

The Desire for Heaven - 1 (Saint Gregory of Nyssa)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



But so as not to fatigue your mind in vain by gazing out over the infinite, we'll desist from poring over the nature of God Who lies beyond, because it's impossible to understand Him. From what we've looked at, we've formed some sort of notion of His greatness, but all we've really gained is the knowledge that we're unable to understand much else. And the more superior we believe the nature of God to be to our knowledge, the greater our sorrow is, because the *summum bonum*, from which we've been separated, is so great, and is such that we can't bear any real knowledge of Him.



And yet, sometimes we find ourselves in such close communion with God that it defies any attempt at explanation. And this God, Who's beyond our comprehension, is so profoundly entrenched in our nature that we can actually be transformed in accordance with the original image, so that we seem to be new persons because of the absolute likeness. Because, whatever we think now about God, all of it was –

once upon a time – inside people. People once enjoyed incorruption and blessedness and composure and freedom. They didn't know sorrow or the cares of life. They were closer to God and saw Him with a clear and free intellect, unhindered by any intermediate impediment. In short, all of this suggests to us the reason for the creation of the world, when it says that people were made in the image of God, that they lived in paradise and enjoyed the trees planted there. The fruit of these trees was life, knowledge and so on.

If we had all that, how is it possible not to mourn the disaster that befell us, when you compare and contrast the blessedness we knew then and today's misery. We who were elevated have been humbled; we who were made in the image of the heavenly, have become dust; we who were destined to become royalty, are slaves; we who were created immortal have been destroyed by death; we who enjoyed the delights of paradise have been transported to this afflicted and wearisome place.

We've exchanged the ambience of freedom from the passions for this tedious and mortal life. We, who were once free and autonomous, are now dominated by so many and such varied evils that it's not easy even to number our vicissitudes. Because each of the passions we have within us, when it becomes dominant, takes control of the person who's subject to it. And just like any tyrant, when it captures the citadel of the soul, it exploits the occupants with the things that should be subject to them: each passion uses our very thoughts to our detriment, in order to benefit from them.

In this way, anger, fear, cowardice, audacity, excessive sorrow or joy, hatred, contentiousness, callousness, harshness, envy, flattery, resentment, heartlessness, and all the passions, which are all ranged in antipathy towards us, are simply an enumeration of some of the tyrants and oppressors who subjugate our souls as captives. And if you think about the bodily tribulations which have become part and parcel of our very nature, meaning the many and varied forms of illness we suffer from and yet which, initially, we had no experience of, you'll weep all the more at seeing woe where there was once weal and at comparing what is bad with what is so much better.

It appears that this is what the Lord is teaching when He praises mourning, that is that the soul looks to the real good and doesn't wallow in the essential falseness of this life. Because, if you look carefully at things the way they really are, how can you live without tears? In the same way, if you don't – and are absorbed in the pleasures of life- how can you understand that you're actually floundering in a pernicious morass and are in no better state than dumb animals? The way their bodies have been formed is miserable. What could be worse than being deprived of

reason?

They've got no idea of their distressed condition, yet their lives go on, with some sort of pleasure. A horse, for example, will whinny when it's pleased, and a bull will paw the ground and send up dust; a pig raises the hairs on its back and dogs play; calves gambol. You can see in each of the animals how they express their pleasure by certain signs. If these animals had any understanding of the value of reason, they wouldn't spend their dumb, miserable lives in sensual pleasure. The same is true of those people who have no cognizance of the good things of which our nature's been deprived. For them, enjoyment of the present life means sensual pleasure.

[To Be Continued]