

## Legitimate Exercise (Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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Whatever movement you make, starting with its conception and following through to the implementation, you have to examine all the time what God will take from it. Because that's all that'll remain; all the rest will be done away with.



This is why we're always telling you to be careful, because within the all-embracing evil of the devil, there's also this dreadful mystery. Satan doesn't only fight to throw his opponent and get him out of the ring and the stadium. Naturally, he's delighted beyond belief when people listen to him and leave the stadium, the contest.

But those who aren't convinced and get involved in the action, he doesn't stand in their way. Not only that but he gives them support, the difference being that he disorientates them. They do their intellectual or practical work, but not in the right frame of mind. Jesus tells us: "Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted". If we look at the word literally, we'll see that the vast majority of

people alive today mourn. But of those who mourn, who will be blessed?

Only those few who mourn for God. In other words, only those who have a sense of their sinfulness and whose hearts are wounded by Godly sadness at saddening God, the centre of their love, and they cry because of it. They will achieve the life of the blessed. This is why we need to be careful. The thing is not merely to act, but to act in accordance with God's will. You see the detail with which that great luminary whom we read this morning presented that wonderful example. A certain monk decides to dedicate himself to the care of somebody who's ill. The springboard for his decision and its implementation was that, if he carried out his plan, he'd be rewarded by God. And you saw what this great Father said, with his keen discernment: the monk wasn't behaving properly. He'd missed the mark. Of course we can't say that he'd sinned by his actions, but he wouldn't get much by way of reward compared to the time and effort he put into his task. It would have been better if he'd acted in the name of affection, in the name of Christ's commandment, in the name of our Lord's love: "by the words of His lips, He has guarded hard ways" [Trans. note: this appears to be a free rendition of Psalm 16, 4]. This is the real aim. What's the reason we take on an obedience in the monastery? It's not because we're scared of the Elder who gave the order. It's not because we're afraid the others will misjudge us and think we're somehow difficult and out of order. Nor is it so that we'll become dependable in routine jobs and supposedly obedient and unwilling to cause any upset. That's not the aim. The point is that we should do what we have to conscientiously, and, if we had to be shown to how do it, it's because we didn't know. We had to accept advice humbly to get to the real aim. Once we've understood, once we've taken it on board, then, by ourselves, even if we're hindered, we obviously won't react rudely, but we'll try and find a way of settling things for the love of God. We'll do it as an obligation, because it's imposed by God's command. But you never look for a reward. You never fear anyone. You don't act because somebody's threatening you or flattering you. You do it because you've realized it's God's will. Unless people act first on the basis of love for God and then of love for their neighbour, they're going the wrong way, they're disorientated. Any indirect or oblique means that people use don't help them get to their real goal.

This is why we need to examine our consciences all the time, in case we've been seduced by some passion or some desire and we're acting in a round about way and wasting our efforts. That's the only way you'll acquire a clear conscience, the only way you'll acquire real freedom, that which is in Christ. Then you'll understand that the commandments of Our Lord "are not heavy" and that the yoke of Christ and His burden "are light". We're obedient to every commandment because we

love Christ. We act only for Him. Not for the forgiveness of our sins- He grants that through the Cross. Nor for His kingdom. That's an insult. He created His kingdom, He planted Paradise in the East, even before He created humankind. He doesn't need to be shown. He needs only one proof: for people to come to their senses, to realize that they're affronting God if they don't obey His will. This is real contemplation, this is the real policy of our Fathers, for which they were considered demented in this world, and were persecuted and lived outside in the deserts "in mountains and caves and holes in the ground". Their eyes were never dry from their lamentations, their concern that perhaps they'd been seduced by the enemy, who, as I said, doesn't attack us only from one side, to disorientate us so that we don't act properly, but actually supports us, so long as our actions aren't in accordance with God's will. This is why, at least for us who are monks, it's necessary to have this light, for these eyes to be open, for this salt always to be there. This detail of the spiritual law that we mentioned is really important and needs to be taken seriously into consideration. But I know from my own experience that a true subordinate doesn't need such fine distinctions. Quite simply, so long as they are exact in their obedience, then they're freed of the concern of having to discern whether they're doing well or not, given that they're still in a state of infancy and childhood. This is why our Church created the coenobitic life so that the predecessors, the older monks, could take on responsibility for the younger ones. This is why our Fathers tolerated group co-existence, whereas, as you know, monks originally lived alone. But these lone monks later returned and created communities, they implemented the saying "bear one another's burdens". "But woe to him who bears but does not understand" writes Saint Efraim in his works. This is why the older monks, the experienced ones, take up the burdens of the weaker ones, out of duty. And the immature and younger monks are happy to subordinate themselves willingly, not out of servility, but out of gratitude that the older monks have agreed to set aside their concerns for themselves and have come back for them, the younger ones, and have become involved in their weaknesses. They want to teach them the spiritual law in case, through inexperience, they labour in vain and don't achieve their goal. In this way, the law of mutual support is brought into operation.

That's what I wanted to remind you of tonight and let none of you feel comfortable because, through acting, he's found something. Not unless that something's legitimate. There are a lots of contestants in the stadium, but only one takes the prize. The one who has striven legitimately. For him "there is in store the crown of righteousness which the Lord will award on that day". Amen.

Source: Αθωνικά Μηνύματα