

Cut off the passions before the soul becomes accustomed to them - 3 (Saint Abba Dorotheos)

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I've told you in different ways how people fall into bad habits. We don't call people volatile if they lose their tempers just once. They're not libertines if they succumb once. If they've given alms once, that doesn't make them charitable. It's the

constant practice of virtue or wickedness that makes it an unbreakable habit in the soul, and it's this which torments it or brings it solace. We've already said, in a variety of ways, how this happens. Virtue's natural and innate to the soul, since the seeds of virtue can't be eradicated. As I've said, the more we practice virtue, the more we become identified with it. In other words, we find our true nature again, we find our health, just as, after an eye problem we regain our sight, or when we regain our natural, healthy state after any kind of sickness. The same's not true of wickedness, though. In the case of evil, it's by practising it that we acquire a foreign and 'unnatural' habit. As if we're bound fast to some contagious disease and can't be cured without a lot of help, lots of prayers and many tears, which will draw down upon us the Lord's compassion.

We come across the same thing as regards the body. There are, for example, some foods that cause, let's say, an excess of black bile ['black' = 'melan' and 'bile' = 'choly', hence 'melancholy'. It was formerly believed that an excess of bile caused depression. WJL]. I mean, lettuce causes melancholy, as do lentils and other such foods. Of course, it's not bad for the gall-bladder to eat lettuce or lentils or some such every once in a while, but we shouldn't overdo it. In the same way, with the soul, if people persist in sin, they create a bad habit in the soul, which torments them.

You should also know that the soul is sometimes susceptible to a particular passion and if the person submits to it just the once, they risk being bound by it. The same's true of the body. Somebody may well be of a melancholic disposition because of neglecting the symptoms in the past.

So we need great vigilance, care and fear, if we're not to acquire bad habits. Believe me, brethren, anyone who's subjected themselves to a passion will be tormented. It may be that somebody's performed ten good works and is subject to one passion, and, in the end, that one passion defeats the ten good works. Like an eagle that's almost escaped from a trap and is caught by just a talon. It's completely defeated by this one, small piece. If the talon's caught, it's still in the trap, even if all the rest of it is free and outside. Whoever set the trap will be able to take the bird any time they want. The same with the soul. If it's bound to a passion, the enemy will take it any time he wants to. Because the enemy's made that person his underling through the passion. This is why I'm forever telling you: don't let any passion become a habit within you. Pray to the Lord, rather, day and night, not to fall into temptation. And if, being human, we do succumb and fall into sin, let's make sure we rise again, repent over it and weep before God's goodness. Let's be vigilant, let's strive. And God, seeing our intent and our humility and our

contrition, will give us a helping hand and grant us His mercy.

Amen.