

## The Glorious Ascension of Our Lord\* A Guide to the Neptic Activity of Prayer of the Heart

**C**OME, all ye feast-loving Faithful! Let us spiritually celebrate, with enthusiasm and clapping our hands, the marvelous ascent of our Lord and God and Savior from the earth to Heaven.

Today we celebrate the most glorious “Epilogue to the most exquisitely beautiful, most salutary, and universal discourse of the CEconomy of God the Word for our sake.”<sup>1</sup>

Now is the time of ineffable gladness and jubilation, because our corruptible and mortal nature ascends in Christ, incorruptible and immortal and with indescribable glory, to Heaven.

*“Let us radiantly rejoice and let us celebrate, reflecting that our substance, which descended into the abyss of Hades, ascends today above the Angels, Archangels, and Principalities; above the Authorities and Powers and Dominions; above the Seraphim, Cherubim, and the Thrones.”*<sup>2</sup>

Let us take godly delight in that Christ our Savior, having raised our erring nature together with His own Divine Flesh, lifted it on His shoulders; and, having ascended, “goes”<sup>3</sup> to offer it to God the Father with God-befitting joy and to seat it “on the right hand of the Majesty on high,” “at the right hand of the Throne of God.”<sup>4</sup>

And together with the God-inspired Hymnographer of Damascus, let us chant from the heart and with compunction:

*“By the power of Thy Cross, O Christ, do Thou make steadfast mine understanding, that I may hymn and glorify Thy saving Ascension.”*<sup>5</sup>

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**BUT WHY** should our “understanding” be made steadfast by the power of the Cross and not of the Resurrection? Because the glory of the Ascension came after the abasement, the Cross, and the Passion:

*“He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a Name which is above every name.”*<sup>6</sup>



Thus will it turn out for those who love Christ: *“All who have crucified sin through repentance and the evangelical life before death”* will become partakers of the glorious Ascension of our Lord, says St. Gregory Palamas.<sup>7</sup>

And why should our “understanding” be made steadfast and not our tongue or our lips? Because repentance and the keeping of the holy commandments of our Lord call for unceasing vigilance; that is, watchfulness, force, and preparedness:

*“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.”*<sup>8</sup>

The Neptic Fathers say that the *“noetic loins and waist are the mind of man,”* which *“bears the entire burden of the soul.”*<sup>9</sup>

The Holy Apostle Paul enjoins us: *“Stand, having your loins girt about with truth”*;<sup>10</sup> to gird our noetic “loins,” that is, our “mind,” *“as much with the truth of right dogma and faith as with the truth of our virtuous life.”*<sup>11</sup>

But the Holy Apostle Peter also most clearly exhorts us:

*“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the Grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*<sup>12</sup>

Our “understanding,” that is, our “mind,” which is the governor and emperor of the passions, must not be “loose” and “ungirded,” or be diffused by means of the five senses and passionately attach itself to vain and sensible things, defiled and sinning and darkened.

On the contrary, the governing “mind” must put on a “girdle,” be tightened and restrained. And what is the “girdle” of the “mind” and “understanding”?

The Neptic Fathers tell us that the “girdle” is *“attention and the forcible return of the mind to the heart.”*<sup>13</sup>

*“Bind tightly,”* they exhort us, *“and gather your entire mind in your heart with mighty force and great strength.”* *“With attention, as if with a girdle, and with the holding of the breath, one must bind one’s mind tightly”* and keep it in the heart, *“without contemplating any sensible or noetic object, but solely the Name of God and of Jesus Christ through noetic prayer and prayer of the heart.”*<sup>14</sup>

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**PRECISELY** for this reason, the Holy Damascene entreats Christ: *“By the power of Thy Cross, O Christ, do Thou make steadfast mine understanding.”*<sup>15</sup>

For, when our “understanding,” when our “mind,” is “made steadfast” in the neptic activity of the Prayer of the Heart, then we will be noetically illumined by the Light of the Comforter; *“and we are sure to acquire the Divine illumination in our heart, abiding enhypostatically within us, for the illumination of the Holy Spirit, according to the Neptic Fathers, is called hypostatic light, which is both personal and enhypostatic, since it abides in those who are illumined.”*<sup>16</sup>

And by this “enhypostatic” illumination *“abiding in our heart,”* we may perhaps at some point be vouchsafed, by the Grace of God, to be caught up in revelations of the Divine and unutterable Mysteries of the Future Age.

This, then, “*is the order and the way: firstly, the mind and heart must be cleansed; secondly, they must be illumined; and, thirdly, the mind must be caught up in God. For without the enhypostatic illumination of the heart, it is impossible for the mind to be caught up in God.*”<sup>17</sup>

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**ALL YE** who love the feasts and Christ, let us celebrate the Ascension of our Savior! “*Gird up the loins of your mind*”; let us be vigilant! And praying in the heart, let us accept the enhypostatic illumination! And thus may we become participants of the most glorious Ascension of our Lord!



\* **Source:** Ἄγιος Κυπριανός, No. 320 (May-June 2004), pp. 41-42.

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## Notes

1. St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον* [Commentary on the Great Feasts], p. 455.
2. *Ibid.*
3. St. John 16:28.
4. Hebrews 1:3 and 12:2.
5. First Canon of the Ascension, Ode Three.
6. Philippians 2:8-9.
7. St. Gregory Palamas, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CLI, col. 296C.
8. St. Luke 12:35.
9. St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, “Interpretation” of Ephesians 6:14.
10. Ephesians 6:14.
11. See note 9.
12. I St. Peter 1:13.
13. St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, “Interpretation” of Ephesians 6:14 and I St. Peter 1:13, on the basis of St. Gregory Palamas.
14. *Ibid.*
15. See note 5.
16. St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον*, pp. 643-644.
17. *Ibid.*