

On Suffering Temptations Calmly and Thankfully (Abba Dorotheos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Like most of Abba Dorotheos' work, this text is addressed to monks. Fundamentally, however, monastics of both sexes are simply people who have been called to live a particular way of life within the Church. So where Dorotheos says 'monk', it is appropriate to read 'Orthodox Christian'. On a personal note, it's always a pleasure to translate Abba Dorotheos. It's notoriously difficult to transmit an experience from one medium to another, to describe the essence of a painting or a piece of music, for example, in words. One of the best examples of this is Saint Paul. There are passages in his epistles where he really struggles to convey an experience verbally. By and large, Abba Dorotheos deals with more practical aspects of the Christian life and is therefore able to express himself clearly and in a very lively manner. [WJL]

Abba Pimin used to say, quite rightly, that the sign of a monk is revealed in temptations. A monk, who's truly setting out to serve Our Lord must, as *Wisdom* says, [i.e. *Wisdom of the Son of Sirach*, 2, 1] prepare his soul for temptations, so as not to be surprised or troubled by anything that happens to him. Instead, he must believe that nothing happens which is not part of God's providence. In God's providence, everything is exactly as it should be and for the good of our soul. Whatever God does with us, He does out of love and consideration for us and to spare us. And we ought, as Saint Paul says, to give thanks in all things for His goodness to us. And never be aggravated or fearful over what happens to us, but, rather, accept calmly, with humility and hope in God, whatever comes our way, in the firm conviction that, as I've said, whatever God does to us is always out of goodness, because He loves us and because what He does is always right. Nothing else would be right for us, other than the way He deals with us in His mercy.



If you have a friend, and you're absolutely certain that this friend loves you, and if that friend does something that causes you harm and troubles you, you'll still be sure that they acted out of love and you'll never believe that your friend intended to hurt you. How much more certain we should be about God, Who created us, Who brought us out of nothingness into existence and life and Who became a human person for our sakes, Who died for us and Who does everything out of love for us.

It's conceivable that friends might do something because they love me and are concerned about me, but that, despite their good intentions, they do me harm. If this happens, it's because they don't have the knowledge and wisdom to direct my affairs properly. We can't say the same about God, however, since He's the source of wisdom and knows what's best for me down to the last detail. Again, it might be said about the friends who love me and are genuinely concerned about my welfare, that it may happen that there'll be times when they want to help but are powerless to do so. This is something else we can't say about God. For Him, everything's possible and nothing's impossible.

So we know that God loves and cares for what He's created. He's the source of wisdom, He knows what to do to promote my welfare and nothing's beyond His power. We can therefore be certain that whatever He does is for our benefit and so we ought to receive it with gratitude, as we said before, as coming from a beneficent and loving Lord. This is still true even if some things are distressing,

because everything happens in accordance with God's righteous judgement. He Who is merciful doesn't overlook even the slightest sorrow we may bear.

Often, people in doubt about this say, 'But what if somebody in difficult circumstances does something sinful because of the affliction they're suffering from? Does this still mean that that affliction's for their own good?' God doesn't allow us to be burdened with anything beyond our power of endurance, so if difficulties do come upon us, we won't sin unless we're unwilling to endure a little tribulation or put up with anything unforeseen. As Saint Paul says, God is faithful and won't allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to endure. But as people, we've got no patience and no taste for a little labour or for bracing ourselves to accept things with humility. So we're crushed. The more we try and escape temptations, the more they weigh us down and the less we're able to be rid of them.

Many people, for a variety of reasons, swim in the sea. If they know what they're doing, when a big wave comes along they duck under it until it goes past and then they can go on swimming unharmed. But if they're determined to take it on, it'll push against them and they'll be hurled back a great distance. If they try and do the same thing next time, all they do is tire themselves out and make no headway. But if they duck their head and lower themselves under the wave, as I said, then no harm comes to them and they can continue to swim as long as they like. People who do this when they're in trouble, putting up with their temptations with patience and humility, come through unharmed. But if they become distressed and downcast, seeking the reasons for everything, they torture and annoy themselves, and instead of helping, they do themselves harm.