

The Passions of Avarice, Anger, Sorrow and Sloth - Part III (Saint Nil of Sorskij)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



During the period of relentless warfare, we must arm ourselves against the spirit of ingratitude and blasphemy, because it's with those weapons that the enemy attacks us at that moment. Satan defeats people with doubt and fear and directs wicked thoughts at them like arrows: that God won't have mercy on them; that they'll never be forgiven; never be redeemed and saved from the tortures of eternal perdition. Indeed, they're also under fire from other thoughts which I can't write about, and aren't able to work or read because the temptation won't let them. This is why, at moments like this, we should forcefully cast despair away from us, and shouldn't be indifferent to our prayer life.



We should fall down in prayer, with our faces to the ground, because this attitude of the body is very beneficial in assisting us to pray, as Barsanuphius the Great says: "Lord, help me, sinner that I am. Lord, behold my grief and have mercy on

me". As we're taught by Saint Symeon the New Theologian: "Lord don't allow me to be tempted beyond my strength. Not with grief nor with pain of the soul. But redeem me and give me strength so that I can withstand everything with gratitude". Or, as we raise our eyes and hands to heaven, let us pray over these passions, sloth and immorality, as the blessed Gregory the Sinaite teaches us, because he considered them to be the worst of all. In this way we shall strive to force ourselves, insofar as we can, to read and to do our handiwork, both of which are of great assistance in the time of warfare. It sometimes happens that Christians engaged in the struggle don't allow even a single passion to get near their soul. Then there's a great need and opportunity to devote themselves entirely to prayer, with all the strength they have.

In order to defeat the spirit of ingratitude and blasphemy we say: "Get behind me, Satan. I worship my Lord and God and I serve Him alone. I accept all pain and sorrows gratefully, because they're sent from Him, in order to relieve me of my sins. The Prophet Micah says: 'I will bear the wrath of the Lord, for I have sinned against Him'. But ingratitude and blasphemy will come back to haunt you, as you'll find out soon enough. So get away from me. May the God Who made me in His image and likeness destroy you".

If he continues to bother you, even after those words, busy yourself with something outside- material or spiritual work, that will strengthen your patience and hope, because that's what your soul has to cling on to, if it wants to please God, as Saint Makarios says. But you need to be careful in your choice of outside work, because the devil often uses it to entrap us in his snares, to bring us into sloth and to distance our soul from hope in God. But God will never allow a soul that hopes in Him to be tested beyond its powers, since He knows what we are capable of. People know what a mule or a donkey or a camel can carry and so they load each one accordingly. A potter is in something of a similar position: he knows the temperature at which to fire each of his clay vessels, because too fierce a heat would shatter them. Equally, he knows not to take them out of the oven too quickly, because that would render them useless. If people have this much awareness, how much greater and immeasurable is the wisdom of God, Who knows exactly what temptations and how much of each every soul needs to overcome in order to be made worthy of the Kingdom of God. Not only will we be worthy of enjoying the good things to come, but here, too, we'll receive the comfort of the Most Holy Spirit.

When we know all of this well, we can be steadfast with courage and silence in our cell. Though sometimes people benefit more from conversation with others, as

Saint Basil says: “Often, when we’re slothful, a blameless visit to our fellow brethren, at an appropriate time, and conversation with them can, up to a point, dispel the passion of sloth”. And so, people who strive, if they’re gradually strengthened by divine grace, and their personal experience, devote themselves with even more desire to the good fight for the virtues. But the Fathers, who know this from their personal struggle, say that patience in quietude is more beneficial.

Blessed Nil Sorskij, Περί νοεράς εργασίας, Orthodox Kypseli, pp. 64-74.