

The Spiritual Struggle (Fr. Andreas Agathokleous)

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1. If somebody isn't thinking and says something that annoys you, don't get upset. Ignore them. Never mind what they said. Is that a reason for you to burn? In cases like that, say nothing. Instead of saying 'That mother-in-law of mine'll be the death of me', say, 'That mother-in-law of mine'll be the saving of me'. Let me not do anything bad. Let me not think badly of her when she's my salvation'. The Scriptures say 'defeat evil with good'. Let's not do bad things. Good people don't

do bad things when other people are bad or something unpleasant happens.

2. We should always see the good in people. Because if we see what's not good, we'll certainly see lots of things, because there's nobody deficient in those.

3. If you want an infallible society, without imperfections, without differences and contrasts, you're not going to find it, no matter where you go. On one day, you might not find anything bad, but you certainly will the next. That's the society we live in.

4. We should be magnanimous. The grace of the Holy Spirit gives magnanimity. 'The fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness and restraint'. 'Those who are of Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires...' Because once a passion's inflamed, it's difficult.

5. Do you wonder how the evil enemy of humankind works? He fights so that we don't take communion, don't go to confession. Once, in paradise, he tricked us into eating the forbidden fruit. Now he sets out to stop us approaching the sacraments of the Church.

6. If we're crucified and we suffer with Christ, we'll rise with Him. But in any case, first comes work, then the reward. The effort always go before the crown [cf. William Penn: 'No pain, no palm; no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown'].

7. Submission is a great value. Even greater is not to expect other people to set any store by you.

8. Satan hinders us from doing good. If we manage to, he either makes us regret it or be proud of it. We should do good for the glory of God, for the glory and grace of God and the benefit of souls, not for our own glory.

9. When an icon-lamp gives light to others, is its own diminished? As long as it's lit, it's got light. Often enough, there's smoke as well- pride- so we need to add oil. The Holy Spirit's the oil. Then the devil praises you, so that you become puffed up and you won't get your reward. You have to say 'Get thee behind me, Satan'. As David did at the time of his repentance, when he was under attack by demonic powers and he cried aloud to God with all his soul: 'Hasten to help me...let those who seek my soul be ashamed... let those who wish me evil be put to shame... let those whose say to me, "Fine, fine!" be turned back immediately ashamed'.

10. We should try and live in moderation. Moderation in speech, in words, in

actions, in the way we look at things, in everything. Joy, sorrow and love should all be in moderation. The only exception is God. Him we should love as much as we can.

11. We have to love our neighbour 'as ourselves'. For alms, 'as much as seems good; but not miserably or by force'. It's a matter of 'diagnosis': depending on the place, the time and the purpose. You see, even God gives in due measure. 'To each of us grace has been given in accordance with the measure of Christ's gift'.

12. When we humble ourselves, grace is abundant. We have to be reasonable in all things, measured. We do so much without thinking or out of some passion.

13. When we get angry, it makes the soul boil. When we act weakly, feebly or lethargically it's a sign of coldness.

14. When grace comes to dwell in someone, unclean spirits can't come in. And the Scriptures say that when an unclean spirit departs from a person, it passes through 'waterless places', seeking rest. And then it says 'I'll return to the house which I left. When it comes, it finds it empty, swept and beautifully arranged' and then brings in another seven demons and so 'the last state is worse than the former'. So we need to pray for our souls continuously.

15. Nobody can boast that they never fall. Some people have virtues by nature and yet, despite that, struggle hard to acquire what's beyond nature- no passions. We who don't have virtues want to acquire them without effort. That doesn't happen. Even insignificant things require effort, humility and grace. How much more so things that are really important! Without patience and effort in small things, we'll never get anywhere. It needs more fervent prayer and humility. With practice and by the grace of God, we'll slowly get there.

16. Let's not reproach other people; even if they do us down and do us harm, it doesn't matter. Because if we reproach them we'll make them ashamed. Whatever we suffer, whatever people do to us, God takes note of it and it'll be a cause for us to enjoy greater spiritual gifts. Because what we suffer helps us in the struggle to mortify the passions and find humility. When people strive, they want to be tested, so that they don't go through the same things again, which would be senseless repetition.

17. The devil's always working against us. Every day he neither sleeps nor drinks. Our struggle is against 'the rulers, the authorities the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places' This is why we [stand] 'with the belt of truth fastened about our waist... and the sword of the

Spirit, which is the Word of God'. We do what we can, we should resist as far as possible.

18. When we accept a situation that's distressing for us, we immediately feel lighter. We may not get over it entirely, but the pain becomes bearable. We should always say 'give us faith and grace'.

19. The devil was waging war against a monk to make him fall. He made great efforts. He tried all the tricks he knows but couldn't get round him. He pressed him to leave the monastery, but the monk wouldn't. The Evil One said to him: 'You're fighting me and winning but you won't get away from me. If you live forty years, I won't leave you in peace, until I make you fall', When he'd said this, the monk thought, 'Why am I sat here quarrelling with him. I'll go to my village and put my affairs in order...' He set out. 'Where are you off to?' one of the fathers said to him. 'I'm coming back', he replied. 'Come back now' said the other, 'this is another one of his ploys'. He did as he was told and turned back and said, 'I'll stay here till I die'.

20. I believe there's not a person in the world who's got everything, who's not tested, who doesn't have a cross to bear.

21. If we harbour an antipathy, anger, revulsion, a complaint, it's like a house that's not cared for. It gets dusty, the windows become dirty, and the yard fills up with weeds and muck. If you open it, you're afraid to go in. We have to clean every day, because the devil brings obstacles and makes the house of our soul his own. When he wants to make a nest, he brings in straw and clay and so on. As long as we get rid of what he brings in every day, he can't make a nest. Even more, if we break his eggs, there won't be any fledglings.

22. In the heavenly battle, there are two opposing wills: the one is rational the other, the inferior, is that of the senses. It's irrational, an appetite of the flesh and passion. With the superior, we want what's best; with the inferior what's worst. This confirms what Saint Paul says: 'But I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretch that I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death'. 'For I don't do the good I want, but the evil I don't want'.

23. The day that's in our best interests is one when we suffer more. If we don't suffer, we're like someone who's opened their shop and nobody comes in to buy anything. It's not the spectators that win prizes, but the athletes who compete fairly.

24. We have to swallow so much, to keep so much down. If we start looking for

perfection and infallibility I don't think we'll find many people free of censure. We should be satisfied with what we've got and happiness will follow. We shouldn't look at other people, because they've got problems as well that we don't know about.

25. 'Send Lazarus to tell my brothers to repent', said Dives, the rich man. This was before the judgement. Any mother who dies and sees her children going astray and sinning is sad. But not after the judgement. 'No fear, no sorrow, no sighing', but joy and light. When we have the lights on, we can't see out to where it's dark, but those who're outside in the dark can see us. That's the way it is in the realm of Paradise, as well.

26. Often enough we try to be more righteous than God, so that nobody should remain outside Paradise. But in that case there's neither struggle nor restraint.

27. When we think that spiritual things are difficult, it's because we're not trying. God helps.

28. In everything we do, we should put Christ first and ourselves last. Not the other way round. Constantine the Great didn't triumph like that. He won only with the Cross in front of him.

29. Everything we do should be for the glory of God and the benefit of souls. We shouldn't waste our hours and days but should use them to praise God and provide succour to the souls of other people.

30. Nobody gets through this life unscathed. People who suffer have their reward.

Source: Fr. Andreas Agathokleous, *Εμπειρία Αγιότητας. Ταπεινή καταγραφή του βίου, της θαυμαστής πολιτείας και των θεοπνεύστων λόγων του παππού Παναή από τη Λύση*. Published by the Orthodox Spiritual Centre of Saint George Makris, Larnaca 2005, pp. 72-77.