

On Travelling the Way of God with Vigilance and Sobriety (Saint Abba Dorotheos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες](#) / [In English](#)



Let us look to ourselves, brethren, and be sober. Who will give us [back] this time, if we waste it? The time will come when we seek these days and will not find them... Let us make a start, let us, in the meantime, desire good. For even though we are not yet in perfection, our desire for it is the beginning of our salvation. From desiring we enter into combat, with God's help, and through fighting will be assisted in the acquisition of the virtues. This is why one of the Fathers [Abba Longinus] says: "Give blood and receive the Spirit"...



For virtues are to be found in the middle. This is the King's highway of which the holy Elder said: "Walk by the King's highway and count the miles". The virtues, therefore, as I said, are in the middle, between excess and total lack. This is why it is written: "Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil (Prov. 4, 27) and go along the King's highway" (cf. Num. 20, 17). And as St. Basil

says, "A person is upright at heart when their thinking tends neither towards excess or absence, but goes straight to the middle path of virtue".

Now, what do I mean? Evil in itself is nothing, for it has no essence or form of being^{*}. God forbid! But a soul which deviates from virtue is in an impassioned state and thus performs wickedness; therefore it suffers from this and does not find any natural rest in it... wickedness is a sickness of the soul depriving it of its own natural health, which is virtue. This is why we said that virtue stands in the middle, just as courage stands midway between cowardice and foolhardiness; humility between arrogance and obsequiousness; modesty between timidity and audacity- and so on with the other virtues.

If someone is found to possess these virtues, such a person is deemed honorable by God, even if they are seen to eat and drink and sleep like other people. They are esteemed for the virtues they possess. But unless people are watchful and keep an eye on themselves they easily deviate from the road either to the left or to the right, that is towards excess or neglect, and so bring upon themselves the sickness that is wickedness.

This then is the royal road by which all the saints have walked; the milestones are the different states of the soul a person has to pass through to see where they are, what point they've reached, and what condition they are in...

Let each of us find out about our own condition. There are three conditions among people: that of giving free reign to our passions; that of checking them; and that of uprooting them. Those who indulge the passions and give in to them, claim them as a right; those who neither indulge our passions nor cut them off completely, dispute with them and come through, but still have them within themselves; those who root them out struggle actively against them.

These three states are very broad. What do I mean? Do you want us to speak about arrogance or debauchery, or shall we speak rather of vainglory, since we often fall into it? Out of vainglory some people won't listen to anything that's said to them. There are those who, when they hear one word are upset and then say five words- or even ten- to every one, and argue and become incensed. And when they stop arguing they carry on fulminating against the person who uttered that one word, and bearing malice against them, and are sorry that they didn't say more than they managed to. And they prepare speeches even more dire to make to that person, and they always say, 'Why didn't I say this?' Or, 'And I've got this to say, as well'. And they're always in a rage.

This is one state, where wickedness has become firmly established in someone. May God deliver us from such a state; this state leads to hell, for every active sin is subject to hell. And even if such people should desire to repent, they are not strong enough to rid themselves of the passions unless they have the assistance of the saints, as the Fathers say. This is why I am always telling you to cut off your passions before you become in thrall to them.

Other people, on being upset by hearing a word, also give back five or ten words, and are annoyed for not having said others three times worse. They're downcast and bear a grudge and go on like this for a few days, and then get over it. Some are like this for a week then are sorry, others are like this for a week, others for a day. Others swear, argue, are upset, upset other people, and immediately repent. You see how many different states there are, and yet all those people are headed for hell as long as they act in this way.

Let us also speak about those who check their passions. They hear one word [said against them] and are troubled within themselves, though they're not saddened because of being abused, but because of not being able to handle it better. This person is in the condition of those who battle their passions and check them. Others struggle and labour and finally are conquered by their passion because it wears them down. Others desire not to answer badly but are betrayed into doing so through habit. Others try hard never to reply maliciously but are saddened that they were the cause of being abused in the first place, but berate themselves for their sadness and repent it. Others again are neither sad nor glad about having been abused.

All these are keeping their passions in check. Two groups are different, however: those who fought and fell; and those who were swept away by force of habit. These are in danger of being like those who give their passions free rein. Yet I say that they are, indeed, standing up to their passions, because in disposition they were opposing them and do not wish to yield to them. They are then grieved, but carry on the struggle. For the Fathers used to say that everything that the soul does not want is of short duration. These groups should examine themselves and see whether, though they might not want to give expression to the passion, they still enjoy the cause of it, which is why they are defeated and carried away...

We also wish to speak of those who are uprooting their passions, people who rejoice over being abused on the grounds that it will bring a reward. These are uprooting a passion, but not knowingly. Others rejoice at being abused and consider that they needed to be upbraided because they were the cause of it;

these people are wittingly uprooting a passion. If people are abused and yet consider themselves to be the cause and accept whatever befalls them as a result, that is knowledge. For everyone who prays to God, 'Lord, give me humility' ought to know what they're asking for, that is that He will send someone to abuse them. And on being insulted, they ought to disparage and despise themselves in their own minds, so that, whereas the other person has humiliated them outwardly, they humiliate themselves inwardly. Others again not only rejoice at being abused and attribute the cause to themselves, but are also sorry for bringing the one who abused them to such turmoil. May God bring us all to this state.

*Cf. Julian of Norwich: "But I did not see sin. I believe it has no substance or real existence. It can be known only by the pain it causes".