praised always in all things forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Jer. 9:22, 1 Cor. 1:29.
[2] Lk. 17:10.
[3] Hab. 1:16.
[4] Rom. 5:12.
[5] Ps. 143 (142):2.
[6] Zech. 11:5.
[7] Lk. 18:11-12.
[8] Mt. 5:28.
[9] Mt. 23:7, 8, 10.
[10] Mk. 10:18.
[11] A reference to St. Gregory's baptismal name: Gregorios means "Awake" in Greek.
[12] Ps. 119 (Arm. 118):39.
[13] Mt. 11:28.
[14] Lk. 23:42.

Prayer 73

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

King on high, mighty and awesome,
blessed Lord Jesus Christ,
for someone like me who despairs of salvation
only you can change the curse of mortality
into the blessing of life.
Only you can turn the discouragement of blame
into joyous praise,
shame into resilience,
humility into honor,
banishment into the hope of goodness,
separation into the expectation of reunion,
menacing words into compassionate comfort,
final condemnation into a second chance at deliverance.

B

Lord, have mercy on me, for I am condemned to death
on the day of my life-breath's release,
while I implore on high with my eyes' pitiful gaze
fixed the perils ahead on that unavoidable journey,
with danger on all sides in my terrified imagination.
And while staring at my cell's ceiling where I will start
my outward journey, wretched and half dead with a twisted face,
with shaking fingers, muffled sighs, failing cries,
a thin voice, my grieving soul shaken by a panoply of
doubts, I shall lament from the bottom of
my invisible soul the sins I have committed.

You are able, compassionate God, to perform a miracle
with your everlasting might saying,
"Be healed of your soul's torment,"[1]
or "May your sins be forgiven,"[2]
or "Go in peace. You are cleansed of sin."[3]
And whatever I do not manage to say at that hour
receive from me today in your love for humankind,
O long-suffering, generous God, who gives life to all.

C

When I, so eloquent now with my haughty
voice and strutting stiff-necked ways,
am laid out a lifeless cadaver, dispossessed of speech,

hands bound, limbs atrophied,
lips sealed, eyes shut,
as still as a board, a half-burnt log,
inert statue, speechless image, breathless being,
pitiful spectacle, deplorable sight,
lamentable form, miserable face,
tear-causing likeness, silenced tongue,
parched grass, petal-less flower,
run-down beauty, extinguished lamp,
deserted throat, devastated heart,
muted trumpet, dry well, wilted body,
festering womb, collapsed tent, broken branch,
separated joint, chopped tree, sawed off root,
abandoned house, harvested field, uprooted plant,
alienated friend, forgotten supplies,
buried filth, cast away trash,
brushed aside clutter, contemptible skeleton,
like some useless thing trodden under foot.

I am needy of the prayers of others,
which rise to you, compassionate doer of good,
with the dew of tears amplifying
the sighs of the faith-filled pleas
of my wretched voice.
Joining in my prayer, they chant
the responsive hymn to
you, whom I praise,
the sign of your cross of salvation, which I worship,
the truth of your resurrection, which I believe,[4]
the revelation of your glory, which I praise,[5]
the sternness of your judgment, which I confess,
the reprimand of your words, which I fear,[6]
the guiding companionship of your Holy Spirit, which I revere,
the anointing seal of the Lord at last unction, which I embrace,
the reigning with you, Lord Jesus, for which I pray.[7]
And though abandoned, rejected, cast away, broken,
blown away, tossed about in the tumult of life,
hope, which is a gift from you,
perseveres, as a permanent and indelible reminder.

D

Look with mercy upon me in my doubts and perils,
glorified Son of God, who alone are compassionate
and will pardon, heal, save, protect, renew, restore, lift up, support,
and create me again in blissful purity.[8]
Yours is the power, yours the salvation, and yours the mercy.
Nothing is impossible for you.[9]
Yours is might, exaltation, dominion

and kingdom without end, true essence and selfhood,
all-encompassing absolute being,
goodness and light, glorified as Lord,
to which nothing can be added or taken away,
adored in the Holy Trinity with inexplicable mystery
and given thanks forever also in the Holy Trinity
in the same act of worship equally with the same honor,
yesterday, today and forever.[10]
Amen.

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[1] Mk. 5:34.
[2] Mt. 9:2, Lk. 7:48.
[3] Lk. 7:50.
[4] 1 Th. 4:14.
[5] Tit. 2:13.
[6] Mt. 7:23, 25:41.
[7] 2 Tim. 2:12.
[8] Ps. 51 (Arm. 50):10.
[9] Lk. 1:37, Gen. 18:14.
[10] Heb. 13:8.

Prayer 74

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Heavenly king, Lord of all,
patient toward all in all things,
Son of the living God, beyond our understanding,
your true mercy is manifest when
the expectation of reward is cut off.
Your benevolence is displayed when the mind's vision is blocked.
Your love of humankind is expressed at the hour
when weakness lays siege from without and within.
The divine healing of your hand is manifest
when life departs completely from our bodies.[1]
You visit where there is no exit.
Your greatness is clear when you cure the wound of despair.
Your genuine humanity shared with us is revealed
when at unexpected times you dispense salvation.
Your victory is obvious
when you open the closed door of life at my last breath.
Your magnificent grace is there
when you forget my wrongs and remember your goodness.
Your ungrudging generosity is manifest
when you include me in your care, ingrate that I am,
along with the grateful.
I know and recognize that you look upon this offering of words with
your former compassion as you lift away my sinful habits.

B

For hymns rise up and chants are sung
when the Lord in his kindness rewards the bad servant
with goodness.[2]
When he grants rest in the royal palace to one
who should be imprisoned.[3]
When he sits on the tufts of the sumptuous throne
one who belongs in the dust bin. [4]
When he lifts toward the heights of happiness
the eyes of one expecting them gouged.[5]
When he places the ring of royalty on the hand
of him who expects his fingers cut off.
When he draws into his comforting embrace
one expecting lashes of a whip.
When in plain view of all he rescues
someone poised for destruction.
When he bestows glory as well as life

to him waiting for death's devastation.
When he decorates with laurels
the head of one expecting beheading.
These are the blessed fruits of your magnificent vine,
compassionate Lord.
This is the living harvest of your creative commandments.
These are the yearning thoughts inspired by fervor for you.
These are the rays of light of your all-encompassing radiance.
This is the pleasurable taste of your glorious sweetness.

C

These are yours alone, Lord,
and by you was I moved to write them.
I pray, blessed Lord, for those gifts uniquely yours to give,
Grant them, I pray you.
Open, Lord, the treasures of your good things,
according to the prayer of the Proverbs.[6]
Do not mix my wrongdoing in the storehouse of your good things.
Do not store up vengeance and anger, which are hateful to you,
with compassion and mercy, which you love.
Do not keep in your venerable creation the darkness and cruelty displeasing to you
or the sin and misery harmful to me.
Do not record with your blessed right hand
into the book of life the mortgage of my damning debts.
Rather bring to pass the seemingly impossible,
exalt your name yet again, Lord, by showing
how simple and easy these are for you.[7]

D

My debts are too numerous to count,
but not so amazing as your mercy.
My sins are many,
but small compared to your forgiveness.
My transgressions are frequent,
but your love for humankind vanquishes them all, powerful and almighty,
The stains on my soul are too numerous for me to count,
but for you they are very limited.
The weapons of sin produced by a miserable wretch like me
are powerless compared with
the memory of your death, living Lord,
for fending off the Destroyer.
What effect can a small shadow have on the light of your day, God?
How can the dusk withstand your radiance, great God?
How can my unruly frail body be placed on the scales
with the cross of your suffering?
How does the mass of all the sins of the universe appear
to your eye, Almighty, who made everything in abundance?

Are they not for you but a clump of earth that easily crumbles
or a drop of rain that splatters in all directions
and disappears at your command?

E

How long would it take your omnipotent power to pardon my transgressions?
Not even the batting of the eye,
not the fleeting side glance,
not the quick glaring flash,
not the slightest hesitation,
not the hurried footstep,
not the raindrop's coursing a cubit,
not the grasp of a line by the mind,
not the speed of light,
not the taking of a breath.
None of these insubstantial, fleeting events or ephemeral states
is so short or instantaneous as the disintegration,
destruction and melting of the glacier of my sins
by your power God,
Lord of all, Jesus Christ,
Son of the living God, beyond human understanding.

You grant the sun of sweetness to the evil as well as the good,
and make it rain upon both.[8]
You mete out fairly the vicissitudes of life.
Those who find contentment in the expectation of rewards,
you pay with the spurs of temptation for their few sins.
And those who have chosen the worldly life,
you forgive with mercy
ministering your care to both alike,
awaiting their return to you.

To you glory, Almighty, for the miraculous work
of your patient loving care,
blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] Mt. 8:3.
[2] Mt. 18:27.
[3] 2 Sam. 19:28.
[4] Wis. 10:13-14, Ps. 113(Arm. 112):7.
[5] 1 Sam. 11:2.
[6] Pr. 8:21.
[7] Mt. 19:26.
[8] Mt. 5:45.

Prayer 75

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, engulfed, entranced and overwhelmed
by the magnitude, multitude and frequency of your gifts
that overflow infinitely with abundant, undiminishing
plenty, on the left and right,
to the front and back,[1]
I approach to offer again, great God, a testament in praise of the true faith,
for although at times
I was ensnared and lured away
and expelled from Paradise[2]
by heretical doctrines, hooked by the devices of the Deceiver,
now by this true doctrine in upright purity,
as a token of true grace[3]
again on wings of light
I ascend in pursuit of heaven.
And as I was conceived and born in the womb of the Church,
with pangs of spiritual labor,
remembering the profession of faith
and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity,
I now should address the great
and favored immaculate queen,
true maiden of all virgins, my glorious mother,
worthy of praise, so she may be known and proclaimed
and the extent of her venerable glory might be told
to the nations in the future, worthy of honor
and reverence as a pure body
headed by the incarnate Word of God.

B

And now, in the manner of this word picture drawn by the Spirit,
this icon upon the altar of light,
accept me, O compassionate and blessed God,
and let me be pardoned and cleansed through it.
Remove the sinful stains upon my soul.
Seat me with the innocent and the pure under its canopy.
Gather me up, the weakest of the house of David,[4]
and move me from there to the house of God, as the Prophet said,
referring to you, Jesus.[5]
Do not render my comings and goings from the chapel vain and useless.
Do not find the fervor of my faith cold.
Do not consider the embrace of my greeting out of place.
Do not deem my service without grace.

Do not reject my worship as meaningless.
May the vision of your image not be fruitless.
May this model of paradise not be lusterless.
May the fireless burnt offering not be overlooked.
May the sacrifice of this vow in words not be cast away.
May the taste of your light not be my death.
May the cup of the blood from your wounded side
not be my condemnation.[6]

C

To you, Lord Jesus, one of the divine essence,
whom we tasted, thereby coming to know the Father
and Holy Spirit,
to you, teacher who taught us
the all-rewarding ways of the church,
to you who dwell in this light-filled house of prayer
dedicated to the salvation of good souls
to you, ruler of all, Holy Trinity
with hearts spread forth and hands outstretched,
we offer this incense of words
forever, with grace and thanksgiving.[7]

D

We glorify you chanting hymns of praise,
believing in the efficacy of the ministry of the Word,[8]
O good commanding cause of all being,
Holy Trinity without beginning, peerless highness,
unfathomable mystery, incomprehensible for our minds,
unexaminable by our senses, beyond the capacity
of all creation, whose greatness encompasses
the heavens on high and the limitless depths below,
end of all ends and beginning of all beginnings,
one from three distinct persons,
three from one indivisible Essence,
beyond the understanding of the unfettered mind
traversing all dimensions, unchanging good,
unshakable uprightness, unadulterated image of love,
greatness beyond which there is nothing,
height which cannot be lowered,
vision that cannot be marred,
undiminishing beneficence, steadfast will,
living commandment, sign of salvation, true blessing,
expectation of faith, unfeignable promise, generous inheritance,
trustworthy good news, sublime beyond reach.
One Father of the only Son, honored by the singular Holy Spirit,
with the richest goodness, completely devoid of evil,
with thanksgiving offered in a voice of blessing,

exalted with hymns of praise beyond our understanding.

E

One of the exalted, the awesome name
partaker of the same honor,
the same ineffable nature,
the same substance of three conjoined lights,
perfection to which nothing can be added,
of his own free will reverently loving the Father,
whose likeness he bears,
who, with the aid of the Spirit of Holiness,[9]
humbled itself and descended to earth,
without diminishing its inherent glory,
to enter the maternal womb of the immaculate Virgin,
Mother of God, in whom he grew the seeds of blessings
in that radiant field of purity, [10]
miraculously combining his divine spirit, in permeating union,
with the breath of our existence.

In this way, with the irresistible reins
of his guiding bridle, he calmed my unruliness
and willingly submitting to the cross.
He rose like the flower of the
fruit-bearing tree of life
upon the stem of immortality.[11]
He was wounded, died
without separating his divinity from
the flesh that is the same as ours
and suffering forever with his physical body,
inseparable from the essence of the creatorship
within him he brought life out of the instrument of defeat.

Descending into the dark regions of hell,
he delivered the captive beings of his creation
from the bonds of the alienating serpent,[12]
and as if shaking off the stupor of sleep,
he forced death's assault on him to retreat,
and arose and came to life divinely
ascending from earth as the bread of life,
shepherding the flock of thinking souls.[13]
The world had faith in Him[14]
and he appeared again to his disciples as he was
in no way diminished, for he
had come back whole and ascended
in his entirety to sit upon
the exalted throne with the glory
of his creatorship as simply
as it had been formerly.

We confess him as God, doer of good
and Lord of all, who judges
all the earth with justice on the great day,
who himself is the beginning and himself
is the end, the first and the last,
who rules with his undiminished wholeness
in light too bright to approach.

F

We praise with the Father and the Son
the Lord Holy Spirit, which springs inseparably
forth from them sharing their glory,
the Spirit that created everything and gave life to all,
that Spirit which from the very beginning,
when the universe was completely enveloped
in misty darkness, brooded, designed and shaped[15]
the sea which covered the earth with
its infinite, all-powerful waters,
an act symbolic of the true mystery
of the holy baptismal font of light.
First he created and now he acts.
He brought into existence and constantly
performs his handiwork, splendid miracles,
foretold through the visions of saintly,
divine signs, amazing miracles,
prophets, apostles, scholars,
learned in the teaching of wisdom.

He prepared the sanctuary for the offering
of Christ's blood. With mercy he ordered
the pardoning of souls and the healing of
bodies in the manner of Christ.

He baptized with that which is greater than water
and he renewed and enlightened through himself.[16]

He daily grows stronger by his good works.

He bore witness to the only begotten of God
at the flowing waters of the Jordan.[17]

With the voice of the Father in the shape of a cloud
he appeared on Mount Tabor.[18]

In the same form he protected the house of Jacob
in its exodus from Egypt.[19]

On the march led by Moses,

he engulfed Pharaoh with terrible winds.[20]

He creates priests.
He shapes sages.
He strengthens kings.
He accords pardon.
He grants life to the dead in the renewal of the resurrection.

He himself is the anointing of God made man,
forever equally worshiped with the Father
for the honor of greatness of the Son,
with boundless glory praised forever,
Amen.

G[21]

We profess the true faith, unerring and pure,
with the kiss of our lips we greet the altar
built of lifeless stone, the body of the church
as the dwelling place of God
more exalted than the most splendid heights of heaven
and founded upon the congregation of the apostles,
and revered by the disciples of the one on high,
as the place where the servants of the Word worshiped.
This treasure of life had its beginning in
the upper room, the place where the miracle[22]
happened on the great day of Pentecost.
The spirit of God with radiant power,[23]
filled that beautiful house,
breathing upon it as a sign of the pre-eminence of the church,
then sanctifying it through this act of grace,
then endowing it and those within with glorious
renewing light. Thus the blood of the almighty God
distributed and offered forever
is greater than Abel's.[24]
For Abel's cries only the message of death
but this blood shouts with a blissful voice
proclaiming life immortal.[25]

No one has the power under heaven
or before the sun to celebrate this awesome mystery
except under the protective wing of the church,
for heaven is not pleased with a gift of the Lord's body,
except when offered under the auspices
of this blessed roof, and for this reason,
according to the Law, there is a curse of death
upon one who makes the divine offering,
except at the altar of communal sacrifice.
Moreover, one who makes this offering,

the image of the soul, at a place other than the altar,
shall be branded with blood guilt.

In the church, there is but one baptism into the death of Christ,[26]
so that his divinity might not unwittingly suffer
sacrificed a second time to purify someone already cleansed by his light.[27]

There is but one laying on of hands
to be anointed with light so that deceit
might not be mixed with truth.

There is but one pardon,
more through grace than penance,[28]
so that the reality might not
be confused with appearances.

There is but one doctrine about the sorting to come,[29]
so that the threat of punishment might not
seem like mere talk about some stranger.[30]

There is but one just warning for both of the elements
of our nature, so that in the immortal power
of the adoption into the kingdom of heaven[31]
the recompense for good and evil
does not appear solely for the inner soul, but
for the outer man too, so the true magnificence
of the kingdom might be manifest
through our earthly nature as well.

There is but one hope of life with the incorruptible saints,
so that the certitude of things promised,
as revealed to the minds of those who listen,
might be believed.

H

The inanimate church, venerable queen,
gives life and rules over death,
like the fruit that Adam was willing to partake of.[32]
But this church surpasses all animate beings,
for though inanimate, it performs miracles,
even undertaking to perfect and renew us,
by etching the image of the glorious light upon us.

It is written that the church shares the vault
of heaven's grandeur, before the hosts
of spiritual beings that live there.
She uplifts bodies to soar again with
the lightness of the soul, endowing

the baser element with dignity.

She is not debased by her own faults,
but by being trampled by evil or faithless people.[33]

She is an amazing sign, overwhelming our mind's understanding,
this unthinking thing, created by thinking creatures,
that helps them as a superior helps its subordinate.

She is greater than man,
as the invincible rod was greater than God's chosen Moses.[34]

She surpasses the speaking beings
as the miraculously blooming rod was greater than Aaron.[35]

She exceeds the thinking beings just as the splendid cloak
that parted the rivers is greater than Elijah and Elisha.[36]

She delivers assistance again and again with hands
more saintly than militant, for her body[37]
of stone and mortar shares the same substance
as the feeling beings and the saints.

Like an immortal rock, she lives in the falling
and rising of many.[38]
Like the judge of all souls, she comes forth with miraculous signs
through curses and blessings.[39]
Like one who sees the unseen she exposes some, shelters others.
Like the commander-in-chief she summons all by name.[40]
Like an eternal mountain she resists attack.[41]
Like a net cast by God she catches souls.[42]
Sinless, unerring, she proceeds in the footsteps of Christ.[43]
Like the praiseworthy, she lifts up her head in
sublime magnificence, boldly and without shame.

I

The church has such great sanctity that her canons
make distinctions among the creatures made
in God's image.
If, despite care, an improper person
ventures through her portal,
she is not desecrated,
but rather distressed by this carelessness.

She is not cursed
but pardons those who do not understand her sanctity.

She is not abandoned as if she caused the shortcomings,
but is tarnished by our deeds.

She does not permit a second approach to receive the mystery
of the Lord at the feet of the life-giving God.[44]

She does not permit that sacrament to be offered twice
in one day so that this gift is not debased by indiscriminate use.

She has compassion for our frailties,[45]
the same as one immune from passion's corruption.
Without a word she judges with lordly authority.

J

For she is an ark of purity,[46]
a second cause of rejoicing
who saves us from drowning
in the tumult of our worldly lives.

She does not gather all sorts of beasts and just a few humans,
but rather gathers the heavenly host together with us mortals.

She is not tossed about on waves of agitation,[47]
but rises above it to the heavenly heights.

As a disciple under the command of the Holy Spirit of God
she avoids iniquity.[48]

She does not demand a death blow to the flesh
but rather guides those in her care to the good news of life.

She is not built by the hand of Noah,
but is built by the command of the creator.[49]

She is not adorned by Moses with the craftsman Bezaleel,[50]
but by the Only-Begotten Son of God with the Holy Spirit.

She is not in perpetual motion, constantly changing
but is established permanently upon an unshakable foundation.

Like the ark made of wooden planks,[51]
lacking the ability to speak and the sense of sight,
still she guides us anew.

In the image of the creator's infinite plenitude
she goes ahead to prepare for us a place in the light of life.[52]

She strikes one dead on the spot, like Uzzah,[53]
if she is not shouldered like the cross in the soul.
She kills without pause or trace
if she is carried off like some man-made vessel
on a cart harnessed to beasts of earthly desires.[54]
She speaks not with the tongues of men,
but with the language of angels.[55]
She does not listen with physical ears
but comprehends directly with her mind.[56]
She does not proclaim with articulated sounds
but tells the message of Jesus' works to all nations.[57]
She does not have vocal cords but expresses
herself with the breath of the living God.
She does not have joints of bones and nerves
but just as the armed throngs of Hebrews
though the chosen army of God on high, were made to
stand two thousand cubits from the ark of the covenant[58]
because of their impiety, she still keeps
her distance from those infected with sin
even though they were delivered from the toil
of brick-making in Egypt.[59]

Even the essence of God incarnate was called the "rock,"[60]
for the thirst of the many was quenched by
the piercing of his side.[61]
It is not the flow of blood through veins
but the rays of light from on high
penetrating and becoming one with it
that give the Church life and renewal.

It is not masterful art of Solomon or Zurababel,[62]
but the wisdom of God who holds all in his hands
that designs the Church.
It is not with the unconsecrated and common oil of Jacob
that is applied to it, but with the awesome blood and glory
of the great God that it is anointed.[63]
It is not a house made with the things of earth,[64]
but rather the body of the heavenly light of God
where he baptizes and ordains its children.
The Church nurtures not those born to the ways of the world,[65]
but rather those who are heirs to the heavenly kingdom,[66]
so that she might offer to the bosom of Abraham
those raised in her care.[67]

The bridegroom of her wedding day is the Son of the living God.
And the rejoicing entourage of bride's maids are the assembly of patriarchs.[68]
She makes us forget the high places of pagan worship where
demons dwell, so that only God in heaven might be worshiped.

She is the complete refutation of the images of pagan gods
for in her every stone Christ is exalted.[69]
She is the open destruction of the self-indulgent
nymph cults of the forest, so that above all other trees
of this world, the Lord might be offered,
like the tree of life, in the Church.[70]
She undermines all the false, magical, fertility idols
because in her and with her the adored rock
is established, set in light-giving rubies and living stones.[71]

K

This graceful, God-pleasing house is free of all servility.[72]
It is not the image of Zion on high, but rather
the true Zion as experienced in reality.
It is not a pagan fire altar or
a place of penance under the yoke of the Law,[73]
but rather the Lord's table which we kiss offering thanks
for his lovingkindness.
It is unshakable,
never taking on a different image but rather
grows ever greater in the same radiant glory,
proclaiming the heavens and representing heaven on earth
in brilliant light.
Just as without the Father, there is no Christ,
so without the womb of the mother Church,
the soul cannot be fulfilled.[74]
The infinite God would wander were it not for the shelter of
the tabernacle of this house of prayer.[75]
The Lord of all would have no place to rest his head,[76]
if he did not lodge at this inn of life.
He is more honored in this material dwelling place
than in the vault of heaven on high.
The infinity of the divine light
that covered the face of the prophet and those with him[77]
caused people to flee because the glorious radiance
was overwhelming, whereas here in the Church,
while celebrating those very prophets,
they approach the light and sing praise with
the host of angels.
Here in the Church, God's good will
and repeated blessings exceed the splendor of paradise.

L

This spiritual, heavenly mother of light
cared for me as a son
more than an earthly, breathing, physical mother could.
The milk of her bosom was the blood of Christ.

If one were to consider her the image of the Mother
of God, it would not be impious.
Like the sign of the cross of salvation with amazing
powers and handiwork, it performs miracles.
The terrifying tribunal of the last judgment
is established there visibly.
Through her the babbling mouths of immoral heretics are silenced.
She also has intelligent, speaking stones,
by which she chases away the beastly and unclean.[78]
She gives birth to godly mortals,[79]
saints in the image of the sole God, Christ.[80]
She faces east, our first place of habitation.[81]
With her hand she points the way to the coming of God,
and making us face east guides us toward
the Lord's brilliant light.[82]
The dawn and rising of the Morning Star foreshadow
for the creatures of earth the vision of Christ
on the day of the last judgment.
She drives away pain, heals the infirm, overcomes
the tyranny of demons.
Like a jubilant bridal party the twelve apostles encircle her
the life-giving fountain, the womb of life.
So much have her blessings and bliss increased and flourished
that she has been called by the name of the Savior himself[83]
and by those close to the only begotten Son,
she was consecrated in the name the radiant Mother of God.
For sinners tossing about on the sea, she is a safe harbor;
for the heavenly choirs, a place of jubilation.
For the perplexed mortal, a place of sure healing.
The Holy Trinity, beyond telling, is glorified in her,
the blessed in all.

M

And woe to him who raises a hand in malice
against the heavenly kingdom as if
the doctrine of the church made by hands,
were some physical invention
or human artifact or earthly handiwork,
and not the gift of life and reflection of the divine,[84]
a foreshadow of the renewing light revealed by the Holy Spirit,
and the abundant gifts of God on high,
the altar honoring the mystery of the will of the creator.
and the institution founded with wisdom by the right hand of the apostles,
in a word, the gate of heaven,[85]
the city of the living God,[86]
the mother of all living things, free of all sin,[87]
and the true model of our visible, thinking being.
Her intellectual part is the mystery of our souls.

Her palpable part is the image of our bodies.
And a new holiness surpassing the holiness of old[88]
and crowned with the brilliantly glorious sign of Christ.
Those who do not confess this
are expelled from the Almighty's presence
by the hand of his consubstantial Word,
depriving them of the inheritance of grace
from the co-glorified Holy Spirit,
and closing before them the doors to the bridal canopy of life.
And we who have written this bear witness to it
and believe in what we have composed here,[89]
in the name of and for the glory of the almighty Trinity
and of the one Godhead,
forever and ever.
Amen.

The first prayer was my credo to the Holy Trinity[90] and this prayer my avowed profession of faith to my Mother Church glorified with light.

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[1] Here, based on certain manuscripts, the Jerusalem Narek has a sub-caption that reads: "Again for a second time the traditional doctrine established by the Apostles under the inspiration of the Divine Spirit is set forth here to shed light on the doctrine of the church and interpret the blessed image beyond words that the inanimate physical church represents." Some commentators believe Prayer 75 to be a continuation of Prayer 34, where St. Gregory sets forth the confession of faith, without addressing the Church.
[2] Gen. 3.
[3] 1 Tim. 6:20.
[4] That is, the Church.
[5] Zech. 12:8.
[6] 1 Cor. 11:27.
[7] Here, some versions have another subtitle: "Another meditation on the Creed and Confession of Faith adopted at the Council of Nicaea" (AD 325).
[8] Acts 6:4.
[9] Mt. 1:18-20, Lk. 1:35.
[10] Gen. 22:18, Lk. 1:42.
[11] Is. 11:1.
[12] 1 Pet. 3:18-19, Eph. 4:8.
[13] Jn. 6:35, Heb. 13:20.
[14] 1 Tim. 3:16.
[15] Gen. 1:2.
[16] Acts 10:44.
[17] Mt. 3:16.
[18] Mt. 17:5.
[19] Ex. 13:21.
[20] Ex. 14:28.
[21] In some versions this section is preceded by a subheading: "The prayer of St. Gregory on the mysteries of the Holy Church against the impious sect of the Tondrakians, the new Manicheans."
[22] Mt. 26:26-28, Luke 22:19-20.
[23] Acts 2:1-4.
[24] Gen. 4:10.
[25] Heb. 12:24.
[26] Rom. 6:2-3, Eph. 4:5.
[27] Heb. 6:4-5.
[28] Justification by grace, not works.
[29] Eph. 4:5, Mt. 25:31-46.

[30] Acts 17:19-20.
[31] Lk. 20:36.
[32] Gen. 3:9-10.
[33] Ps. 79 (Arm 78):1.
[34] Ex. 4:1-5.
[35] Num. 17:8.
[36] 2 Kg. 2:8, 14.
[37] Ex. 17:22.
[38] 1 Pet. 2:4-5, Lk. 2:34.
[39] Mt. 25:24, 41.
[40] Ps. 147 (Arm. 146-7):4.
[41] Ps. 125 (Arm. 124):1.
[42] Mt. 13:37.
[43] Eph. 5:24-27.
[44] Mt. 28:9; Jn. 20:17.
[45] Heb. 4:15.
[46] Gen. 6:14.
[47] Gen. 7:1-18.
[48] Wis. 1:5.
[49] Gen. 6:14.
[50] Ex. 31:1-11.
[51] Ex. 25:10, Num. 11:33.
[52] Jn. 14:2-3.
[53] 2 Sam. 6:6-7.
[54] 2 Sam. 6:3-7.
[55] Ex. 25:22, 1 Cor. 11:10.
[56] 1 Kg. 8:28-30.
[57] Rom. 10:18.
[58] Jos. 3:1-6.
[59] Ex. 5:6-18.
[60] 1 Cor. 10:4, Is. 28:16, Dan. 2:45, Zech. 3:9.
[61] Jn. 19:34, Ex.17:6. The piercing of Christ side on the Cross may be being compared the quenching of the thirst of the Israelites, when Moses struck the rock with his staff at Horeb.
[62] 1 Kg. 6:15-32, 1 Esd. 5:56-58.
[63] Gen. 28:18.
[64] Not "Beth-El", Gen. 28:19.
[65] Jn. 1:13.
[66] Jas. 2:5.
[67] Lk. 16:22.
[68] Rev. 21:2, 9-14.
[69] Is. 54:11, Rev. 21:10, 19-20, Lk. 19:40.
[70] Gen. 2:9.
[71] Rev. 21:9-21. Christ dwells in the Apostles and saints of the Church.
[72] Gal. 3:26.
[73] Num. 16:16-35.
[74] Jn. 3:1-12. Kéchichian, p. 407, n. 2, cites a parallel in St. Cyprian (d. 258) "Habere non potest Deum Patrem, qui Ecclesiam non habet matrem" (De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate, c. 6).
[75] 2 Sam. 7:6.
[76] Mt. 8:20.
[77] Ex. 34:29-35, 40:34-35.
[78] Ex. 19:13, Heb. 12:20, 2 Macc. 1:16, 3:24-40.
[79] Jn. 1:12, 10:34-35.
[80] Rom. 8:29, 2 Cor. 3:18.
[81] Gen. 2:8
[82] Mt. 24:27.
[83] A reference to churches named, for example, Sb. Amenaprkich – Holy Savior, or Sb. Astvatsatsin, or Sb. Etchmiadzin, the Mother See of the Armenian Church.
[84] Some versions have "expectation of the divine."

[85] Gen. 28:17.
[86] Heb. 12:22.
[87] Gal. 4:26.
[88] Heb. 9:1-5.
[89] 2 Cor. 4:13, Ps. 116(Arm. 114-115):10.
[90] St. Gregory appears to be referring to Prayer 34 above.

Prayer 76

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

God whose mercies are diverse and abundant,
mighty and awesome God who loves humankind,
blessed living God beyond description
whose mere word can make anything possible
and for whose mind nothing is unthinkable.[1]
You alone can repay the severity of thorns
with sweetness of fruit.
You who are the author of that new and amazing law of life:
to do good to those who hate
and pray for those who persecute
and to seek salvation for those who wound
and ask forgiveness for those who murder.
These are the miraculous fruits you bestow,[2]
with sweetness beyond compare
made delectable by your divine will
and savory by your praiseworthy lips,
Lord Christ, blessed on high
breath of our nostrils,[3]
and the strength of our dignity.[4]

Yet still, human beings, earth-born, prone to err
render evil to the hand offering good,[5]
but you, light and giver of light,
do not heed the blasphemy,
take no pleasure in evil,
do not want their destruction and
do not wish these sinners' death.[6]
Neither are you vexed or agitated,
nor do you succumb to anger.
Nor do you act rashly.
Nor do you wane in love.
Nor do you waver in compassion.
Nor do you change in goodness.
Neither do you turn your back
nor turn your face away.[7]
Rather you are light in all ways
with the sole aim of salvation.

B

If you wish to pardon, you are able.

If to heal, you have the power.
To give life, you have the means.
To bestow, you are generous.
To make whole, you are able.
To grant, you are most bountiful.
To justify, you are most resourceful.
To comfort, you are all powerful.
To renew, you are all capable.
To perform a miracle, you are king of all.
To establish anew, you are the creator.
To re-create, you are God.
To care for us, you are Lord of all.
To rid us of sin, you are a guardian.
To aid us, though unworthy, you are blessed.
To rescue from the hunter, you are our savior.
To pour yours upon us, you are rich.
To reach us before we ask, you lack nothing.
To widen the narrow places, you are a comfort.
To call me who am last, you are a protector.
To steady me who wavers, you are a rock.
To give me a drink when parched, you are a fountain.
To reveal to me what is covered, you are light.
To teach me what is useful, you are kind.
To overlook my faults, you are long-suffering.
To refrain from judging my minor transgressions,
    you are exalted.
To lend a hand to a servant like me,
    you are good master.
To shelter with your right hand, you are a provider.
To offer a remedy to me who am infirm, you are a restorer.
To fill me when ignorant, you are a teacher.[8]
To accept me when I petition, you are a refuge.

C

Indeed, all these are yours, Lord of mercy,
not just in words, but also in reality,
especially are you foremost among
the martyrs in your patient suffering,
you, who for my salvation
came to the battlefield in force to soften
the stiff-necked unruliness of my haughty body
with the tempering instruction of tormenting tribulation
and taking our nature, bore on your blameless body
the penalty of grievous torment
in order to teach by your example
the mercy you have for us.
Ever blessed.
Amen.

[1] Mt. 19:26.
[2] Mt. 5:44.
[3] Lam. 4:20.
[4] Ps. 28 (Arm. 29):8.
[5] Ps. 38 (Arm. 37):21.
[6] Wis. 1:13, Ez. 18:32.
[7] Jer. 2:27.
[8] Lk. 11:1.

Prayer 77

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Since today is a blessed day,
when the light was renewed,
transforming the passing creatures of the earth
into different and heavenly immutable beings, [1]
and dividing the day, and human destiny, into two equal parts,[2]
when the high were laid low and the humble raised up, [3]
making this the most awe-filled day of Lent, Holy Friday,
when it is fitting for me to write
this prayer voicing joy mixed with terror; therefore,
I think it appropriate to speak now of
the suffering you endured for me, God of all.

B

You stood, with my nature, before a tribunal of your creatures,[4]
and did not speak, giver of speech.
You did not utter a word, creator of tongues.
You did not release your voice, shaker of the world.
You did not make a sound, trumpet of majesty.
You did not answer back with accounts of your good deeds.
You did not silence them with their wrongs.
You did not deliver your betrayer to death.
You did not struggle when bound.
You did not squirm when whipped.
You did not fight back when spat upon.
You did not resist when beaten.
You did not take affront when mocked.
You did not frown when ridiculed.
They stripped you of your cloak, as from a weakling,
and dressed you like a condemned prisoner.[5]

If my Lord had not been forced twice to drink vinegar and gall,[6]
he would not have been able to cleanse me of the accumulated bile
of our forefathers.[7]
He tasted despair and overcame hesitancy.
They dragged him violently and brought him back disrespectfully.
They condemned him, humiliated him by flogging
before a motley crowd.
They knelt before him in ridicule
and put a crown of disdain upon his head.

C

They gave you no rest, Life-giver,
even forcing you to bear the instrument of your death.
You accepted with forbearance.
You received it with sweetness.
You bore it with patience.
You submitted to the wooden cross of grief, like one condemned.
Like a lily of the field, you shouldered the weapon of life,[8]
so that your throne in my body might be protected
against the terrors of the night[9]
turning the last judgment into a joyful banquet.

They led him out like a sacrificial lamb.
They hung him like Isaac's ram whose horns were caught in the thicket.[10]
They spread him on the table of the cross like a sacrifice.
They nailed him like a common criminal.

They persecuted you, like an outlaw, treating
you in your serenity, like a bandit,[11]
you in your majesty, like a miserable wretch,
you who are adored by cherubim, like a despised man,[12]
you who are the definition of life, like one deserving of a slaughter,
you, the author of the Gospels, like one who blasphemed the Law,[13]
you, the Lord and the fulfillment of the prophets,
like one who cut the Scriptures,[14]
you, the radiance of glory and the image of the mystery of the Father, beyond mortal understanding, as if
you are the adversary of the will of him who bore you, [15]
you who are blessed, like someone banished,
you who came to release the bonds of the Law, like a heretic,[16]
you, the consuming fire, like a condemned prisoner,[17]
you who inspire awe in heaven and earth, like one deserving punishment,[18]
you, covered in unapproachable light, like some earthly quarry.[19]

D

O, sweet Lord,
forbearing doer of good, merciful and compassionate,
Lord of all, who for the sake of infirm and unruly servants like me
submitted to everything willingly according to your plan
together with your perfectly human body,
submitted even to the sleepy tomb of the sepulcher,
who lack nothing of divine perfection, being identical with God
who is beyond human understanding,
yet bore human indignity with patience beyond words,
you rose with your body, alive and of your own power,
in exalted light, with undiminished humanity
and flawless divinity.

You are blessed for your glory
praised for your compassion,
and always exalted for your mercy,
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Mt. 27:51-52.
[2] Zech. 14:7, Mk. 15:33.
[3] Rev. 21:1.
[4] Mt. 26:57-66, 27:11-26, Lk. 23:8-12.
[5] Mt. 27:28-31, Mk. 15:20.
[6] Mt. 27:34, Mk. 15:23, Mt. 27:48, Jn. 19:29: St. Gregory changes to the third person singular here, after addressing the first part of his prayer in the second person to Christ.
[7] A reference to the original sin of Adam.
[8] S. of S. 2:1, Mt. 6:28.
[9] Sleep is the analog of death upon which there is judgment.
[10] Gen. 22:13.
[11] Mt. 26:55.
[12] Is. 53:3.
[13] Mt. 26:65-66.
[14] Mt. 5:17.
[15] Heb. 1:3.
[16] Gal. 3:13.
[17] Dt. 4:24.
[18] Is. 53:4.
[19] 1 Tim. 6:16.

Prayer 78

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, fallen down upon my face with my earthly nature,
humbly on my knees in worship,
I kiss the life-giving feet of your mercifulness, doer of good.[1]
Offering this to your majesty,
I pray you, my sole keeper, who loves humankind, compassionate,
giver of life, mighty God, who rescues and protects us.

May your suffering for our salvation not be in vain,
God, who became man for my sake.
May the sweat mixed with blood on the night of your betrayal
not be without purpose.[2]
May the gifts of your light not be eclipsed, gifts
that you have given freely and without compensation to a wretch like me.
May the good news of your grace
renewed by the blood drops from your side not be erased.[3]
May the fruit of your suffering, offered for my neediness,
not be senseless.
May the banished Deceiver not dare
to possess me, whom you have made.

B

Indeed, you vanquish the desires of the Evil One by your will.
You confound anew the one whom you once cast out
and again defeat completely the one condemned.[4]
Do not hold back your words of salvation,
which being offered to you
return your own creatures to you.

You have done good works beyond telling
at the unexpected moment of despair,
when all movement of life had ceased and disappeared,
you who are immortal died and brought the dead back to life.[5]
If you changed the Old Testament rule of "an eye for an eye,"[6]
do not now block the plainer, more flexible and yet more feasible rule,
O source of mercy, compassionate, blessed and forbearing King.
Say the word, by which with almighty force,
you brought light into existence on the first day,[7]
and I will immediately be made well.[8]
And though I have failed to follow your light,
may you visit me anyway in the form of your Father's radiant dawn,[9]

and may I, an unworthy servant, be summoned before you
for your mercy and grace.
The time has run out for paying my debts,
so turn your face toward me, when I am in pain,
you who lighten the darkness for the disheartened.[10]

Block and seal the escape routes
through which your good things drain away
from my memory.
Preserve in me the grace of your permanently sparkling treasure
by which I might be found worthy to be called yours
and be protected by your boundless goodness.

C

Have mercy upon me, compassionate Lord, I pray you.
Have mercy upon me, almighty Lord, again have mercy.
Do not repay my wrongdoing with pain, O Lord who is good in all ways.
Do not take from me the grace you have given.
Do not snatch away the breath of the all-blessed Holy Spirit.
Do not erase the venerable stamp of your majestic image.
Do not raise the thorns of sin in the purity of my mind.[11]
Do not cut the tie that binds me to you with steadfast love.
Do not deprive me of the powerful art of speech.
Do not weaken the ability of my right hand
to distribute the parcels of your light.[12]
Do not enter my death sentence in your book of life.[13]
Do not record my sins and assess them to me.
Do not recollect them and do not embarrass me with them.
Do not blame me and do not trample me.
Do not register my infirmity.
Do not gather my destructive acts.
Do not accuse me like some criminal.
Do not let the tree of damnation grow within me.
Do not unleash in me the branches of destruction.
Do not let the buds of my sins blossom.
Do not demand payment on my debt note.
Do not permit these sins to mature into evil fruits.
Do not count my prolific misdeeds on the tree branches the fingers of the earth you created.
Do not pronounce your awesome word to confront me with my iniquity.[14]
Do not permit my willfulness to betray my soul into slavery.
Do not honor me here, only to condemn me in the hereafter.
Do not let the lesser, passing things of this world diminish my eternal good.
Do not measure the endless glory to come by the meager intervals of the here and now.
Do not pawn the incorruptible life for the valley of sighing grief.
Do not exchange your light beyond words for the shadows of the darkness here.
Do not drop the reins of my soul to follow my wayward tracks.
Do not deem the bridge of my passing life as sufficient repose for me.
Do not keep the well of my mind in the shadows

only to be cleared when it is too late in the life to come.
If you were to add all of my innumerable misdeeds,
I would be the living dead.
If you were to take this all to heart,
I would be spontaneously consumed in flameless fire.
If you were to examine my iniquities,
I would completely melt away, without even coming before you.
If you were to allow the sprouts of sin to grow with me,
I would be choked off by them and waste away.

D

Always powerful, almighty God,
glance my way, so that
the sins within me might be set to flight,
so that your goodness might come in their stead.

O compassionate God, praiseworthy provider,
inextinguishable light, with unbounded power,
command that the essence of my nature be established anew
under the roof of my body and its parts, in order
that you might dwell here with happy fervor,
and stay enthroned without ever leaving,
uniting my soul with you and
banishing completely the corruption of sin,
immortal king, Lord Jesus Christ, who gives life to all,
blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] Lk. 7:38.
[2] Lk. 22:44.
[3] Jn. 19:34.
[4] Rev. 20:10.
[5] Lk. 7:14, Mk. 5:41, Jn. 11:43.
[6] Mt. 5:38-43.
[7] Gen. 1:3.
[8] Mt. 8:2.
[9] Heb. 1:3.
[10] Jn. 1:5.
[11] Is. 5:6, 1 Macc. 4:36.
[12] The Eucharist, or perhaps his writings.
[13] Rev. 20:12.
[14] Mt. 25:41-45.

Prayer 79

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Remember, Lord, Lord of mercies,
who loves justice, true God,
to look again upon me in my ever erring human condition.
Check again the circulation of my blood throughout my body.
Like a physician examine me,
for I am a man possessed of an unripe mind filled with faulty thoughts
as you yourself know, seer of the non-existent,[1] for you
alone are devoid of the darkness of falsehood.
This is why it is more proper to record me among sinners,
I who repeatedly succumb to the weaknesses of human frailty
like all other mortals born of the flesh on earth,
otherwise your word might appear false.[2]

For you indeed know that
"they were made evil and their wickedness is innate,
and their way of thinking will never change,"[3]
as the learned man, wise in the ways of the soul,
observed long ago in his writings.

B

Ease the severity of the torment
that awaits me and
those children of hell, the retinue of eternal death.[4]

Lift away my shameful sins
that are kept to reprimand me, wretch that I am,
at the tribunal of the last judgment.

Let it be for my peace that my punishment has already been given by your mercy,[5]
so that unbearable terror does not loom before me,
and hopelessness might not overwhelm life-giving contrition.

Terrifying day of judgment,
judge that cannot be bought or deceived,
awful shame, fearsome rebuke,
inescapable reprimand, unavoidable torment,
terror that cannot be comforted,
trembling that cannot be stilled,
inconsolable weeping, incurable gnashing of teeth,[6]
untreatable disease,

the curse of your awesome divine word,[7]
the shutting down of compassion, cutting off of mercy.
At the time when the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll[8]
and the earth will be shaken to its very foundations,
and billowing waves of the tempestuous sea,
pursue each other, crash against each other and
counteract each other's force,
jolting and shaking
the foundations of the earth's thick surface
across its expanse
with forceful blows to its very core
and with thunderous sound,
laying the mountains low,
and melting the substance of stone with fire,
with all the other elements of nature at that time:

then the heavens will be cleared in purity
and the creatures together with all their elements
will be recreated in new form
and our hidden misdeeds will be made known[9]
and our invisible passions will be revealed
the conduct of each person's inner beliefs
will be displayed on our bodies[10]
and the king of heaven will sit at his tribunal
with the due sentence in his hands.[11]

C

Woe to me, sevenfold woe!
An endless perdition in the measure of this cipher, seven,
that symbolizes the infinity of numbers.[12]
What shall my pitiful soul do on the solemn day of peril?
For the thought of what lies ahead is worse than the event itself.
As one of the prophets vividly wrote,
it is as if one were to escape from the clutches of a lion,
only to run into a bear,
and fleeing the bear,
you enter a house and lean against the wall,
only to have a hand bitten by a snake.[13]
And he makes the situation yet more terrifying,
saying, "Indeed, the Day of the Lord is darkness"[14]
"That Day is gloom and darkness, a day of clouds and thick fog."[15]

D

When the guardian angel who is our companion for life,[16]
accuses us like a stern official
and the awesome judge justly reprimands us,

the king's servants rush about without delay,
inviting some to life and condemning others to shame,
showing to some a cheerful face,
but to me appearing fearsome and horrifying.
To some they shall offer a halo of glistening light,
and others mortal perdition.
To the just, the voice of good news,
but to me, the sad news of endless grief.
When for the good, the victory of death itself expires,[17]
for me, wayward soul, it is repeatedly extended.
At that point knocking at the door will do no good,
for my quota of mercy will have run out.[18]

There, when the amazing and miraculous book is opened, showing
all manner of hitherto hidden acts done by human beings and
the conduct of our human nature,
for which reason all beings were created,
then upon each body all this shall be manifest in full,[19]
so that before our eyes shall ineffably appear,[20]
that which is sealed away from the comprehension of this world.
Here, heaven can be found at the cost of lamentations and tears,
there, these are despised and rejected like so much untimely vanity.
The sighs of the heart that are not delivered now
will not be accepted later.
Kindness sparingly sown[21]
shall not light the way before us.

There, the loud-voiced accusers shall be
the ark against the lawless of the time of Noah,
and the Old Testament against those who blasphemed the Lord,
along with the awe-inspiring sign of the cross against us now.
I will be accused
first for breaking the natural law of our earliest forbears,
second for dishonoring the tabernacle of worship to the invisible spirit, and
third for the blood of great God.
And I by my own actions here
have brought a multitude of torments upon myself in the hereafter.

How shall I be consoled when my hope is cut short?
For if the forces of light, the ranks of the just,
who are glorified in benedictions, tremble in fear,
and cannot bear the terrifying face of the great judge,
how shall I come before him, miserable wretch that I am,
a disinherited son condemned to death,
who does not expect a halo
but unbearable punishment
and endless ruin?

E

Hasten to extend your hand of salvation to me, for I am captured by the Destroyer,
Lord almighty beyond words, who gives all things.
For with your help, I might turn back from the gates of hell,
and properly armed, I might escape punishment completely without harm,
seeing with my mind's eye the things to come,
I am already sufficiently chastened
by the terrifying reports of awful tortures that await me.

By your good will, I might be saved unscathed,
and not thrown to the young lions,
who beg for me as food,
so they can devour me with their ferocious teeth
and fill their belly of death with me,
who has grown fat in this world.
They will drag me away to the storehouse of surplus sin,
there to consume me forever in torment.
For you alone are able to wrest me from the jaws of death,
and deliver me to everlasting life and bliss,
refuge of all, king of light,
Lord Jesus Christ, blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] Gen. 8:21.
[2] Ps. 51 (Arm. 50):6.
[3] Wis. 12:10.
[4] Mt. 23:15.
[5] Is. 53:5.
[6] Mt. 25:30.
[7] Mt. 25:41.
[8] Rev. 6:14.
[9] Is. 65:17, Rev. 21:1,5.
[10] Lk. 8:17.
[11] Mt. 25:31.
[12] Rev. 8:13 (in the Middle Ages, the number 7 was associated with infinity).
[13] Am. 5:19.
[14] Am. 5:18, 20.
[15] Zeph. 1:15.
[16] Ps. 34 (Arm. 33):7.
[17] 1 Cor. 15:54-55, Rev. 20:14.
[18] Mt. 25:11-13, Lk. 13:25.
[19] 1 Cor. 3:13.
[20] Rev. 20:12.
[21] 2 Cor. 9:6.

Prayer 80

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, after all this despair
and terrible heartbreak,
angry reprimands and divine wrath,
with a soul completely tormented by grief,
I pray to you, Holy Mother of God,
angel from humankind, a cherub in bodily form, heavenly queen,
pure as air, clean as light,
clear as the image of the Morning Star at its height,
higher than the forbidden dwelling place of the holy of holies,[1]
place of the blessed covenant, a breathing Eden,[2]
tree of immortality, guarded by a fiery sword,[3]
strengthened and protected by the exalted Father,
prepared and purified by the Holy Spirit that rested upon you,[4]
adorned by the Son who dwelt in you as his tabernacle,[5]
only Son of the Father, and for you the first born,[6]
your Son by birth, and your Lord by creation,
together with your unsoiled purity, spotless goodness,
together with your immaculate holiness, guardian intercessor.

Receive these prayers from me, who believe in you.
Together with my ode to you[7]
offer and present them to God as your own.
Weave and mix into your prayers of happiness and adoration
the bitter sighs that I, a sinner, utter,
you, who are the tree of life bearing the blessed fruit,[8]
so that always receiving help from you and through your good deeds,
and taking refuge in the light of your holy motherhood,
I may live for Christ, your Son and Lord.

B

Assist me on your wings of prayer,
you, proclaimed Mother of all the living,[9]
so that my departure from this earthly valley
may be without torment, leading to life in the lodgings you have prepared,[10]
that my death might be light, though I am weighed down by iniquity.

Make the day of my anguish a festive holiday,
you, healer of the sorrow of Eve.[11]
Speak on my behalf, beg and beseech for my sake,
for as I believe your purity is beyond words,
I also believe in the power of your words.[12]

Blessed among women, I am in trouble.
Help me with your tears.
Ask on bended knee for my reconciliation, Mother of God.[13]
Care for me who am miserable, altar of the exalted.
Lend me a hand, for I have fallen, heavenly temple.
Glorify your Son,
by performing upon me the divine miracle of mercy and pardon,
handmaid and Mother of God.[14]

C

Magnify your honor through me,
and my salvation will be manifested through you
if you find me, Mother of the Lord
if you pity me, pure one,
if you rescue me in my waywardness, immaculate one,
if you care for me in my fear, happy one,
if you lift my head bowed in shame, good grace,
if you intercede for me in my despair, ever Holy Virgin,
if you include me in my rejection, exalted of God,
if you show me kindness, undoer of malice,
if you steady me in my doubt, repose,
if you calm my anxiety, pacifier,
if you show me the way from which I have strayed, praised one,
if you appear before the tribunal for me, vanquisher of death,
if you mellow my bitterness, sweetness,
if you eliminate my separation from God, reconciliation,
if you lift away my uncleanness, you who stamp out corruption,
if you save me in my condemnation, living light,
if you cut off the sound of my wailing, bliss,
if you restore me, for I am broken, salve of life,
if you look upon me in my ruin, you filled with the Spirit,
if you visit me with compassion, bequeathed legacy.[15]

You alone are blessed on the pure lips of happy tongues.
Indeed if but a drop of your virgin milk
were to rain on me, it would give me life,
Mother of our exalted Lord Jesus,
creator of heaven and earth,

whom you bore complete in humanity and total in divinity,
who is glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
uniting his essence and our nature in a manner beyond human understanding.
He is all and in all, one of the Holy Trinity.[16]
To him glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Heb. 9:7.
[2] Gen. 12:7, Gen. 2:8.
[3] Gen. 3:24.
[4] Lk. 1:35.
[5] Jn. 1:14.
[6] Lk. 2:7.
[7] St. Gregory wrote an Ode to the Mother of God in 984.
[8] Lk. 1:42.
[9] Gen. 3:20.
[10] Jn. 14:2-3.
[11] Gen. 3:16.
[12] Jn. 2:3-5.
[13] Lk. 1:42-43.
[14] Lk. 1:38.
[15] Jn. 19:27.
[16] Col. 3:11.

Prayer 81

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Accept, kind and merciful God,
with the prayers of the Mother of God,
the petitions of the immortal angels, adorned in light,
which sing, without ceasing, with their pure mouths
in constant intercession for my sake.
The angels are virtuous, created good by you, doer of good.
They are ignorant of evil, established by your command, which rules all, God who is.
They are a mighty force at your disposal, exalted God,
holy, pure, spotless, blessed,
splendid, victorious and invincible,
swift as a flash of the mind.

These guardian angels serve us and plead for us,
just as for the barren fig tree,[1]
that did not give fruit for three years,
an eternity encompassing past, present and future,
for a long period it took root
in the vineyard of this world,
decorated with useless foliage, but gave no fruit.
And this is the very image of wretched humankind.

The angels brood over us constantly.
They aid us in our frailty.[2]
They tend our portion of virtue
with everlasting life they pray for our salvation,
saying these words: "Forsake not the work of your hands."[3]
For truly, this prayer is ours.
You, God on high arranged for them
to say this for our sake,
for they were created by the word,
and we by the energy of your hand.[4]
They shall come with your only begotten Son,
as fearsome witnesses at the last judgment,[5]
true accusers of the sins of earthly beings,
before the terrifying tribunal,
justly and fairly counseling us.
There too, they sympathize with us, pleading with sighs,
the perpetual chant of their voices:

Have mercy, you who created them.
Do not destroy them.[6]

B

Now, with their voices in thanksgiving
and their prayers, immortal and sublime,
inhale also the savory scent of our sighs, creator of all.
You exceed those above and below with your compassion,
since from you flow all good deeds for us and for them.
And thanks to the splendor of the incorruptible beings,
miraculous in their fiery forms,[7]
unadulterated purity, sinless, made of fire and spirit, invincible,
with the immense advantage of their higher status,
their abundant, brilliant knowledge,
fervent with an ardor that does not cool,
with an innate passion for the love of God,
like them, may our cold, smoldering hearts,
be rekindled brightly at the sublime mystery of the holy table,
which is your sanctuary,
and without drowsiness or lethargy,
may we await the blessed command
of your life-giving will, creator of all,
to be united with God inseparably
in cherubic virtue.

They are the great heavenly principalities,
soldiers, pure and awesome,
the virtuous and noble ministers in your heavenly kingdom,
the glimmering rays of your cloud of light, God on high.

C

Through them, Jesus, show your merciful love for humankind
for me also, sinner born of earth that I am.
Through the prayers of my guardian angel
turn me toward the good path of your light,
so that the commendation of my soul
which you entrusted to his protection,
may be received by you from this life,
with a joyous heart, jubilant within me,
blameless and blessed by you,[8]
might he bring me forward and present me
with a glad and cheerful face,
to you, praised and merciful Lord,

sublime king of glory beyond comprehension,
in the midst of the blissful choir in tumultuous jubilation.
And to you, who are beyond understanding,
with your Father, beyond reach,
and your Holy Spirit beyond words –
glory, honor and adoration,
unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

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[1] Lk. 13:6-9.
[2] Book of Tobit, where the Angel Raphael comes to the aid of the persecuted, but righteous Tobit.
[3] Ps. 138 (Arm. 137):8.
[4] Gen. 2:7.
[5] Mt. 25:31.
[6]per Kéchichian, p. 434, n. 2, this phrase is a citation from a hymn to the angels in the Armenian Ritual; *see also,* Zirekyants, *Reflections*, pp. 152-53.
[7] Heb. 1:7.
[8] Mt. 25:34.

Prayer 82

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Lord God, doer of good, generous king,
refuge of life, form of light,
spacious place of repose,
who for the sake of sinners like me
came, took the form of man
accomplishing things beyond telling
and performed miracles,
even perfecting our humanity[1]
with the fullness of your divinity.

Now for the holy apostles,
whom you ordained with your heavenly hand,[2]
and anointed by your Holy Spirit,[3]
whose deserving praises I have sung
as much as I could
for your glory, Lord of all, in another work.[4]
Have mercy upon me in the memory of your chosen.

Through them prepare for me a way to the most desired bliss.
May the voice of these good shepherds
be heard beckoning me sweetly to eternal life.
May I partake of the jubilant hope
of everlasting salvation
with the lives of our leaders, the first to be graced with this honor,
the glorified ranks, the founts of wisdom,
the sublime evangelists, the illustrious princes,
those with sparkling crowns,
and those adorned in the untarnished
brilliant radiance of the strength of grace, yes,
those who have been made perfect with
the oil of gladness, your lordly light.

B

Christ God on high,
accept me together with the disciples
under your great command
and the martyrs chosen for self-sacrifice,

who, through mortification and torments of the flesh,
peril to life and limb and all manner of suffering,
despite their earthly nature,
struggled against every element of material existence to
win halos, transcending and being reborn in spirit and,
courageously departing this world, in the words of
the prophets,
as true witnesses to all the trials and tribulations of death.
They comprehended the unequivocal good, unseen and hidden,
even in this world with the hope of things seen.[5]
The disciples of the apostles and their companions in suffering
are also equal to them in their works
and in their consummate and utter perfection
are jubilant with endless bliss.
By their pleasing and acceptable pleading,
honoring their prayers as a blood-drenched sacrifice of dedicated service
offered with the incense of sweat,
accept me again to share their lot
and be established in you with everlasting salvation.

C

Son of God, although I am a sinner deserving punishment,
accept me,
together with those who fight with fire and sword, covered in blood,
and together with the holy ascetics, hermit fathers,
and your other followers,
all of whom with invincible bravery and undistracted vigilance,
have courageously struggled against the baseness of the body
and fended off the bodiless Satan.
In the perpetual battlefield of our earthly life
without being worn down
upon the waves of this expansive worldly sea,
despite the heaviness of their bodily ark,
they sent their souls soaring in lightness,
reaching the safe haven of eternal life.
And like those who love the celestial realm,
truly and boldly, without reservations,
they have crowned themselves with
the tiara of victory, adorned with brilliant gems.[6]
By grace of their worthy prayers and dedicated supplications,
accept me too.

D

Mixing my impure words
with the glorious prayers of the blessed,
who for my sake call out to you in a pleasing manner,
I too call out with them,
sour notes amidst the sweet,
thorns amidst the smoothness,
ugliness amidst splendor,
mud amidst fair pearls,
impurities amidst pure gold,
worthless rocks amidst silver,
contradictions amidst the truth,
grains of sand amidst the soft bread.

Listen, mighty, ingenious, praised, Lord,
to their prayers for me and mine for them,
for their praise, my salvation, and for your glory,
O Lord, all-compassionate, doer of good, blessed,
long-suffering, potent, beyond understanding,
beyond words, incorruptible and uncreated.
Yours are the gifts, and yours is grace.
You are the beginning and cause of all good.

E

You are not the accuser, but the liberator,[7]
not the destroyer, but the rescuer,
not the executioner, but the savior,[8]
not the scatterer, but the gatherer,[9]
not the traitor, but the deliverer.
You do not pull down, but lift up.
You do not knock down, but stand upright.
You do not curse, but bless.
You do not take revenge, but give grace.
You do not torment, but comfort.
You do not erase, but write.
You do not shake, but steady.
You do not trample, but console.
You do not invent the causes of death,
but seek the means to preserve life.
You do not forget to visit.
You do not abandon the good.
You do not withhold compassion.

You do not bring the sentence of death, but the legacy of life.
You are not opposed for your generosity.
You are not blasphemed for your grace.
You are not cursed for your bounty.
You are not insulted for your free gifts.
You are not mocked for your patience.
You are not blamed for your pardon.
You are not accused for your goodness.
You are not dishonored for your sweetness.
You are not despised for your meekness.
For these, we send not complaints,
but gratitude that cannot be silenced.
Take away my sins, Almighty.
Remove the curse from me, blessed.
Pardon my debts, merciful.
Erase my transgressions, compassionate.
Extend your hand of deliverance
and I will instantly be made perfect.
What is easier than this for you Lord,
and what is more important for me, a debtor?
Thus, providential Lord, revive me
made in your image and brought to life by your breath[10]
in order to renew the breath of your pure enlightening grace,
protecting my sinful soul.

F

Do not dispatch me, merciful Lord, before my time.
Do not let me depart this life empty-handed, before my journey is accomplished.
Do not offer me the cup of bitterness in my time of thirst.
Do not block me, compassionate Lord, from the path of spiritual well-being,
and do not permit the nightfall of death to overtake me
like a band of thieves in a sudden ambush.[11]
May the feverish heat of the sun at an unexpected moment
not cut off and dry up my roots forever.[12]
And may the lunacy of the moon, arriving in secret, not cause harm.[13]
May the frosty mass of my sin not be preserved,
and may I not drown in the rushing waters of my life.
May rest not bring death
and slumber not lead to slaughter.
May sleep not destroy me
and may drowsiness not corrupt me.
May my death not strike me at an inappropriate moment.
And may the release of my spirit upward not be seized and cast down.

G

You are the Lord, you are compassionate, you are the doer of good.
You are patient and almighty.
In all things you are strong beyond comprehension and words[14]
to pardon, to save, to grant life,
to enlighten, to establish anew,
to snatch from the jaws of ferocious beasts,
or from the teeth of dragons and restore life,
to lead from the depths of the abyss to the light of bliss,[15]
and from drowning in the waves of sin
to be seated among the righteous with the glory of the blessed.
Every soul awaits you with hope and expectation,
longing for your grace,[16]
whether heavenly or earthly,
whether fallen in sin or exalted with righteousness,
whether master or servant,
whether lady or maid.
And in your hand is the life breath of every creature.[17]
To you with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
glory forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Heb. 5:9; 12:2.
[2] Lk. 24:50.
[3] Acts 2:3-4.
[4] St. Gregory appears to be referring to his Ode to the Apostles and the sixty-six disciples in his Ode to the Cross and the Holy Virgin, dated between 984 and 1000. Critical Edition, p. 1100, n. 4.
[5] Heb. 11:1.
[6] Phil. 3:13.
[7] Jn. 8:11, Lk. 9:56.
[8] Jn. 10:10.
[9] Lk. 15:4.
[10] Gen 1:26, 2:7.
[11] Lk. 12:39.
[12] Ps. 121 (Arm. 120), 6, Mt. 13:6.
[13] Ps. 121 (Arm. 120):6.
[14] Gen. 18:14; Lk. 1:37.
[15] Jon
[16] Rom. 8:18-25.
[17] Job 12:10.

Prayer 83

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Exalted and inscrutable, terrifying power,
lord of creation, king of heaven,
creator of angels, who fashioned the spirits,
and made the fiery beings,
good chief of souls, helping hand,[1]
tranquil repose, vision of enlightenment, [2]
brightness of bliss, path to beatitude,
cause of life, source of intelligence,
salvation without evil, guide to peace,
rampart of strength, bulwark of protection,
wall of the great fire of blessing,[3] definition of unvengeful,[4]
remember the lamentations and confessions in this book,
for those of the human race who are our enemies as well,
and for their benefit accord them pardon and mercy.

Do not be angry at them for my sake, Lord,
as if they blasphemed the saints,
on account of your love which is upon me,
but rather forgive them their transgressions
for they justly reprimand and rebuke evil.

For when we both appear before you, just judge,
perhaps some of those who have harmed me have sinned little
and justly spoken against me,
whereas I have committed innumerable and
immeasurable breaches of my vows,
with respect to you, generous Lord.

B

Remember your greatness, Lord,
when looking upon my lowliness.
And while I petition you to do good to my enemies,
you in your magnanimity beyond words
show your miraculous favor toward them who are also your enemies.[5]
Do not destroy those who persecute me, but reform them,
root out the vile ways of this world,
and plant the good in me and them,

especially since you are light and hope,
and I am darkness and foolishness.
You are true good, praiseworthy Lord,
and I am thoroughly evil and helpless.
You are the Lord of everything on earth and in the heavens,
and I do not control my breath or spirit.
You are exalted, free of any needs,
and I am in pain and peril.
You are above all the passions of earth,
and I am base, foul clay.
In the words of the prophet:
you endure in perpetual infinity on high
and I continuously perish.[6]
In you there is neither darkness nor deceit,
and in me, they are complete,
since I have wasted my inheritance of goodness.

Take me out of my prison and free me from my bonds.[7]
Remove my chains and rescue me from drowning.
Free me from anxiety and release me from my irons.
Deliver me from preoccupations and banish my doubts.
Console my sadness and calm my vexation.
Dispel my afflictions and quiet my agitation.
Cure me of my tears and stop my sighing.
Drive away my lamentations and heal my sobbing.

God of mercy and giver of sweetness,
do not despise me, whom you have redeemed with your almighty blood.
Do not condemn me to a place of perdition.
Prop me up for I have reached the shores of death[8]
through all manner of fatal illness.

C

Look how through the seasons of my life
my vain acts have piled up and accrued,
for from the day I appeared on this earth,
I have been good for nothing,
and in the field of my mother's womb
I was a sprouting thorn bush of sin.
Nevertheless, do not be a wounding sting for me,
as you were for the house of Judah or the descendants of Ephraim.[9]
And since I sowed in my soul
weeds that prick, poison that numbs me,
instead of the good seeds of wheat, [10]

as the Scriptures say, which are older than the Gospels,[11]
why should I not call my soul a foul field,
choking with the accursed thorns of sin?[12]
I did not sow justice, as Hosea said,
so why should I reap and gather the fruit of life?[13]
I lost the pure innocence of my soul,
as the prophet said of Israel:[14]
Now can you restore it, Lord?
I spread forth and opened the bed of my will
to the demons of lust, in the wayward ways of Judah.[15]
It is in your hands to restore that innocence.

D

If the union of the prostitute with the prophet[16]
purified her, how much more, Salvation,
will our spiritual union purify me?
If the inanimate sun which you created,
provider of the earth, dries the foul swamps
and brings the immature fruits to ripeness,
then you, Creator of all, Holy Spirit of God,
how much more can you flush away the silt of my wrongdoing
and cleanse the foul pus of my accumulated sin?
For this reason I hasten in this prayer to ask that you do good
to those who hate me,
so that you, blessed compassion, would not reject me,
though I am deserving of death for my mortal sins and you should
banish me from your all-protecting sight.

Give me life, although I have sinned in all ways,
with every part of my body
and the conduct of my soul, give me life
that I might contemplate only that which is pleasing to you.

To seek benefits for those who have done good is
the law of nature, an instinctive urge.
And indeed, all manner of people are capable
of following this first rule.
But the second, that is, to pray for your enemies
with the care of the first, comes close to being the divine.[17]
For this reason, I presented the second first,
that is praying for my enemies
before asking favor for the good.

E

Remember twice those
who, in your exalted name,
accepted me, unworthy soul that I am,
and give them, most generous Lord, doer of good, without spite,
the reward of the just and the prophets.[18]
Although I may be devoid of virtues forever,
considering the belief and by the hope and expectation,
they in their reasonable judgment have regarded
those like me, a slave to sin,
as if I had a secret compartment in my soul
filled with your life-giving relics.

Approaching me with your infinite compassion,
cleanse me, whose sins cannot be hidden from your sight
or from your unerring judgment.
Thus protect me from being shamefully condemned
before the tribunal of the universe.

And as those whom you love, those who for your sake
see your glory reflected on me, unworthy though I am,
for they look upon my fine vestments
without knowing the defects they conceal
and call me in my pitiful state "blessed,"
may you, ingenious, bountiful, content
Lord, who loves humankind, with infinite mercy,
for the sake of the sighs of my most wretched soul,
settle with them according to their faith.
On the terrible day of judgment,
when everything is tried and the good are separated from the bad,[19]
offer and grant them your incorruptible glory
and your never fading crown.[20]

F

You are the guarantee of salvation for a starving slave like me,
made worthy by the Word, your gift,[21]
to be redeemed for the benefits of heaven[22]
by the greatness of your endless and priceless treasure.

Lead me beside the still waters.[23]
Erect in me like a monument, unchanging God, a ready assurance.
Establish in me, praised Lord, a sincere and unshakable hope.
Accord me, you who provide everything, an impartial defense.

In my unsteadiness, accord me the tranquility of virtue,
in my doubt, the solace of enlightenment,
in my mourning, great happiness,
in my weariness, hope to live,
in my abandonment, steadfast help,
in my retreat, return without stumbling.
For all of this is yours, and all of this is from you,
and through you are distributed the necessities of all creation,
and to you is fitting glory,
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Ps. 73 (Arm 72):23.
[2] Mt. 11:28-29.
[3] Zech. 2:5.
[4] Hos. 11:9.
[5] Lk. 6:27-28.
[6] Ps. 102 (Arm. 101):26-27.
[7] Ps. 142 (Arm. 141):7, Lk. 13:16.
[8] Is. 38:1.
[9] Hos. 5:12.
[10] Job 31:40.
[11] Mt. 13:25.
[12] Is. 5:6; Mt. 13:7.
[13] Hos. 10:12.
[14] Ezek. 23:3.
[15] Is. 57:8.
[16] Hos. 1:3.
[17] Mt. 5:46-48.
[18] Mt. 10:41.
[19] Mt. 25:32.
[20] 1 Pet. 5:4, 1 Cor. 9:25.
[21] Mt. 28:18-20.
[22] Lk. 19:13.
[23] Ps. 23 (22):2.

Prayer 84

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Heavenly monarch, exalted king,
Lord of all, hope of each,
creator of the visible, establisher of the invisible,[1]
cause of being, shaper of the future,
giver of light, impulse of dawn that prepares the morrow,
who makes the evening appear and conjures the night,[2]
ingenious artisan, applied wisdom,
blessed pardoner who liquidates sin, banishes pain,[3]
and neutralizes bitterness,
preserver of tranquility, who induces slumber,
arranges sleep, grants rest,
who sustains our breathing, maintains our senses,
dissipates our phantoms, moderates our imaginings,
displaces our terrors,
transformation of sadness, suppression of anxiety,
dispeller of doubts, calmer of turmoil,
who strikes fear in the heart of the wicked,
and cuts down demons,
wards off disease and drowns scandal,
protect me with your hand that shaped the heavens.
Strengthen me with your exalted right hand.
Take me under your almighty wings.
Blanket me with your divine care.
Bolster me with the vigilance of your heavenly host.
Encircle me with your army of immortals.
Surround me with the attachments of angels.
Fend off the enemy with the forces of the vigilant.
Support me through prayers to your divine Mother, for I am shaken.
Assign your best troops to guard me.
Open the eyes of my mind along with the eyes in my face.
Sober the passions that weigh me down along with my troubled soul.
Lift away, Lord, from my senses the stupor that covers them.
Remove, Lord who only does good, the heavy veil of darkness.
Make your mercy dawn with the breaking of day.
Make your righteous sun shine on the gloom of my heart with morning light.[4]
May the ray of your glory illumine the chamber of my mind.
May the sign of your cross cast its shadow over
my whole spirit and body.

I commit to you today
this tabernacle of mine,
which you have given to shelter my soul.[5]
For you are God beyond understanding,
generous in all things,
perfect in all ways,
blessed forever.
Amen.

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[1] Col. 1:16.
[2] Jer. 33:20, 25.
[3] 1 Jn. 2:2.
[4] Mal. 4:2.
[5] 2 Cor. 5:4.

Prayer 85

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, since our waking vigilance[1]
appears like some kind of stupor to you
and our profound silence, owing to our orthodox faith in you,
seems to you sleeping with open eyes,[2]
direct me with your Holy Spirit's wisdom
to finish this the work of my hands
the prayers of my sighing voice.

Strengthen me, Lord, in my courageous labors
to fight the good fight.
Be my aid against human frailty.
Lighten the task of my repentance, for it has only just begun.
Quicken, always capable Lord, the work I have set before me.
Ease the course to its conclusion.
Help me achieve the bliss of accomplishment.[3]
Help me reach the destination I hope for.
Be my companion through the end of my journey.[4]

In my ascending flight, speed me on the course toward the good.
Be at my right side when I am in danger.[5]
Make your voice heard in my time of need.
Grant me life with your hand in the hour of my death.[6]
Intervene with your finger in my time of alarm.
Level the most harmful obstacles of alienation.
Send an angel, as you did to Habbakuk, to help me.[7]
Inspire my speech before the tribunal of judgment.[8]
Plant wisdom in me when I am being scrutinized.
With the cloud of your will miraculously protect me.[9]
Calm my stormy seas with your tree of life, the cross.
By your command, bridle my earthly impulses.
For if your mercy wills it, Lord,
the fluid waves of the sea will become harder than stone.[10]
But if you abandon me on dry land, Lord,
the earth upon which I stand will move
and crumble beneath me.[11]

B

Jesus, accept with favor
the supplications I make to you,
and turn my gnawing apprehensions into solid faith.
In the time of the great flood that destroyed everything,[12]
those who lived carelessly without fear
upon the steady plains of earth
were destroyed, bereft of your mercy,
while those who trusted in your name, savior,[13]
stood on the rocking deck
of the covered ark made of logs
and were saved.
Even so, rescue me with your love of humankind,
though I forever sway this way and that, and
deliver me to the harbor of your peace, I pray you.

Bearing the fruits of your grace with me
and leaving behind the heavy burden of sin that weighs me down,
I fall before you, Lord, in the words of your parable,[14]
uniting with you completely, inseparably,
O Lord, blessed in all things.
Now chanting these prayers in antiphon
with the most pure angels
and with the earthly martyrs
who were tested by water and fire[15]
and who upon their departure from this life, pray for us,
leaving their memory as encouragement,
let us say with them, in unison:
So be it.
Amen.

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[1] Eph. 5:14.
[2] Ps. 24 (Arm 25):15, S. of S. 5:2.
[3] Ps. 126 (Arm. 125):5-6.
[4] Lk. 24:15.
[5] Ps. 23 (Arm 22):4.
[6] Mk. 6:50.
[7] Dan. 14:33-39 (Arm. version).
[8] Lk. 12:11-12.
[9] Ex. 13:21, 14:19-20.
[10] Ex. 14:22.
[11] Is. 24:19-20.
[12] Gen. 7:21-23.
[13] Gen. 8:15-19; Jesus/Joshua/Yeshua come from the Hebrew root ‘to save, rescue, deliver’.
[14] Mt. 18:27.
[15] Ps. 66 (Arm. 65):12.

Prayer 86

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Have mercy, praiseworthy and long-suffering king,
upon all souls through these prayers
of grieving lamentation,
composed on various themes,
and have mercy especially on those souls
who are cut off from the hope of salvation
who have died unprepared,
with lamps extinguished for lack of oil.[1]
Remember, then, my compassionate Lord,
and consider me justified in this request also,
for in your splendid and awe-inspiring majesty
you combined opposites in the make-up of man,
a little gravity, a little levity,
on the one hand coolness, on the other heat,
so that by keeping the opposites in balance,
we might be called just,
because of this faithful equality.
And however virtuous we might be judged on this account,
when transported upward,
we should bear in view that we are made of humble clay
and accept the crown of tribulation.
But since we violated your commandment of the Old Testament
and following our earthly nature, strayed like animals,
we were bent low and bound to the earth,[2]
in some instances by disease, and others by cruelty,
some by gluttony and passions,
as if a ravenous beast is joined to our nature.

Sometimes one of four primary elements, lunges forward[3]
and uncontrollably, savagely and relentlessly raises its head.
And though warmed by the fervor of our love for you
and by token of your spark which is in us,
the coldness that is its constant companion,
extinguishes it, disrupting the good.[4]
And although we ascend to you with the airy ways of angels,
the weight and density of our first element, earth, [5]
holds us down, and hinders us.[6]

B

And now, defeated on all fronts and completely forsaken,
like a feeble cripple, I am rejected, I am banished that I might perish.
Worn down by the multitude of blows, I was captured by death
and deprived of grace.
I seek mercy with a shameful face.
I, who have committed all manner of sin,
pray for all the dead living in you.[7]
For you are able, with infinite ingenuity,
to save dying mortals like me.
For you everything is possible.
Especially since you have power that knows no limits,
and you take delight in exercising your will for good.
Therefore, when these two illustrious and
renewing graces come together – power and will –
the despair that afflicts the race of sinners is lifted away
and the light of your good news arrives
with your prescription to heal our souls,
Lord of all, blessed forever.
Amen.

---

[1] Mt. 25:8.
[2] Gen 8:21, Ps. 44 (Arm. 43):26.
[3] St. Gregory refers here to the elements of classical cosmography: earth, air, fire and water.
[4] Rom. 7:14-25.
[5] Gen. 2:7, 3:19.
[6] Rom. 7:14-25.
[7] Lk. 20:37-38.

Prayer 87

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

And now, since I am approaching the end of this
modest testament of lamentations,
Lord, with these prayers, put an end
to those demeaning blameworthy acts
that have become a bad habit with me.
You established the good news of hope for condemned people like me,
saying, “It is not the will of the Father,
that the least of these little ones should perish.”[1]
And further, “This is the will of my Father,
that I shall not lose those he has given to me.”[2]

B

Behold, you are blessed for compassion,
ever praised for your sweetness,
proclaimed for your patience,
recognized for your help,
preached as the Lord for salvation,
celebrated for your bounty,
honored for your protection,
glorified for your deliverance,
worshiped for your infinite highness,
adored for your greatness beyond understanding,
alone acclaimed for your triumph,
exalted for your great strength,
revered for your mercy,
embraced for your mildness,
partaken in humility.
With your heavenly father,
God of all comfort,[3]
together with your Holy Spirit, filled with goodness
who established the Law
not to abandon the fallen beast of one’s enemy[4]
nor the man who stumbles by his own stupidity.

Your gifts, Almighty, within me,
and your virtue, great Lord, on high
are celebrated endlessly by the eternal choir of angels,[5]

thus hear my prayerful voice
through the intercession of the angels
and along with the supplications of the martyrs,
in sweet and pleasing aroma.

Through the redeeming value of these prayers of reconciliation, almighty Lord,
let my original sin be pardoned and my unseen wounds be cured,
along with those committed in the course of my life and at my death,
wounds that bring death to my body and my soul.
Heal my inner and outer wounds,
their traces, lines, and welts,
with the exalted and pure salve of your mercy.
The multitude of bites
show you the essence of my character,
both the base and that which is pleasing to you.

C

And if I reach old age,
having been guided by you to my worthy death,
do not abandon me in my frailty.[6]
Do not despise my gray hair.
Do not destroy what is already broken.
Do not bring down the bent.
Do not knock down the humbled.
Do not extinguish the flickering flame with your wind.
Do not shove the unsteady.
Do not leave the shivering without a coat.
Do not permit the afflicted to go without a cure.
Do not leave the dilapidated untended.
Do not let the old image be dishonored.
Do not take the taste away from the sumptuous.
Do not tarnish the splendor of grace.
Do not insult the old.
Do not send waves upon the ship of my soul.
Do not cut the thread of hope.
Do not sever the life line.
Do not take away presence of mind or memory.
Do not destroy what you have shaped.
Do not clip the wings of ascension.
Do not deform the cheerfulness of beauty.
Do not retract the rays of light.
Do not close the windows of the eyes.
Do not block their light.
Do not cut down my speaking image.

D

I pray you, compassionate Lord, I beseech you with all of the saints,
listen to my prayers now, so that they will not later be forgotten.
You led me, as the Psalmist wrote, and "restored my soul."[7]
Relieve me, Lord, as with the Psalmist,
of the doubts and perplexities that cause me fear.[8]

But I am not worthy of this,
no, not even of the common sustenance of a hired servant.[9]
But you are able, according to your ways,
to show kindness even to people who whine as I do.
Yours are the amazing gifts beyond telling, you,
who alone work miracles, continuously blessed
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
forever and ever.
Amen.

---

[1] Mt. 18:14.
[2] Jn. 6:39.
[3] 2 Cor. 1:3.
[4] Ex. 23:5, Dt. 22:4.
[5] Is. 6:2-3, Rev. 5:11-12.
[6] Ps. 71 (Arm. 70):9, 18.
[7] Ps. 23 (Arm. 22):3.
[8] Ps. 71 (Arm. 70): 20.
[9] Lk. 15:19.

Prayer 88

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Now with my broken soul, my deserted mind and my crushed heart,
I pour forth the water of my will and the milk of my tears,
just as the prophet Samuel,[1]
poured water before you, all-seeing God,
to show his people how to bow
in confession and obedience
before your life-giving feet.

B

And now, accept these prayers of sighs and contrition,
as you inhale the scent of this bloodless sacrifice of words,
king of heaven.
Bless and sanctify the letters of this book of lamentation,
and fix your seal upon it,
as an eternal monument of
servanthood along with others pleasing to you.
May it stand before you forever,
and echo in your ears constantly.
May it be pronounced upon the lips of your chosen,
and may it be spoken by the mouths of your angels.
May it be spread before your throne,
and may it be offered in your sacred temples.
May it rise as incense in the houses of worship dedicated to your name,[2]
and may it give fragrance at the altar of your glory.
May it be kept among your treasures[3]
preserved in your estate.
May it be recited to the ears of all generations,
and may it be preached to all peoples.
May it be inscribed on the doors of the mind
and imprinted on the threshold of the senses.
As if alive and in person, may it recount
the iniquities I have confessed.
And although I shall die in the way of all mortals,
may I be deemed to live
through the continued existence of this book.
May it by your will, Lord, be protected from destruction,
that it might be for me, the condemned,

an ever watchful judge, fair accuser,
that reprimands with vigor and blames with rigor,
that relentlessly criticizes and sternly shames me,
that pitilessly hands me over to
the unbribable executioner from whom there is no escape
like a ruthless informant coldly exposing me to the whole world.
May it loudly trumpet my faults in confession[4]
without break or end.

C

This book will cry out in my place, with my voice, as if it were me.
It will uncover what is covered up and proclaim secrets.
It will lament what has been done and
extol what has been forgotten,
reveal the invisible and relate scandal,
preach about the depths of the soul
and tell of sins.
It will lay bare the unseen and display the shape of what is hidden.
Through this book may traps be explored and pitfalls be discovered.
May unspeakable faults be confronted and
the traces of evil wrung out.

May the life of your grace and mercy reign, O Christ.
May my dry bones be preserved in your treasury
so that at the time of eternal life,
at the dawn of that first spring light,
on the day of renewed splendor,
through your dew my soul might again stir,
with your immortal salvation
and according to the hope held out in your inspired Scriptures,[5]
may I again become green and blossom,
and send up shoots of spiritual goodness
that will never dry out.

And to you, Savior, and to your Spirit,
of the same essence as the Father,
to your united lordship and your inexplicable Trinity,
all glory and adoration
with mystic praise
forever.
Amen.

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[1] 1 Sam. 7:6.
[2] Ps. 141 (Arm. 140):2.
[3] Dt. 32:31.

[4] Mt. 24:31.
[5] Is. 26:19, Ezek. 37.

Prayer 89

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

God and Lord, life and creator,
merciful, compassionate, light,
long-suffering, God who bears no grudges,
all-merciful, generous God who loves humankind,
savior, blessed, praised, glorified,
storehouse of steadfastness, bulwark of faith,
good without guile,
radiance without darkness,
pardoner of sins,
healer of wounds,
creator of unknowable mysteries,
the most approachable of the unreachables,
refuge from despair,
your name is proclaimed, Son of God,
and your Father's with you,
mighty and awesome,
and your almighty Holy Spirit
worshiped with you,
glory and thanksgiving forever.
Amen.

Prayer 90

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Glorified God in heaven,
sole creator, lord of all,
awesome majesty,
compassion worthy of blessing,
mercy worthy of proclamation,
providence worthy of worship,
love of humankind worthy of celebration,
protection worthy of adoration,
exalted beyond understanding,
close to us by your choice,
unfailing refuge,
you comfort our hearts,[1]
you make our grief disappear and reassure us in our pain,
you end our despair and wipe away our debts,
you remedy our shortcomings, discipline our passions, and shape our words,
you rein in our tongues, regulate our breathing, and control our speech,
you bring our thoughts together, discipline our will, and settle our emotions,
you calm storms and restore tranquility to the waves,
you hold the rudder of my impulsive will
and taming it with your wisdom,
you guide me back to you.

B

O ever exalted giver of gifts,
you are forbearing with lowly gentleness,
dwelling with fervor and untold miracles in the souls of the saints.[2]

O king of all beings, merciful one proclaimed by the universe,
you are our forefather and originator of the law of love.[3]

O path of life,[4]
you sweetly lead me, a learner, toward your heavenly light.

O most steady outstretched hand,
you do not let me stumble to my destruction.

O image of hope,
you appear before praying human hands as that truthful hope.

O refuge of peace,
you never lead us to the risk of condemnation.

O bestower of free grace,
you redeem us fully without compensation.

O generosity that knows no jealousy,
you adorn with your glory the base earth of which I am made.

O brilliance without shadows,
who engulfs me, a miserable wretch, in the radiance of your awesome majesty,
restore and make me flourish again.

O pardoner of our multiple sins,[5]
rekindling the former brilliance of those deprived of salvation,
remake their splendor.

O Almighty,
you make it possible to reach the infinite heights.

O certain path,
you lead us toward the promised joy.

O yearned for bliss,
it is pleasing to give up the breath of life,
that I might find you, Living God.[6]

O unwavering will,
who is able to pardon me, a slave,
you deserve all praise.

O unerring balm of life,
who performs miracles even over those completely without life.[7]

O undoubted creator of all,
who resurrects in the blink of an eye,[8]
those consumed by fire, blown to the winds,
or devoured in the jaws of beasts,
back into their undiminished physical being.

O brave nobility without equal,
in whom it is right to boast and
in whose glory we can bask.[9]

C

Look, Lord, from heaven, with cheerful sweetness
upon me, imperiled on all sides by destruction.
Calm my anxious sobbing.
Grant the ease of repose.
The deadly armies are mounted against me:
battalions of violent warriors armed with

all manner of demonic devices,
the barrage of ugly sins hateful to you,
the strokes of pain and destructive disease.
Repel them, take them away, cut them off, stop them,
drive them out, banishing them to a distant place, never to return.
Destroy them yet again
and erect the sign of your cross
as a destiny of life and beacon at my death
guiding me to your refuge,
O Salvation.

D

And through the invincible, infallible and irresistible
power of your awesome majesty,
may the secret snares of Satan be undone,
may his tools be snatched away and the stumbling blocks removed,
may his traps be foiled,
may his ambush be discovered,
may his treachery be revealed,
may his nets be lifted away,
may his weeds be burned,[10]
may the wicked spells be cast out,
may the deceptive ropes of the hunter of death be cut,
may the liar's gossip be confounded.
may the troublemaker's weapons run out,
may the swords fall from the hands of the bearer of death,
may the attacker's preparations be scuttled,
may the ropes of the tormentor come undone,
may the false appearances of the hypocrites be unmasked,
may the heavy-handedness of the haughty be banned,
may the bands of marauders be dispersed,
may the hordes of thieves be banished,
may the masses of barbarians be expelled,
may the fortresses of the rebels be demolished,
may the tempests of the boastful be checked,
may the rainstorms of the tempter be dispelled,
may the frost of the divider evaporate,
may the horns of the wicked be broken,[11]
may the pedestals of idols collapse,
may the bragging of the proud be shattered,
may the aggressors' confrontations be repulsed,
may the troops of Belial be destroyed –
both spiritual and physical,
may the invaders from one route be set to flight in seven directions,[12]
may they fall into the pit they have dug for me,[13]
may the winters of discontent turn to summer,
may the ties that bind me to the tireless outlaw be cut,
may the kiss of the flatterer upon my forehead revolt me,
may the barrage of arrows from my tormentor cease,

may the boat of the trickster always be rocky,
may the teeth of the biter be ripped from their roots.

E

Through the blessed wood of life,
upon which you were bound,
incomprehensible God,
by the memory of those nails,
with which you were spread upon the instrument of death,
creator of heaven and earth,
by your lordly blood,
by which, as with a fishhook, you caught the great serpent,[14]
by the bitterness of the bile,
which you drank, pouring out the deadly potion of the destroyer,
by the blessed recounting of your horrible torment,
through which you shamed and silenced the impudence of the opponent,
by your name that cannot be understood or explained in any way,
before which the natures of the visible and invisible,
tremble with fear and awesome terror and are condemned,
may all these gifts of grace
be for me, who proclaim them,
protection, cure and pardon.

And for the serpent that brought the bitter poison of death,[15]
by whom the universe was betrayed into evil,
may these bring the death for him.
May he be bound and taken captive,
subjected to the stroke of incurable torture.

May your mercy, O creator, toward me,
and the breath of my soul toward you,
be united inseparably as one.

F

And let whoever may read these requests and supplications
of the voice calling out in prayer,
with the love of God,
whether old or young,
girl, boy or maid servant,[16]
may all equally receive, without distinction,
from you a portion of the blessing of forgiveness of sin,
and be restored to their former spotless purity,
sealed with your unchanging image.
You who are almighty, powerful,
beyond telling, beyond understanding, beyond comprehension,
look upon the cries of the sighing heart,
offered to you from the lips of all,
for your Father in heaven and doer of good,

for the Holy Spirit, co-equal in glory and giver of life,
through the intercession of your Mother of God,
and the prayers of all the saints.

For you created everything
and from you all things came into being,[17]
and you rule over all,
and to you is befitting glory from all creation.
You, one of the very essence of the timeless trinity,
infinitely glorified together,
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] 2 Cor. 7:6.
[2] Is. 66:1-2.
[3] 1 Jn. 4:7-10, Jn. 15:12.
[4] Jn. 14:5.
[5] I Jn. 2:2.
[6] Phil. 1:23
[7] Jn. 11:39-44.
[8] Ezek. 37.
[9] 1 Cor. 1:31.
[10] Mt. 13:30.
[11] Ps. 75 (Arm. 74):10.
[12] Dt. 28:7.
[13] Ps. 7:15
[14] Job 40:24.
[15] Gen. 3.
[16] Ps. 148:12.
[17] Jn. 1:3, Col. 1:16.

Prayer 91

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Lord, Lord filled with compassion, God of mercies,[1]
majestic name, awe-inspiring voice,
severe summons, unbroken silence,
thundering speech, shocking sound,
hope of good deeds and all merciful sweetness,
before which all creatures quake in fear.
Before your awesome wrath,
the seraphim take to flight and the cherubim huddle together,[2]
the choirs of angels hide their faces,
all the principalities of heaven shake in amazement,
and all of them rejoice with great trembling in jubilant celebration,
the demons are frightened away and the evil bands recoil,
the spirits of darkness are exiled and
the angels of the banished one are condemned to the abyss.
The attacks of the aggressors are held in check by the sign of your cross,
and the vengeful Amalekites are locked away in their infernal prison.[3]
The enemy forces are bound with undoable knots.
The legions of the warriors of death are jailed in prisons from which there is no escape.
The demonic hordes are arrested as in irons by your command.
The instigators of mutiny are silenced.
The mobs of evil spirits are tied up and waste away.
The emissaries of the Antichrist are locked in unbreakable chains.

B

In this midnight silence I lift
my hand toward you to make
the blessed sign of your cross, source of sight,
who never dims in the darkness of ignorance,
but eternally dwells in unapproachable light.[4]
With a grateful heart I implore
that this grieving soul be taken
under the protection of your almighty wing.[5]
Save me from the onrush of external illusion.
Endow my heart's eye with pure light.
Strengthen me with your cross, the wood of life, against nightmares.
Consecrate the boundaries of my cell with drops of your life-giving blood.[6]
Sanctify my threshold with the water and blood from your side.[7]
May the roof of my dwelling bear the shape of your cross.
May the miracle of your sacrifice for our salvation
appear as a vision before my raised eyes.
May the instrument of your torment be fixed upon my door.

May my faith and hope hang upon your blessed tree.[8]
With your cross, Lord, stop the slayer of souls.
Let the protector of light enter.
Ease the severity of my pains
and lighten the burden of my guilt.[9]
In the silent chamber where my mind collects itself
upon the cushion of my bed,
recalling the bitter fruits of despair,
I confess to you, all-knowing God, my innumerable deeds
of wicked iniquity in all their forms.[10]

C

Give me rest.
I am exhausted from the multitude of cares and toil.
Remove the turmoil of doubt from my broken spirit,
the bitterness along with the grief,
the sighing along with the misery,
the anxiety along with the wretchedness,
the cries along with the destruction,
the brokenness along with the stupor,
the delirium along with the folly,
the imprudence along with the stupidity,
the cooling of love along with the feverish passion for luxury.[11]

Come to my aid,
for I am weak with grief and poor in spirit.
With your right hand of beneficial grace,
with your finger of renewal, with your ever-radiant glory,
with your eternal, incorruptible presence, [12]
with your cheerful countenance,
with the essence of your venerable being,
with your greatness worthy of worship,
relieve this labored sighing that is suffocating me.[13]

Stop the new tricks of evil and the old deceptions of the Troublemaker,[14]
the alienating impulses of the teacher of death,
the unfitting imaginings prompted by the one who kills us daily,
the mirages caused by the treacherous demon,
the enchanting sorcerer's fiery breath.

Protect my place of rest in the tranquility resembling death,
from hidden thoughts and new errors,
from great misdeeds and small missteps,
from the evil machinations of idleness.

Banish from my senses, wayward servant that I am,
inappropriate thoughts and base passions,
blameworthy conduct and unbecoming ambitions,
erring actions, ridiculous illusions,

vile thoughts, and despicable babble.

D

Arm me, for I have taken refuge in you,
arm me with an unerring heart and undefiled body,
against winds, the violent blows,
the battering of the storm, the pouncing of the tempest,
the attacks of beasts.
When I close my eyes, do not let my heart-vision grow dark,[15]
rather let it awaken, become bright and splendid
to shine with you, Lord Jesus Christ,
with the burning of the inextinguishable light.

With your word, cleanse my bedchamber
of cunning and distractions,
of memories distasteful to you and thoughts hostile to heaven,
of criminal follies and ingratitude toward your Lordship,
and heresies against God.

Stand guard over me with your heavenly host,
the principalities and dominions, and invincible powers,
pure ministers of your holy Godhead,
the apostles with the tidings of your Gospel,
the prophets with their testaments,
and the righteous with their prayers offered at the end of their lives,
that I might fall asleep in mourning pleasing to you[16]
and awaken anew with the grace of your joy.

Though I sleep with trepidation,
may I arise again in spiritual bliss.

Though I go to bed in sinfulness,
may I get up with a clear conscience and spotless purity.

E

Hear the sighing of my voice in prayer,
you who alone are most compassionate,
through the intercession of your Holy Mother,
and all the righteous and the chosen martyrs.

To you glory from all people, which I offer up to you,
along with the choirs of immortal Holy Angels,[17]
in praise of your Father, our God,
and the Holy Spirit, the creator and renewer of everything,[18]
forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] 2 Cor. 1:3.

[2] Is. 6:1-5.
[3] Ex. 17:8-16.
[4] 1 Tim. 6:16.
[5] Ps. 17 (Arm. 16):8.
[6] Heb. 9:11-24.
[7] Ex. 12:7.
[8] Wis. 14:7.
[9] Mt. 11:28.
[10] Ps. 32 (Arm. 31):5.
[11] Mt. 24:12.
[12] Dan. 7:14.
[13] 2 Cor. 7:10.
[14] Wis. 2:24.
[15] S. of S. 5:2.
[16] 2 Cor. 7:9
[17] Lk. 2:14.
[18] Ps. 104 (Arm. 103):30.

Prayer 92

A Prayer of Instruction on
the wooden bell that calls us to worship,
symbol of the trumpet on the Day of Judgment.

A

I give you thanks, compassionate Lord,
friend of humankind,
creator of heaven and earth,
Son of the living God.
As soon as I awake I am seized by yearning for your love,
thanks to the sounding of your wooden bell.
Hearing the bell's clipped resonance
we awake and arise from our deathlike slumber.
And as if called by a consoling voice,
we are drawn to the service of blessing and come
with joy before your throne to be judged.[1]

B

Glory to you,
name beyond definition, uncontainable power,
who went to such amazing lengths to provide for my salvation.
Immortal essence, praised with thanksgiving,
your miracles in this world
foreshadow the world to come.
By this instrument, this wooden vessel,
you firmly shake me from the stupor of sleep,
as if you rouse me from my slothfulness
with an admonishing reproach,
adding percussive accompaniment
to the gentleness of your fatherly love.
By the clapping of two mallets,
you sweetly rain your lovingkindness upon us.
You do not plunge me back into the depths of sleep
with hushed syllables,
nor frighten my anxious soul
with needless harshness.
I worship you, upon my knees, Creator of all,
who has given us in this world a sample
of the sound of that terrifying alarm that will echo
on the great day of resurrection.
You brought me back to life
from the tomblike numbness of oblivion.
You sought a fool like me to invite
to taste the wine of joy.[2]

You made this instrument to prepare
the immaculate bride for your love, O groom.[3]
With this humble spur, you struck fear in the monstrous demons.
You tamed the Rebel by placing a massive yoke upon his shoulders.
You muzzled the jaw of the Troublemaker with a restraining bridle.
May your infinite highness be forever exalted great God,
who turned the tree symbolizing our transgression
into the liberating grace of salvation[4]
and who brought a muddled fool like me
to my senses through the wisdom of your spirit.
Through the strokes of the mallet on this wooden board
you remind us that alone we cannot cure the serpent's bite.
By the three blows at the end of the call to worship,
which symbolize the Trinity,
you reinforce the three chains that restrain my destroyer.[5]

C

I send up odes of praise, with fragrant incense, to you
God who cares for all,
for your ways are more potent than the multitude of pagan gods,
from whom you captured my sinful soul
guiding me to your worship.

With the voice of this sacred wood, hardy and robust,
you preached the truth.

With this worthy instrument
you increased the honor of your New Covenant.

Its clamor calls your heavenly host to arms,
Lord Christ, who rules over all earthly states and emperors.
It is the sign of joy, Lord Jesus, upon your victory on the field of battle,
in which the Pharaoh who oppresses souls is seized and bound.[6]
This well-shaped piece of wood delivers a daily beating
upon the head of the haughty evil doer.
By the sound of this wood, the children of Zion are summoned to battle
against the despot who casts a darkness over the world.[7]
And like a house of divine worship, built long ago,[8]
this wood consecrated with oil,
which neither grows old nor retires from service,
alerts us well in advance of the Day of Reckoning that lies ahead.
It is like the tree of life in paradise, O God, inviting
us to gather and hasten to the house of blessings.
It resembles the tree of knowledge
created to distinguish good from evil.[9]
It is a solemn reminder of the sign of the cross
sealed upon my forehead by your Holy Spirit.
It announces the good news of your glorious second coming
to the bride, kept pure for you, O King.[10]

It encourages the ranks of the saintly to rejoice.
It inspires an innocent yearning for spiritual union
with the virgin queen, the mother of all, veiled in splendor.
It prepares the secret treasures that adorn the soul.
It is reminiscent of the thunderous message on Mt. Sinai
and the aura of dwelling places of the Lord.
It crowns with glory the immaculate mother of pure children,
the splendid eternal virgin – the church.

D

With the sounding of this wood,
stronger than the trumpeting rams' horns at Jericho,[11]
you brought down and leveled the tyranny of Satan.
With this wooden slingshot you slew Goliath.[12]
You fashioned this new javelin that foretells the destruction of Satan,[13]
for with this tool you pulled up the deep roots of sin
and through its beneficial work
you recommitted me to duties I had forgotten.
If I call this alarm a voice,
that predicts the coming of your Word, O God,
I would not be wrong, but would be telling the truth.[14]
By this humble instrument,
though material, yet bearing the spirit,
the majesty of your works are proclaimed, O Jesus.
Through this unassuming sign,
signaling the place of refuge,
you draw our attention on earth
to your bounteous help from on high.

E

Your name is proclaimed,
God, who loves humankind,
who provides and cares for us beyond reason.
You are adored in the mystery of your Holy Trinity,
O light whose image cannot be depicted.
By this twice dedicated wood,[15]
you shot arrows of sound,
through the air, reaching their targets
across long distances, bearing a living spirit,
foiling the secret designs of the archer of darkness,
forcing him into retreat.
As if waging battle from a high fortress,
mighty and indestructible,
you hurl down the strokes of this wooden bell,
like an angel you send to confound the enemy.
With the words of your covenant, Your Majesty,
consecrated with grace by being mixed with your blood,
you have sharpened this horn

like a cross of redemption honed on the whetstone,
to strike down the blustering bully.
By the clamor of this wooden bell,
more tumultuous than a celestial chorus,
the doors of the human will
with its half-hearted and unseemly impulses,
are knocked down
taking with it the legalistic mentality of the Old Testament heart
and its house which is but a shadow of your new covenant.

F

I offer you glory and praise,
immortal king,
I pray that you might renew
with your mighty right hand
all that you have created.
By the reverberating wooden bell
you drove away the wicked peril of the cunning Troublemaker,
the feverish torment of sin,
the sour breath of the deceiver,
the impulsive and deadly misadventures and delusions,
the harmful and depressing acts caused by weakness of the flesh,
the diabolical whining that causes us to faint.

Helped by the wings of the sign of your cross,
dispel again with this wooden armament
clouds that rain fire,
thunder that brings hail,
burning flames of smoky deception
of the many-footed fire-breathing dragon,
the butcher's knife, the confrontation of battle,
the wild thoughts that overtake me
like prancing demons.

They are set to flight by this little bell,
overcome with trembling,
and they know the Lord
comes to judgment
with a sound like this.

And the pious warriors,
well-armed with the sword of the Holy Spirit,
are spurred on with courage,
when they hear the alarm of the wooden bell,
which with an inarticulate cry calls all nations
to sacrifice themselves for justice.

G

Listen to the great trumpet sound
by which God is exalted in worship[16]
throughout the world.
It resounds in the ears of the heathens, causing them to scatter.
It reinforces the voice of the watchmen of great God,
and, in the words of Isaiah, has us singing
together for joy.[17]
Thanks to this wooden bell, the enemies of the cross
are separated like the waters.[18]
The fruit of the first tree loses its far-reaching significance,[19]
when wood becomes celebrated as the symbol of life.[20]
Compared to this wooden bell emitting the sound of life,
the iron sword of war loses its luster.[21]
And like something sacred,
this wooden bell that rings out life
was deemed worthy to be inscribed
with the sign of the cross,
like reins on horses, holy to the Lord.[22]
The sword of human authority is sheathed[23]
in deference to this anointed staff of the heavenly shepherd.
No hammer of any artisan has nicked a stone of the temple, [24]
but on the altar built by God this sacred wood
soaring with the wings of the cross wields power.
Not only at the beginning of the month,[25]
nor upon the seven times seven years of the jubilee,[26]
is the wooden bell removed from its corner and sounded,
but from the dawn of the universe to its far reaches,[27]
upon the waves of the sea and its islands,
it echoes, divinely,
announcing the good news.
The swords of the murderer were broken
by the sight of this wood,
and the useless were transformed into ploughshares and pruning hooks.[28]

H

The sound of the wooden bell, is not like the harsh echo
of stones in the depths of a pit,
nor does it do violence to the air, in the words of a foreign sage.[29]
It does not pierce the ear with a sharp and annoying sound,
nor does it make the skull vibrate unpleasantly.
It does not cause bones to crack,
nor does it stun the mind.
It does not clang like a bell of copper,
nor does it clunk without any sweetness
like a stone on the pavement.
It is the invincible keeper of the New Zion,
It is one of the main, sacred vessels, given by God,

that Christian clerics, along with the Levites,
treat with care and reverence.
It is like the voice of an angel,[30]
which in the words of the parable-teller,
resemble the song of a bird.[31]
It is a new musical instrument to announce the grace of the good news.
It awakens in us the Spirit of God
more readily than the odes of Elisha's harp.[32]
It is the prelude to the lamentations,
played upon the strings of a sweet and harmonious violin.
It is cymbals with their allegorical expression.
It is a new flute of a different sort
that we have adopted instead of the old.
It does not make hollow noises like reeds of the pagans.
It does not make earthly noises like instruments of the Jews,
about which the Lord said through the prophet,
"Take these away from me."[33]
Rather, it is a God-pleasing sound, doubly honored,
for it wards off attacking demons and other strokes of evil.

I

And now, I have accepted with blessing, veneration and praise,
this sacred gift,
as protection for me and glory for you,
thanksgiving from me and worship to you,
a wonder of your creative glory, wanting in nothing.
May this Godly sound pierce through the joints of my body[34]
to drive from my soul
the deceitful ways of the demons
and block corruption.

Make this wooden bell a symbol,
a harp of light, an invitation that cannot be retracted,
an endless praise of your lordly providence.

Hear us, O compassionate Lord, through this wooden bell.
Grant us, I pray, almighty Lord,
twofold protection against visible and invisible enemies.

Give us, O generous hand,
open and ready to offer
and share good things,
the sweetness of air
and beneficial rains.

May your order, voiced in this medium,
curb the hellish blasts,
the painful breathing,
the attacks of the deceitful and evil brigands.

By this instrument may we be delivered from
the aggressive warriors who lead us to evil.

By the cheerful voice of this anointed wood,
may the worm, canker, and their kind,
that draw strength from our sins and fight against us
be driven away, cut down and killed.

By this plant of bliss
may our trust in you as our protector,
Creator of all, lord of creation,
take root, like the thicket where Abraham found the ram,[35]
at the end of whose branches
the sacred inheritance of my present salvation hangs before us,
caused by you, Christ, to blossom
and bear the fruit of eternal life.

Before the ringing out of the good news heralded by his glorious wood,
may the demon-possessed enemies
and the lying and tricky many-handed hellions
be set to flight and banished to the dark abyss.

May this bell drive away from the fertile fields of our toil,
the devastating blights and trampling bands of animals.

Let this bell remove unbecoming excesses
caused by the devices of evil,
that render us yet more ugly.

May this bell truly eliminate
the faults generated by traitors
in our two natures:
from the spiritual, strange, false thoughts;
from the physical, corruption caused by impure stirrings.

Deliver me, Lord Jesus, I pray you!
Deliver me, my benefactor.
Reach out to me with your praiseworthy right hand,
and having helped me,
free me of these enemies.

J

Mix and unite your commandments with the sound of the bell,
so that my callous heart, hard as a diamond,
might again bear the fruits of your word.[36]
May the sound of the bell strike and pierce
my worn heart and forsaken soul
and like a sharp staff of wonder,[37]

reinforce and shore them up,
upright and steadfast,[38]
while softening the hardness of my soul,
so that I might awaken, sobered with humility,
like Paul and Matthew.[39]

O God who loves humankind,
through this venerable wooden bell
remind me of the gifts of your cross
by which you did things beyond words.

Lift away from me, Giver of life,
the weight of my sins
by the glorious yoke of your new tabernacle.[40]

By your will, Almighty,
may the ears of my stubborn heart be opened
to the sound of life.
By this tiding of your magnificent good works,
may the ears of the deaf hear.[41]
Through this bell may the tongues of the dumb speak.[42]
May the sight of the eyes be restored,
that they might look upon you purely in unwavering adoration.[43]
May the weary wills of men be refreshed,
that they might repent and return to you.[44]
In my turmoil, O Lord,
grant me the rain of tears.
Let this be from you to us
a message of joy,
a jubilant shout,
a tranquil song,
a thing of bliss,
a means of salvation,
an occasion for pardon,
a banishment of grief,
an extrication from entanglements,
an easing of anxiety,
a ceasing of cares,
a dispelling of sighs
an alleviation of groaning,
an assurance of necessities,
a discipline of passions,
a consolation for disappointments,
a cure for pains,
an immunization against backsliding,
a contemplation of things invisible.

K

Lead me across this bridge of yearning,
which neither hinders nor causes us to stray,
on our upward journey,
upon this heaven-bound ladder marked[45]
by the footsteps of the saints.
Present me to your blessed Father,
whose name inspires awe,
O doer of good.
May I be guided by your Holy Spirit
to inseparable unity with you.
And to your one and only, holy and united Lordship and incorruptible creatorship,
for which your creatures, both living and inanimate, give thanks,
glory and dominion, forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Heb. 4:16.
[2] Pr. 9:5.
[3] Rev. 21:2.
[4] Gen 3.
[5] Rev. 20:2-3.
[6] Rev. 19:11-21.
[7] Eph. 6:12.
[8] Gen. 28:18-19.
[9] Gen. 2:9.
[10] 2 Cor. 11:2, Rev. 21:2, 9, Eph. 5:27.
[11] Jos. 6:1-21.
[12] 1 Sam. 17.
[13] Jos. 8:18-19.
[14] Jn. 1:23 (Like John the Baptist).
[15]The Holy Cross and Consecrated Bell that calls to worship.
[16] Ps. 47 (Arm. 46):5, Is. 27:13.
[17] Is. 52:8.
[18] Ex. 14:15-31.
[19] Gen. 3.
[20] Prov. 3:18.
[21] Is. 2:4.
[22] Zech. 14:30.
[23] 1 Sam. 17:32-51.
[24] 1 Kg. 6:7.
[25] Ps. 81 (Arm. 80):3.
[26] Lev. 25:9.
[27] Rom 10:18.
[28] Is. 2:4.
[29] Some commentators interpret this as a reference to Homer. Critical Edition, p. 1113, n. 14.
[30] Mt. 25:31.
[31] Ec. 12:4.
[32] 2 Kg. 3:15.
[33] Am. 5:23.
[34] Heb. 4:12.
[35] St. Gregory uses the Hebrew word *sabec* which means ‘bush’ or ‘thicket’, referring to the thicket where Abraham found the ram that he sacrificed in place of his son Isaac. Gen. 22:13. Critical Edition, p. 1114, n. 22.
[36] Mt. 13:3-9, 18-23.

[37] Following Terian, *Narek*, p. 426, n. 70, invoking the image of Moses striking the stone with his staff at Horeb, Ex. 17:6.
[38] Is. 35:3-4.
[39] Acts 9:1-9, Matt. 9:9.
[40] Mt. 11:28-30, Ex. 25:14.
[41] Is. 35:5.
[42] Mk. 7:32-35.
[43] Jn. 9, Mk. 10:46-52, Is. 35:5.
[44] Is. 35:3-4.
[45] Gen. 28:12-19 (Jacob's Ladder).

Prayer 93

A Prayer of Instruction on Holy Chrism,
the light-giving oil of consecration

A

Holy, awe-inspiring name, too sublime to utter,
ever desired object of our yearning,
praised without end by the glorious seraphim,[1]
who sing, “Holy, Holy, Holy,”
to you who dwell in the Holy of Holies,
who are filled with bountiful goodness,
you pour forth generously and without end,
awesome and incomprehensible.
You are all and are in all.[2]
With these words, as my contract of hope,
may I enter into a covenant with you, Almighty?
Yes, amen, alleluia![3]
venerated king of the universe,
God of all, creator of beings and sovereign Lord,
sole cause of all consequences,[4]
forever adored,
Savior and Christ, the anointed Messiah.

B

The meaning of this priceless treasure and irreplaceable wealth
is given to us by your very name,
Jesus Christ heavenly king,
whom the immortal and sublime beings,
with mouths of light and breath of fire,
serve with trembling,
bowing to you on bended knee in thanksgiving,
gladly without mental reservations,[5]
Creator of all beings visible and invisible.[6]

You who are and were totally perfect and lacking nothing,
took our nature truly and in its entirety,[7]
in order to complete it with your perfection.

O blessed and praised Lord,
forever proclaimed for the incomprehensible sacrifice
you made for our salvation,
to you, glory and praise for your goodness,
you, who are exalted beyond words, sublime and awe-inspiring.

You are the source of grace given through anointing,

a great mystery that miraculously adorns us,[8]
for through it your light was revealed to us,[9]
O incomprehensible ray,
boundless dawn,[10]
sun shining fairly on all,[11]
star that divides the day in two,[12]
lamp unto our feet and light upon the path,[13]
thanks to you we see the meaning of this sacrament
and compose this prayer,
celebrating with angelic singing and jubilation,
with a pure spirit,
venerating with incense fit for our Savior
your generous allotment of gifts, most wise Lord,
through the oil of gladness and spotless belief.[14]
For the first created man, my forefather, who,
scarcely created, tragically lost the greatest gift,
the breath of eternal life,[15]
and forever withering in the hands of sin,
became a captive of death.[16]
He was tied into an undoable knot,
into deadly decadence,
and fell because of the tree of knowledge
unable to stand, stumbling toward destruction,
expelled from the light,
he was condemned to the darkness of this world.[17]
But you, compassionate Lord,
always knew your creature
better than he knew himself.
In pursuit of the divine knowledge he could not have,
he lost the innocence he had,
thereby becoming unable to look upon
your sublimity which dwells in unapproachable light,[18]
O infinite God.

For this reason you did not reveal yourself
in an ever radiant light that does not wane,
but only as an aid against the terrors of the night,
when the feet stumble.
You gave the oil, and in this oil you placed a wick,
which exemplifies your union, without imperfection, with our condition,
formed and woven with your love of humankind,
so that we, who find ourselves banished, in the shadow of death,
because of the first transgressions against the tree,[19]
through the fruit of the tree akin to it,[20]
might be enlightened with the flame of faith,
and restored to that former blessed state.
And also by being spread upon the tree of death
you spread us upon it as well,
and thanks to this great mystery[21]
united us with the tree of life.

C

Now, just as the day is incomplete without night,
so the household is incomplete without the staple oil.
For as ordinary, unconsecrated oil illumines the sight of the physical eyes,
so the oil sanctified and chosen by the mystery of your breath of grace
gives luster to our invisible souls in a glorious, miraculous way
uniting us with you, Lord who cannot be seen.
For as we believe, that by the washing of the body
in the glow of holy baptismal font
our souls are cleansed,
so when anointed with chrism, that oil of hope,
we believe, without the least doubt,
that we receive through it the Holy Spirit.

And since by your blessed commandment, Lord,
you arranged in advance the pardoning of those afflicted with sin,
and for those who do not believe in this pardon,[22]
you performed before their eyes the miracle of healing
as evidence for doubters.

Similarly, this oil of salvation, sanctified with light,
is poured on us to anoint our outer temple,
and enters us in secret and unseen,
whereby the inner man is born again.

D

This physical thing is a superb analogy for you,
for the wise maidens who bore the oil
received the benefit of your mercy,[23]
and in praise you defined yourself as merciful, saying:
"I am merciful, said the Lord."[24]
As your name is synonymous with love, O God,[25]
so in part your mercy and love are manifested
by coming down to be reimprinted upon our nature
according to the divine plan of salvation.

The sacrificial fat is a fitting analogy for a great and sublime mystery,[26]
for as the fat is to the animal,
so the oil is to the plant – its heavy, earthen part.
And as you commanded in the Old Law
that this part of the animal should not be eaten,
but should be offered as a sacrifice to you, O Creator,[27]
so under the New Testament,
this oil is a potent offering ceremonially given
for your favor, fitting only for you Lord,
the God who is,
as the true travel-mate of my soul,

to be kept and pledged to you, Creator.

For neither the lifeblood nor the savor of the burning fat,[28]
which are the symbols of the soul and strength,
are burnt to ashes with the meat of sacrifice,
but are the portion offered before your throne
in the heavenly kingdom, O Lord,
so this light-giving substance
may always burn bright and inextinguishable.

E

The first-born male could not preside as a judge
unless he was anointed,
nor could the clergy set foot in the Holy of Holies,
unless he were ordained and consecrated with oil.[29]
Jacob poured oil upon the stone on which he slept,[30]
thus consecrating the distant archetype of the altar of God.
This pouring out moreover symbolized your descent
on that splendid ladder, O God exalted beyond words,
to take me up on my heavenly journey.
And for this reason, he erected and anointed a monument
to remind later generations.
The splendor of Aaron's priesthood
was fulfilled by anointing him
according to your commandment, great God.[31]
In the words of the Psalmist,[32]
when oil poured down over his head and beard,
he was miraculously transformed,
regaining the original glory of Adam,
and receiving your life-giving Holy Grace through union with us.
The kings of this world would have no legitimacy,
as the image of your creatorship on earth,
were it not for their consecration with a horn filled with oil,[33]
and the placing of the crowns upon their heads in your name, Christ.
And how could I forget the first among these sublime figures, Melchisedek,
the servant of your greatness and your image beyond understanding?
Is it possible that Melchisedek
the symbol of your awesome truth,
on the Mount of Olives,[34]
where later your feet, God incarnate, walked, can it be possible he
was not anointed by the fruits of this place by the angels on high?[35]
Thus he was invested by you
to guard the tomb of our forefather Adam[36]
in princely episcopal honor,
until you appeared, Lord,
the true priest fully revealed,
the regeneration and regenerator of Adam.

F

Since yours is grace,
and to you is befitting thanksgiving,
O blessed Son of God,
may you yourself place the seal of your blessed image upon these prayers,
imbued with the oil of humble love,
the incense of adoration
and the myrrh of repentance
that they may bring glory for you
and healing for me, a wretched sinner.
Apply, Lord Jesus, this oil of light to my invisible sores,[37]
and on the cauterized parts of these deadly wounds,
put a drop of the blessed oil of your salvation
with the ever-sweet wine of your love,
bound by you with the protective bandages of your care,
so that this testament, my explanatory discourse in prayer,
might be endowed with fitting dignity,
under the wings of your Holy Spirit.

Your Spirit, O exalted God, came upon David,
only after the day he was consecrated and anointed.[38]

Saul became a different man and joined the band of prophets,
when the anointing oil descended upon his head.[39]

The Assyrian Empire was conquered and taken captive
by the anointed and joined to the house of Israel.[40]

Certain illustrious rulers, great and prominent
among the uncouth and barbarous nations,
upon whom was sprinkled the dew of this life-giving oil,
were caught as if in a trap,
joining your family in service to you, great God.[41]

The heavenly word, spoken through the prophets,
calling Cyrus, chosen of God,
also honored him by referring to him as “the Anointed One.”[42]

The Psalmist esteemed the title, “anointed”
greater than that of “prophet,”
first stating the prohibition, “Do not approach the anointed.”
and then adding, “and do not harm the prophets.”[43]
The divine mission entrusted to Elijah on Mount Horeb,
which marked the end of the pagan cult of Baal,
was the anointing Jehu and Hazael.[44]

Your name, O bridegroom, the Christ, “the oil poured out,”[45]
is witnessed long ago by the inspired words of the sage.

In this way, the Spirit, the eternal image and sign of God,
might imprint your great image on this small drop of oil
that we may be united with you, receiving your grace.

G

Why do I belabor this point
with images and farfetched analogies
in long, complicated, poetic prayers to you,
O exalted and awesome Lord
O Lord and giver of life,
O creator of heaven and earth?

You began to preach the good news of your kingdom,[46]
only after you were anointed and proclaimed by John the Baptist
as the Anointed One and "Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world."[47]

Although the Holy Spirit was always in you with its complete essence,
and your perfect union of divinity with humanity was an anointing in itself,
the word, *anointed*, when applied to the saints
describes the miraculous grace acting upon them,
and through this word you prepare the servile flesh of Adam
to be eternally ennobled.

Opening the book of the prophet Isaiah,
you read about yourself,
O incarnate divinity,
and in fulfillment of the words of your servants, O Lord,
revealed yourself as the anointed,
through the prophetic words:
"the Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me."[48]

Then you closed the book,
thereby showing the great difference in degree
between these two anointings, ours and yours,
and defined the great distance between them:
ours is a bit of luster from a drop of grace,
and yours is the revelation of your divine essence
shared equally with your Father and your Holy Spirit.

When you first made your incarnation known at your birth,
the angels in high praise proclaimed you the Messiah
by which name you became known to all the creatures of earth.[49]

The Prophet foretold the descent of your Father's voice from the heavens
at the River Jordan and on the chosen Mount Tabor,[50]
saying "He proclaims among the people his Anointed One."[51]

And the Psalmist also foretold your glory, Almighty,
and of the honor bestowed by consecrating the human nature you have assumed,
“God, your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness.”[52]

H

“The breath of our face,” Lord Christ,[53]
your name is truly, “the Anointed One,”
for in your goodness, you gave our souls
the breath of life[54] and light of your countenance.[55]

The wise words of one favored by God[56]
proclaimed your love for humankind,
while telling of a certain prophet:[57]
“He shall testify before the Lord and his anointed,”[58]
and confirmed the good news, saying:[59]
“I have not taken so much as a pair of sandals from any man.”[60]

In praise of Christ’s bride, the holy church,
the Song of Songs, from beginning to end,
explains the divine mystery,
comparing incarnation to spiced wine[61]
and virtue to myrrh mixed with choice oil[62]
and perfect morals to a sweet perfume of myrrh and incense
mixed with delicious powders.[63]

When Daniel described in words that seemed
beyond human expression
your life-giving death,
Christ King of heaven,
he predicted “the anointed one will be killed in sixty-nine weeks,”
calling you the anointed leader. [64]

The lampstand of Zechariah, son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo,[65]
through its ingenious system of oil supply
to the seven lamps, keeping them constantly lit,
symbolizes the anointing and salvation
poured from your bounty upon us.

And according to the Old Law of prophecy,
cereal offerings of round loaves of unleavened bread
of fine flour mixed with oil[66]
and peace offering of the anointed calf, [67]
the portion called the Lord’s, and
purification sacrifice performed with two birds,
the living one dipped in the blood of the other,[68]
as if with anointing oil,
all were performed at your altar in the temple.

All these are manifestations of the mystery,
all are signs relating to you,
only begotten Son, blessed of great God.

You alone are anointed in a new and marvelous way,
in and through yourself, with your whole essence,
perfectly and lacking absolutely nothing.

I

But does it make sense to multiply examples of
this great, inexplicable mystery?
To understand, we must taste you, sweet Lord,[69]
and learn through you
the true meaning of the oil
for what is it, if not
the gladness praised by the Psalmist[70]
that you grant by curing the grief
of the tree of our transgression?

What is it, if not the rich, fullness of heart,
by which you make us forget the food of death?

What, if not the anointing,
that transforms our ashen wretchedness
into the brightness of perpetual good cheer,[71]
that through the salvation of your name,
O Spirit of Might, we might become the children of God?[72]

What, if not the cure that is the fervent desire of the prophet's heart,
that is, to be anointed in his old age with rich oil[73]
that he might be anointed upon his head with oil,[74]
by which with the help of your protecting hand,
we are saved from the tragedy of the fall,[75]
which brings death.

What, if not gratitude for the lamp[76]
that shed light on the fog of sin
and the darkness of idolatry,
by your union in our likeness to dwell among us, Emmanuel?[77]

What, if not the consolation prophesied by the prophet
of gladdening blessings as a sign saying:
"They will be anointed with oil free of impurities."[78]

Or when the wiseman in the name of bride, says to the bridesmaids,
"Sustain me with oil, shower me in apples,"[79]
and "Keep me in the embrace of the sweet balsam orchard,"[80]
referring to that fine substance, filled with your Spirit,

whose light enables us to see
your finer, higher, ungraspable element, praised Lord.

And now, our only provider and
cause of all good things,
listen with compassion, Lord,
to the supplications I call to you,
with my arms lifted up in prayer,
bolstered from within,
with the sighs of my heart,
with the cries of my tongue and lips.

For granting these gifts,
I offer up my gratitude to you,
almighty, awesome, exalted, incomprehensible,
forever embraced in unending love,
constantly praised with the chant,
Holy, Holy, only and always Holy,[81]
blessed forever.

Out of your great goodness,
grant me yet more help,
for I am completely lost.

Give me hope of sweetness,
though I am not worthy of the least drop of your light,
so that I might understand through you, good Lord,
the subtle secret of this mystery.
and mix thanks with my prayer,
saying with David,
"We have received your mercy, Lord,"[82]
and "your hidden and invisible secrets,
you have revealed through your wisdom."[83]

J

And now, majesty to you, God almighty,
whose generosity never ceases,
whose compassion streams in all directions,
who is always ready in healing,
because you merged and mixed
your splendid miracles, awe-inspiring beyond telling,
into such common and familiar matter.

For that force
which the heavens in their height,
and the earth in its breadth,
and the abyss in its depth,
and the seas in their multitude
could not hold,

you fit in this small drop of oil,
a mere speck, compared with your immensity,
truly and not just in appearance,
so that when it performs a new miracle,
unrelated to its nature,
it does not appear to be some kind of illusion to onlookers.
Instead it heals the doubting souls
rather than wounding them.

Just as out of the grain of wheat,
blessed Son of God,
you made your body,
in reality and not in semblance,
and out of the wine of the grape
the blood of your side,
and out of the bountiful water,
the womb of spiritual birth,
so you also bestowed on us, as you did upon your disciples,
the immortal breath of your Holy Spirit[84]
through and in this oil.

For the people who walked in darkness[85]
you brought the dawn through your incarnation,
and through your labors you gave birth to new life.
You placed a seal upon them
that cannot be effaced even by idolatry,
just as no one can follow your example
to further consecrate the wood of the cross, Lord.

For by this mark of grace
you brought light to the world,
manifesting yourself in your perfect fullness, beyond understanding,
in such a way, that the poor shall not want
and the rich shall not take on airs,
for like the air is distributed
and the sunlight is spread
and the stream waters flow
equally to all,
just as the manna was equally distributed to all people on earth alike,[86]
with more for the poor than the rich and powerful.

K

The deep mystery of this substance is
marvelously explained by its very nature,
for it does not shift around constantly
as if it cannot make up its mind,[87]
nor does it steal away from its place of rest,[88]
nor can it be removed by the strongest soap,
nor is it washed away by any other kind of liquid.

And just as color is a necessary and permanent attribute
of physical existence,
because when there is color, the body exists,
and when there is no color, the body seems not to exist,
in the same way, by virtue of its natural powers,
this oil takes hold and does not let go,
and through it you were united and joined with us,
Lord Jesus Christ,
bonding its substance with its significance.

You rendered visible
that which was invisible for the eyes
and incomprehensible for the desires of our hearts,
by miraculously preparing and providing us this oil,
made by pressing and squeezing fruits of the earth.

Moreover, you did not command that this anointing oil
be prepared by mixing together all manner of flowers
into a strange concoction,
like the old and benighted law.[89]
Instead, you transformed the old into the new
by mixing yourself into this pure oil,
making it radiant with heavenly light.

And although the savors of your sweetness are beyond expression
and cannot be compared to anything,
although you have variously been referred to as
the flowers of the field or the lilies-of-the-valley,[90]
exquisite nard or sandalwood mixed with aloe,[91]
the scent of saffron, the blossoms of the vine or a fine wine,
you, Lord beyond understanding, deemed it fitting
that your name be glorified simply as “oil poured out,”[92]
for you are the consummation of all things
and lacking in nothing.

Thus, not by the mixing of opposing elements,
which at once symbolize a divided will,
but rather in confirmation of our love,
you revel in divine joy,
for our sake, you manifest yourself in all your splendor,
according to our needs,
as the light of goodness
or as a warming fire,
or as the fervor of love,
devoid of any hard-hearted coldness,
in ways to make understandable to our minds
that this drop of oil can really unite us with God.

With Solomon the anointed and adopted of God,
I sing with the mouth of a bride, to you heavenly bridegroom,

a song of praise and thanksgiving,
yearning with the fervent desire of my heart
for your sweet scent, more than for any incense.
In the inspired words of the wiseman[93] and the theologian evangelist,[94]
let us hasten in your footsteps and the trace of your scent.[95]
Like one who has the words of eternal life,[96]
having washed my face with the water of life,[97]
which is more exalted than the waters above the heavenly firmament,[98]
and having anointed my head with the heavenly oil of incorruptibility,[99]
I come before you with joy, cheerfully and without sadness.

L

This venerated and blessed oil,
would not be an ointment for the chamber of my brain,
or do the hair on my head any good,
were it not sealed with the sign of your life-giving cross, Lord.

This miraculous oil brings the blessing of the Light to
the Jew and the Gentile,
the Indian and the barbarian,
the Scythian and the Greek,
the cruel savage and the fearsome dog-headed giants,
the freeborn master and the slave by birth,[100]
making them Christians,
baptizing them in your name,
dedicating them to your Holy Spirit, and
adopting them as the true sons of your Heavenly Father.

See how varied its powers,
first in the physical and then in inner strength.
For as a wooden vessel easily cracks unless it is rubbed with oil
and becomes useless and worthless,
so a person, if not anointed, is easily led astray,
and separated from you, and
remains unenlightened.[101]

This oil is your finger, O Jesus,[102]
with which you perform miracles,
which like unscratchable, impenetrable armor,
covers us with an ever-protective cloak,
from dark and foreign marauders.
For one pure as wool, dipped in this oil,[103]
can neither be stained with blood,
nor fade into somber colors.

Spiritually, this oil enters
and penetrates the very substance of our being.
And if the curse of the Psalmist
could soak the bones of the evildoer like oil,[104]

how much more will your Spirit
through this oil of light,
heal and make whole
our invisible inner beings,
from our windpipes
to our toes,
completely submerging
any disturbing thought of death.
For your awesome, life-giving power, Lord Christ,
is mixed in this oil and truly dwells in it.

M

Oil, this magnificent substance applied by wrestlers
to their naked bodies, as an enhancement during tournaments,
making it difficult for their opponents to take hold of them,
sets demons and diseases to flight.

For, in the words Ezekiel addressed to the spiritual Pharaoh,[105]
in the form of a satirical allegory:
"On the day you were created,
I placed you with an anointed guardian cherub
amidst the fiery stones of the holy mountain of God."
O blessed and awesome universal help,
who is always beyond words and beyond understanding,
who is constantly venerated through the gospel of life
as the new-born, anointed one from the city of David,[106]
and constantly sought as in the question of the chief priest,
"Are you the Christ, son of the blessed?"[107]
and in the blessed proclamation by Peter,
"You *are* the Christ, the Son of the living God,"[108]
and by your suspicious interrogators,
"If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."[109]
And because of your teachings,
we believe you to be the Christ,
teacher and Lord of all.

And even before this,
Herod directly asked for you by name, O Christ,[110]
and you yourself answered, "How is it written
that the anointed of God, the Son without beginning,
the one David calls Lord, could be his son in time?"[111]
And we understand from this as a fitting interpretation,
that the consummation of this mystic calling is realized in us,
who have the honor of being called Christians.[112]

N

The awesome word "anointing,"
evokes at once trepidation, veneration and rich adoration,

that no earth-dweller dares be called God,
but only godly.
Likewise, no human being has been called the Christ,
but only Christian.
Not even the greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist,[113]
who by baptizing with water
prepared the way for the baptism with the spirit,
could claim this name,[114]
for he said, "I am not the Christ, but was sent before him."[115]

In the words of the evangelist Mark,
the disciples set out in pairs,[116]
and as if acting with the genuine hand of God
they would anoint with oil
and without invoking any other human devices,
they would heal people.

For as darkness yields to the light,
and ailments to health
and night to day
and death to life,
so by virtue of this substance, given by the Lord,
all evil works are rejected, checked, and completely suppressed.

And just as for flies, spiders and insects that crawl into the ears,
the oil is a deadly poison that kills them,
so this oil strengthened with the abundant blessings of grace,
wards off demons, dissolves the mortgage of evil and
tears up the death sentence.

The baptismal font is not complete
unless accompanied by anointing.

To the first man left mortally wounded by brigands,
this salve of salvation was applied,[117]
and it also served honorably
as ointment for the incurable wounds of Jacob and Israel.[118]
David wanted this oil
as a fruitful olive tree in the house of the Lord,
dwelling there always in trust,[119]
predicting abandonment of circumcision
and adoption of the grace of baptism.

But how can I discourse
convinced that I understand this completely,
especially regarding holiness,
when even the angels cannot explain it in words,
let alone its true essence?

O

Glory to you always and in all things,
immortal king, in the praise I now sing,
which you created and perfected through me,
good, caring, merciful and patient,
wealthy and abundant, Lord, triumphant over all.
The idea of anointing sketched by our forefathers,
you made a reality in the fullness of time.

You are light in your very nature[120]
and the ever-shining sun,
and you called your disciples the light of the world,[121]
for through them you filled the creatures of all the earth
with rays of blissful grace.

You accepted the anointing of your feet with the oil of sweetness[122]
as a symbol that our prayers are acceptable to you.
And by the anointing of your head by a woman of ill-repute,[123]
you showed your compassionate love for us.

And with such great pleasure, O infinite Lord,
did you inhale the aroma of the oil,
that you ordered as an inviolable commandment
that wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world
that seemingly insignificant act of anointing should be remembered,[124]
to the amazement of your listeners
and raising the hopes of future generations.

“You have been anointed by the Holy One,”
said that most blessed of your disciples,
explaining the mystery poured out upon us
from your overflowing bounty, O source of life.
This drop of blessing from you who are praised on high,
which endlessly inoculates us,
bears a close, fitting and lasting resemblance
to you who are light and to your Holy Spirit.

It is called *light*,
because it is like the first element of creation, [125]
and the very symbol of you, our Creator,
by which you drive away the gloomy darkness of evil.

It is called *fire*,
because in every element of creation
there is distributed in some measure, your essence,
hidden and manifest,
silent and proclaimed,
that unless provoked by the devilish adversary,
it will not flare up by itself.

It is also called *anointing*,
because through it we are adopted into your majesty
and are offered to your Father as his inheritance[126]
and marked indelibly with your mercy by this oil, like you,
so we might shine brightly in the next life.

It is also called *spirit*,
because we are cleansed of the calamities of deceit,
cunningly instigated by that troublemaker Satan,
so we might worship our heavenly Father
renewed in soul and with truth,[127]
nailed to you with faith and hope,
all-giving God.

P

In truth, eternally and in reality,
this oil filled with light is
a venerable proof of your love, God on high.

This is why Paul himself deemed it fitting
to say directly in his teaching on grace and thanksgiving,
"He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God,
who has also sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee,"[128]
and also, "Do not," he said, "grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."[129]
"Anointed" is a title honorable and invincible
in the Old Testament, yet more so in the New.

In the words of the Psalm of David,
that predict faithfully the mystery of your providential suffering, Lord,
"The rulers of the people band together against the Lord and his anointed."[130]
A great prophecy that imprinted upon the Jewish throngs
the unredeemable sin of spilling your blood,
caused by audacity toward you, Lord,
"Who can put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed,
and be guiltless?"[131]
For although Saul was killed by one of his own,[132]
still they were not rejected in shame
or subject to the insults of foreign nations,
until they were implicated in the spilling of your blood, Lord.

And these pleas in the Psalms are a great pledge,
reminding us of the inheritance of future generations:
"For the sake of your beloved servant David,
you do not turn away the face of your anointed one,"[133]
and again, "Look upon the face of your anointed"[134]
and "show steadfast love for your anointed."[135]

Q

This light-filled fluid, O Christ,
is the venerated gift of your hand,
for out of all riches in your kingdom,
the Prophet deemed nothing higher, Lord,
than that you would say,
"I have found David, my servant,
and with my holy oil I have anointed him."[136]
Thus, by this instructive example,
embracing your anointing with the light, our Lord Jesus Christ,
you are known to us, unchanging and eternal.[137]

You are all and in all, the only king of kings,
and the true anointed one among the anointed,
glorified and worshiped yesterday and today.[138]

For as the wick, soaked in oil, does not give light
until lit with a flame,
so we, who are anointed with the light,
do not glow until we are lit like torches in heaven.
This is a clear explanation of its nature,
transmitted from the ancients till today,
painted in marvelously brilliant colors
through these felicitous analogies.

R

Now, the cause of these sublime, life-giving, divine effects,
characteristic of you, Creator,
without which one cannot be considered a Christian,
or named a Nazarite,[139]
or be remembered as a son of Judah,
or raise a battle cry in the name of the Lord of Jacob,[140]
is this substance, the oil of blessings,
in which your Holy Trinity is mixed and joined:
the ray of grace,
the splendor of our forehead,
the image of our face,
the comeliness of our traits,
the light of our eyes,
the sign of the cross on our pupils,
the tenderness of our cheeks,
the decoration of our countenance,
the guardian of our lips,
the attendant of our faith,
the guide of our behavior,
the tie that binds,
the strength of souls,
the fortitude of resistance,

the barrier to spells,
the destroyer of talismans,
the repeller of wizards,
the confounder of sorcerers,
the exposer of heretics,
the vanquisher of demons,
the dispeller of pain,
the fulfiller of the baptized,
the fervent desire of converts,
the incomprehensible mystery of outsiders,
the bewilderment of pagans,[141]
the envy of non-believers,[142]
the unmasker of secrets,
the honor of the humble,
the glory of slaves,
the adornment of women,
the growth of children,
the joy of the aged,
the consecrator of the ordained,
the counsel of the pure,
the crown of kings,
the grandeur of monarchs,
the excellence of emperors.

For as a sealed container
indicates the value of the contents,
so the sublimity of your grace sealed in us
by being anointed in your name,
God and Lord Jesus Christ,
is beautifully symbolized by anointing.
And the name of this substance, *muron*,
according to the inspired wisemen,
originated with the Egyptians and
expresses its very essence
as an image of an awe-inspiring mystery.

S

For this blessed *muron*,
which the prophet foreshadowed,
referring in his prayer to the light of his eyes,[143]
according to its etymology is derived from *homeron*,[144]
which means *mother for me*,
that is to say, *that which strongly attracts our nature to itself,*
and solidifies through a wonderful transformation,
the fluid water of the font of light,
and like the ingredient that curdles milk into yogurt,
so it stabilizes my untame ravings and
the perpetually flowing stream of my consciousness.

According to another etymology,
the word *muron* means ‘somber,’
that is, ‘obscure,’
since it refers to something dark, profound or unseen.[145]

And this name is not some baseless metaphor,
since this word truly refers to something
that symbolizes a secret deeper than the holy of holies.
For *muron* does not wash away dirt like water,
or bolster the heart like bread.
Instead in a fittingly new way, with divine providence,
it imprints the Lord on our senses,
nevertheless remaining exalted beyond our comprehension,
thus its name is beyond our understanding.

For as God truly dwells in light that cannot be approached,[146]
with your boundless glory in its infinity,
you covered yourself in impenetrable cloud[147]
externally sealed from our faculties.
In the same way, the flow of light
from the eloquent tongues of some,
in appropriate poetic composition is called *mrayl* (‘obscure’),[148]
because worldly natures cannot understand essential truths.
The holy chrism richly and properly
commands both these divine names,
for the very name *chrism* resembles the name of our exalted Lord, Christ,
doubly glorifying this oil,
consecrated with fine and fragrant incense.
For “Our God is a consuming fire,” according to Moses,[149]
and also, “the light,” according to John,[150]
thus Isaiah’s allusion is justified:
“The light of Israel shall become a fire.”[151]

T

Once again I shall express the same idea
in different words and comparisons,
with renewed praise and blessings,
for I cannot forget my bitterness,
which you sweetened in your great compassion.
For *mera*, which means ‘bitterness [in Hebrew],’[152]
appropriately signifies ‘wearisome torment and pain,’
so in Armenian, *muron* is explained etymologically
as a derivative of *merelutyun*, that is, ‘mortification.’[153]
For by being anointed with this spirit-bearing oil,
we are cut off from the vanities of this world,
those vile and deadly excesses of the Adversary,
whose dankness makes my lyre go out of tune,
whose dampness muffles the sound of my drums[154]
that used to resound strong and bold when struck

but whose soggy wetness drags us down
into the deaf numbness of death.

Yet again through this anointing we are bound with hope
to the miracle of your cross, beyond telling, O Christ,[155]
for by baptism into your death, O living God,[156]
we partake in your divine immortality through you yourself, God,
placing complete trust in you,
forever, fully and inseparably.

U

This oil seals us in your name, Jesus,
with a four-pointed mark in the form of your sign,[157]
conferring grace in glory and dignity to your blood,
O Savior and giver of life,
and crowned with the same invincible glory,
this oil is exalted.

It is called the wood-blessing oil,
in the words of the Prophet,[158]
for when this oil is miraculously applied
to common wood of the forest,
raw material, wild with evil and strange ideas,
becomes the mature equivalent of your cross,
to be offered up to you, O Creator.

Similarly, the windows of our soul, which are always open,
were sealed by you, in the name of your awesome majesty,
with the sign of the cross
in providential modesty,
that we might inhabit a dwelling favored by your Holy Spirit,[159]
and might be impervious to the evil delusions of the trickster
and his dark fog.
Restrained by this light, we gather for the hymns of thanksgiving
at the evening service with the stars, your heavenly lamps,
symbolic of the light of your grace, the *muron*, that burns in us.
And in this light, the oil reminds us of the salvation of the good,
planting this thought in our souls, making it blossom and bear fruit.[160]
To make ready for the banquet
on the last night of your Great Coming,[161]
we use this light like a lamp.[162]

V

Now, if using the numerical value of the Armenian alphabet,
we take the 22nd letter with the value of 400 [n],
and apply it to the profound mystery of the oil,
we come up with an easily digestible explanation
to nourish those hungry for understanding.

For when we multiply twenty times four, we get 80 [dz],
which is the first letter of the word *oil* [dzet/dzyut] in Armenian.
And when we substitute the letter 400 [n] for 80 [dz],
we change the word for *oil* [dzyut] into the word for *matter* [nyut],
which symbolizes the new leaven
that miraculously raises up the lump of dough.[163]
And as the Gospel parable teaches,
though the smaller [80] does not contain the larger [400],
nevertheless it can transform the whole mass and make it grow,
so the anointing oil mixed into our nature transforms and makes us grow.

W

This gentle oil is a constant reminder
of elevation and humility.
For when eaten in food it goes down soft,
like a balanced and kind word,
but when put on liquids, slippery and unstable,
it rises above them,
showing its glorious excellence and superiority,
symbolizing its miraculous mystery.
And when applied to a leather container,
it is not absorbed like water or wine,
but rather stays on the surface within its proper bounds.
Thus understanding the incomparable excellence of your goodness,
O Son of the living God,
by virtue of your blood,
we have our foreheads sealed
with this oil of sacred gifts,
and the breath of our nature imprinted with your Holy Spirit,
believing with the conviction of our heart
that this oil will forever show forth and shine anew with brilliant radiance
upon the varied and marvelous expanse
like a beacon toward the glory of everlasting life.

And may this spiritual oil,
full of bliss and heavenly glow,
make the sign of your cross
shine upon my face, in your image.[164]

X

And being incomprehensible, a power too great for understanding,
even soaring with the swift wings of the mind,
before the pursuit of my thought
flying without trace into infinity,
completely disappeared, hid from me,
and it left no likeness,
resembled no parallel,
was defined by no formula,

and could be measured by no companion,
but rather was spiritually superior to them,
like the sign of your divine cross,
the equal to your blood, O Savior.

And now, Lord, bless us through it and in it.
And by it may your name become our salvation,
O awesome, light, heavenly and marvelous,
venerated with incense by the pure in spirit in praise of your ineffable glory,
holy, holy, beyond understanding, beyond telling, exalted, merciful,
lauded, true, doer of good and holiness,
Pardon us.[165]
Grant us healing.
Clothe us in grace.
Endow us with bliss.

By being anointed with this oil, this heavenly shower of light,
may I be found sinless.
Do not let the sorrow of sinful infirmity,
invade and take over this anointed rational fabric of mine,
and commingle with the image of my soul.

For those who present themselves to be anointed with this oil,
let them be beautifully arrayed in holy splendor
as for a glorious wedding,[166]
their souls adorned with happiness.

And for those who approach it to be counted among the elect,
may this light, this glorious fire, given by God,
be a double tempering,
with the fervent striving for the good,
through which they emerge transformed.

And in all ways fully armed with ever-ready steadfastness,
may I dwell upon your unshakeable rock,[167]
standing firm,
my faith grounded in you without any doubt.

For those who are on fire with this gift,
by this sign of victory, may they
not be doused with water,
not be burned by the fire,
not be frozen by the cold,
not be extinguished by the harmful wind,
not be stained by unclean dreams,
not betray Jesus' own to the Evil One,[168]
not forfeit the accumulated treasures of life
at their moment of exit from this world,
not be outside the protection of your wings,[169]
not be stripped of our being anointed by unclean living.

But by your grace, may we be set on fire by it,
be filled with it,
be enlightened through it,
be justified by it,
be liberated, crowned and reign by it.[170]

And to you alone, the only Anointed,
together with your Father and your Holy Spirit,
may all give
hymns of blessing,
alleluias in all tongues,
resounding voices,
triumphant praise,
lips lauding your goodness,
holy words of the Psalms,
forever and ever.
Amen.

The previous prayer (92) was about what is holy, and this prayer (93) was a meditation on the holy of holies.

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[1] Is. 6:2-3
[2] 1 Cor. 15:28, Heb. 1:2.
[3] Rev. 1:7, 19:4.
[4] Jn. 1:3.
[5] Phil. 2:10, Heb. 1:6.
[6] Col. 1:16.
[7] Phil. 2:7.
[8] I Jn. 2:27.
[9] Lk. 2:32.
[10] Lk. 1:78-79.
[11] Mt. 5:45.
[12] Rev. 22:16.
[13] Ps. 119 (Arm 118):105, Lk. 1:79.
[14] Ps. 45 (Arm. 44):7, Heb. 1:9.
[15] Gen. 2:7.
[16] Gen. 3:9.
[17] Lk. 1:79.
[18] 1 Tim. 6:16.
[19] Gen. 3:22-23.
[20] The olive.
[21] The spreading of Christ on the Cross is likened to the spreading of anointing oil.
[22] Mt. 9:2-9.
[23] Mt. 25:4-10.
[24] Jer. 3:12.
[25] 1 Jn. 4:8.
[26] St. Gregory refers here to the mystery of redemption, in a play on the Greek words, *helaiov* = 'oil' and *heleos* = 'mercy.' Kéchichian, p. 492, n. 3.
[27] Lev. 7:22-25, Ex. 29:13.
[28] Gen. 9:4, Lev. 7:26.
[29] Lev. 8:30, 21:10.
[30] Gen. 28:18, 35:14.
[31] Lev. 8:30.
[32] Ps. 133 (Arm. 132):2.

[33] 1 Sam. 16:1, 13.
[34] Gen. 14:18-20, Ps. 110 (Arm. 109):4; Heb. 7:1-3.
[35] Although the anointing of Melchisedek is not mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, St. Gregory is relying upon Armenian church tradition and the Synaxarion, which celebrates Melchisedek's consecration on March 25. Kéchichian, p. 493, n. 8.
[36] According to Jewish tradition, Noah buried the head of Adam at Golgotha, the Place of the Skull. Jn. 19:17.
[37] Lk. 10:33-34 (the Good Samaritan).
[38] 1 Sam. 16:13.
[39] 1 Sam. 10:6, 1-12.
[40] Is. 45:1, Ezra 1:2 (referring to Cyrus as the anointed, who in 538 BC helped the Jews out of their captivity to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple).
[41] Among pagan emperors and kings who converted, Constantine of Rome, Trdat of Armenia, Clovis in France. Kéchichian, p. 495, n. 1.
[42] Is. 45:1
[43] Ps. 105 (Arm. 104):15 (saying in effect that it is a sin to harm the prophets, but it is forbidden even to approach the anointed).

[44] 1 Kg. 19:15-16, 2 Kg 9-10 (9th cent. BC).
[45] S. of S. 1:3.
[46] Lk. 4:18.
[47] Jn 1:29, 36.
[48] Lk. 4:18; Is. 61:1.
[49] Lk. 2:11.
[50] Mt. 3:17; Mt. 17:5.
[51] Am 4:13 (per the Armenian version).
[52] Ps. 45 (Arm 44):7.
[53] Lam. 4:20.
[54] Gen. 2:7.
[55] Ps. 4:7.
[56] Jesu or Ecclesiasticus, the son of Sirach.
[57] Samuel.
[58] Saul.
[59] Lk. 10:4.
[60] Sir. 46:19.
[61] S. of S. 8:2, 1:2, 4:4, 10.
[62] S. of S. 5:1.
[63] S. of S. 3:6, 4:14.
[64] Dan. 9:25-26.
[65] Zech. 1:1; 4:1-14.
[66] Ex. 29:2, 10, Lev. 2, 3:1.
[67] Lev. 3:1, Lev. 7:11-16.
[68] Lev. 14:5-7.
[69] Ps. 34 (Arm. 33):8.
[70] Ps. 104 (Arm. 103):15.
[71] Is. 61:3.
[72] Is. 11:2; 61:3, 9.
[73] Ps. 92 (Arm. 91):10-11.
[74] Ps. 23 (Arm. 22):5.
[75] Gen. 3.
[76] Ps. 18 (Arm. 17):28.
[77] Is. 7:14, Matt. 1:23.
[78] Is. 25:6 (per the Armenian version).
[79] S. of S. 2:5.
[80] S. of S. 6:2.
[81] Is. 6:3.
[82] Ps. 48 (Arm. 47):10 (per the Armenian version).
[83] Ps. 51 (Arm. 50):8 (per the Armenian version).
[84] Jn. 20:22.

[85] Is. 9:1.
[86] Ex. 16:16.
[87] A reference to mercury. Kéchichian, p. 502, n. 2.
[88] A reference to water, which evaporates. Kéchichian, p. 502, n. 2.
[89] Ex. 30:22-25.
[90] S. of S. 2:1.
[91] Sir. 24:15.
[92] S. of S. 1:3.
[93] Pr. 4:10-11.
[94] St. John.
[95] S. of S. 1:4.
[96] Jn. 6:68.
[97] Mt. 6:17.
[98] Gen. 1:7.
[99] Ps. 23 (Arm. 22):5, Ps. 45 (Arm. 44):7.
[100] Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:26-28.
[101] Jn. 15:5.
[102] Ex. 8:15; Lk. 11:20.
[103] Is. 1:18.
[104] Ps. 109 (Arm. 108):18.
[105] Prideful man or Satan, cf. Ezek. 28:14.
[106] Lk. 2:11; Mt. 2:5-6.
[107] Mk. 14:61.
[108] Mt. 16:16.
[109] Jn. 10:24.
[110] Mt. 2:4.
[111] Mt. 22:43-45.
[112] Rom. 8:29-30.
[113] Mt. 11:9-11.
[114] Mt. 3:11-16.
[115] Jn. 1:20-23.
[116] Mk. 6:7-13.
[117] Lk. 10:30 (The traveler on the way to Jericho is symbolically Adam beaten by the brigands who symbolize Satan, and cared for by Christ in the role of the Good Samaritan with oil. Kéchichian, p. 508, n. 1, Terian, *Narek*, p. 445, n. 137)
[118] Is. 1:6; Jer. 30:12.
[119] Ps. 52 (Arm. 51):8.
[120] Jn. 1:9.
[121] Mt. 5:14.
[122] Jn. 12:3.
[123] Lk. 7:46.
[124] Mk. 14:3-9.
[125] Gen. 1:3.
[126] Rom. 8:17.
[127] Jn. 4:23.
[128] 2 Cor. 21-22.
[129] Eph. 4:30.
[130] Ps. 2:2.
[131] 1 Sam. 26:9.
[132] 2 Sam. 1:14. St. Gregory assumes that the killer was a Jew, when in fact it was an Amalechite in the employment of Israel. Kéchichian, p. 511, n. 3.
[133] Ps. 132 (Arm. 131):10.
[134] Ps. 84 (Arm. 83):9.
[135] Ps. 18 (Arm. 17):51.
[136] Ps. 89 (Arm. 88):21.
[137] Rev. 19:16, 1 Tim. 6:16.
[138] Heb. 13:8.
[139] Num. 6:2.
[140] 1 Sam. 17:45.

[141] Acts 2:6-13.
[142] Acts 8:18.
[143] Ps. 13(Arm. 12):3.
[144] St. Gregory, in a poetic etymology, discerns two Greek roots, *mi* which he equate with "me," and *ro* which he equates with "flowing, or source," resulting in, "the source of me" or "mother of me." Critical Edition, p. 1120, n. 77.
[145] Some scholars derive *muron* from the Greek *mauros*, "dark" or "black." H. Acharian derives it from the Greek *muros* 'fragrant oil,' coming from Proto-Indo-European *smer (without s-movable), English *smear.* Critical Edition, p. 1120, n. 77.
[146] 1 Tim 6:16.
[147] Ps. 18 (Arm. 17):12.
[148] Following Terian, *Narek*, 450, who notes the sound similarity of the Armenian original *mṙayl* to *muron.*
[149] Dt. 4:24.
[150] 1 Jn 1:5.
[151] Is. 10:17.
[152] Cf. Hebrew *marah*, English *myrrh*.
[153] Critical Edition, p. 1120, n. 77.
[154] Per the Haykazyan Bararan, q.v. *t'mpuk*, a reference to the deafening of the eardrum.
[155] During baptism, the priest makes cross-shaped seals of muron on the forehead, eyes, ears, mouth, heart, back, hands and feet of the person being baptized.
[156] Rom. 6:3.
[157] See note 233.
[158] The Olive Tree. Is. 41:19, Hag. 2:19.
[159] 1 Cor. 6:19.
[160] Jn. 15:16.
[161] Rev. 19:9.
[162] Mt. 25:4, 10.
[163] Mt. 13:33, Lk. 13:21, See Terian, *Narek*, p. 453, n. 194, for an ingenious explanation of the cross pattern formed by these letters used as numbers, when charted on a standard numerical table of the Armenian alphabet, 4 columns of 9 letters each.
[164] Gen. 1:26, Rom 8:29.
[165] Lk. 1:68.
[166] Rev. 21:2.
[167] 1 Cor. 10:4, Mt. 7:24.
[168] Jude 1:1.
[169] Ps. 17 (Arm. 16):8.
[170] 1 Pet. 2:9.

Prayer 94

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Eternal God, almighty, doer of good,
creator of light and inventor of night,[1]
life in death and light in the darkness,[2]
hope for the expectant and patient with the doubters,
who with your ingenious wisdom
turns the darkness of death into morning,[3]
dawn that does not dim, sun that does not set.[4]
The dark of the night is not able to cover the glory of your Lordship,
before which all creation kneels constantly in worship,
those in heaven, and on earth, and those confined in hell.[5]
You who hear the sighs of those who are bound,
and who attend to the prayers of the humble,
and receive their supplications,
my God and my king,
my life and my refuge,
my hope and my confidence,
Jesus Christ, O God of all,
holiness that dwells in the souls of the saints,
consolation for the afflicted and pardon for sinners,
you who know all things before they happen,
send the protective strength of your right hand
and save me from the terror of the night and evil demons,
so that always embracing your awesome memory and your holy name
on the lips of my soul and with the desires of my breath,
I might be saved and protected along with those
who call to you with all their hearts.[6]

B

And by the seal of the sign of your cross,
which you renewed by staining it with your divine blood,
and by the same grace of your fatherhood, into which you baptized us,[7]
and in the glory of your image, in which you fashioned and created us,[8]
with these divine gifts,
may Satan be confounded and his machinations foiled,
may his snares be removed and his forces be defeated,
may his sharp-edged weapons be ineffective,
may his fog be lifted, his darkness dispelled, his shadow withdrawn.
May your arm shield me and your right hand seal me,
for you are compassionate and merciful,
and your servants are called by your name.[9]
To you with the Father and your Holy Spirit,

glory and power forever and ever.
Amen.

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[1] Gen. 1:3-5.
[2] Mic. 7:8.
[3] Am. 5:8.
[4] Rev. 22:5.
[5] Phil. 2:10.
[6] Acts 2:21.
[7] Gal. 3:26-27.
[8] Rom. 8:29.
[9] Acts 15:17.

Prayer 95

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

Sun of justice
ray of blessings,
form of light,
cherished desire,[1]
exalted beyond understanding,
mighty beyond telling,
joy of goodness,
hope realized,[2]
praised by heaven,
king of glory,[3]
Christ creator,
life proclaimed,[4]
finish, I pray,
the meanderings
of my wretched, errant voice
with your own mighty words.[5]
Help me to polish
a pleasing prayer,
to bring before your Father on high.
You who took on my likeness
submitting for my sake to trial and condemnation,[6]
take pity on me.
You who bless all life,
God of Goodness,
who provide all things above and below,
who were willing to die for me,[7]
God and lord of all,
who have borne the pangs of mortal flesh,
take pity on me,
for I am wracked with pain.[8]
Take pity on me, stay with me, a wretched sinner,
and pray with me to your Father, your equal in glory.[9]

B

By your noble and glorious blood,
offered unceasingly to please God who sent you,
may the dangers be lifted from me, the condemned,
may my transgressions be forgiven,
may my vices be pardoned,
may my shamelessness be forgotten,
may my sentence be commuted,

may the worms shrivel,[10]
may the wailing stop and the gnashing of teeth fall silent.[11]
Let the laments lessen and tears dry.
Let mourning end and darkness be banished.
May the vengeful fire be tamped out
and torments of every kind be exiled.

C

May you who grant life to all be compassionate now.
Let your light dawn, your salvation be swift,
your help come in time, and the hour of your arrival be at hand.
May the dew of your mercy quench the parched field
where my bones have fallen into the pit of death.
Prepare the earth for the day of light
and let the soil bloom and bring forth fruit,
heavenly cup of life-giving blood,
ever sacrificed, never running dry
all for the salvation and life of the souls in eternal rest.
And though my body die in sin,
with your grace and compassion,
may I be strengthened in you, cleansed of sin through you, and
renewed by you with life everlasting,
and at the resurrection of the righteous
be deemed worthy of your Father's blessing.[12]
To him together with you, all glory,
and with the Holy Spirit, praise and resounding thanks,
now, always and forever,
Amen.

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[1] Mt. 13:17, Jn. 8:56.
[2] Lk. 4:21.
[3] 1 Cor. 2:8.
[4] Jn. 6:68.
[5] Rom. 8:26.
[6] Heb. 2:18, Gal. 3:13, Phil. 2:7.
[7] Gal. 2:20.
[8] Heb. 4:15.
[9] Heb. 7:25.
[10] Mk. 9:48.
[11] Mt. 25:30.
[12] Mt. 25:34.

Postscript Dedication on the Composition of this Book

The sun that brings joy to our eyes
the brilliant, glistening round disc,
always brimming, radiant light bearer,[1]
measurer of days, dispelling darkness,
is the creative dawn that counts years and groups them into centuries
along the eternal cycle of life and death of this passing world.

At the end of the ninth jubilee [2]
and the commencement of the tenth
according to the calendar of the people of the House of Japhet,[3]
three years after his arrival, in the north-eastern regions,[4]
the conquering Roman Emperor, Basil,[5]
traversed the expansive frontier in all directions
and raised huge stone monuments wherever he laid his hand.
Without blinking an eye,
he took possessions to the left and right,
without breaks or gaps,
adding the parcels and territories
of many nations to his realm.

In a tranquil period,
when the enemies of the church were restrained
I undertook the writing of this book.
I planned, arranged, compiled, took notes,
gathered, organized, composed, and set it forth,
bringing together in one wondrous work,
in a single style passages from many different sources,
to produce this fruitful, sacred book.
I, Grigor, priest of the faith,
the lowest in rank among the poets and the least of the teachers,
working with my blessed brother Hovhannes,
a member of the noble brotherhood of Narek Monastery,
being relatives not only in body,
but also in unity of soul, faith, honor, and thought,
initiated in the same way of life,
we lived as two persons with one persona,
four eyes fixed on the same mystic vision.

And now, we ask you who partake at this banquet table
with its various offerings,
to remember us in earnest prayers
and worthy supplications,
with pure love and kind thoughts,
that your name be written in the
book of everlasting life in heaven on high.[6]
Amen.

Composed
by St. Gregory of
Narek with the help of his
brother Hovhannes around the
year 1001 of our Lord and 500 of the
Armenian era, copied through the cen-
turies by dedicated scribes and scholars and
revered by the Armenian faithful for a thou-
sand years. In 2001 on the occasion of the
1700th anniversary of Armenia's adoption of
Christianity as its state religion, it was translated
in to English with awe and trepidation by Thomas
J. Samuelian and polished poetically by Diana Der
Hovanessian, in the hope that this translation
might help restore to many English-speaking
Armenians this treasure from our heritage and
that for people around the world it will be a
discovery that will cause the heart to sigh. For
once there was a saint called Gregory who
wrote a book of prayer for his brethren
and all nations, at a monastery on the
shores of Lake Van, the land of
our forefathers from time
immemorial.

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[1] Unlike the moon which waxes and wanes.
[2] 9 x 50 = 450 (each half-century was a jubilee)
[3] According to Biblical tradition as set forth by the father of Armenian history, Movses Khorenatsi, the Armenians decedent from Noah's son Japhet, through his grandson, Togarmah (Armenian Torgom), whose son was Hayk, eponymous forefather of the Armenian people. See, Gen. 9:18-10:2, 1 Chr. 1:4, Movses Khorenatsi, History of Armenia, Bk. 1:5. The Armenian Calendar starts at 551, the year after the Council of Dvin. Since this is the first year of the tenth jubilee year, St. Gregory finished writing this book in 451 of the Armenian era, which is 1002 (451 + 551) AD.
[4] North-east of Vaspurakan and East of the Byzantine Empire.
[5] Basil II (976-1025) who came to Armenia in 999, to claim possessions left to him by prince David.
[6] Lk. 10:20, Rev. 20:12.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

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He is the author of numerous books, articles and translations, including *A Course in Modern Western Armenian*, a retelling of Yeznik Koghbatsi's *Refutation of the Sects*, a verse translation of Toumanian's *David of Sassoon*, and *Armenian Origins: An Overview of Ancient and Modern Sources and Theories*.
In 1998 he moved to Armenia, where he practices law, continues scholarly pursuits, and remains active in Armenian community and church life. He can be reached at tsamuelian@arlex.am.

With what shall I come before the Lord? Shall I come with burnt offerings? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?
Micah 6:6-8

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. - Romans 8:26

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

Written shortly before the first millennium of Christianity, the prayers of St. Gregory of Narek have long been recognized as gems of Christian literature. St. Gregory called his book an "encyclopedia of prayer for all nations." It was his hope that it would serve as a guide to prayer for people of all stations around the world.

A leader of the well-developed school of Armenian mysticism at Narek Monastery, at the request of his brethren he set out to find an answer to an imponderable question: what can one offer to God, our creator, who already has everything and knows everything better than we could ever express it? Top this question, posed by the prophets, psalmist, apostles and saints, he gives a humble answer – the sighs of the heart—express in his *Book of Prayer*, also called the *Book of Lamentations*.

In 95 grace-filled prayers, St. Gregory draws on the exquisite potential of the Classical Armenian language translate the pure sighs of the broken and contrite heart into an offering of words pleasing to God. The result is an edifice of faith for the ages, unique in Christian literature for its rich imagery, its subtle theology, its Biblical erudition and the sincere immediacy of its communication with God.

For my soul is filled with torment, and there is not cure for my body. I am tortured and laid low in the extreme, and I groan with the sighs of my heart. Psalm 38:9-10.

* * *
St. Gregory of Narek

Born in 951 to a family of scholarly churchmen, St. Gregory entered Narek Monastery on the south-east shore of Lake Van at a young age. Shortly before the first millennium of Christianity, Narek Monastery was a thriving center of learning.

These were the relatively quiet, creative times before the Turkic and Mongol invasions that changed Armenian life forever. Armenia was experiencing a renaissance in literature, painting, architecture, and theology, of which St. Gregory was a leading figure.

The Book of Prayer is the work of his mature years. He called it his last testament: "its letters like my body, its message like my soul." St. Gregory left this world in 1003, but his voice continues to speak to us.

The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise. Psalm 51:17.