

# EDIFICATION AND CONSOLATION

“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men for edification and exhortation and consolation”  
(I Corinthians 14:3)

## Simple Catechism From the Experience of the Orthodox Church

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### A Timely Teaching of St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite

## God Has Entrusted to Us the Salvation of Our Brothers and Sisters

“...If you are a lay person, living among unbelievers, imitate the holy Christians of old in love, patience, and humility, keeping all of the Commandments of the Gospel, that you might be a light and paradigm in every good work to the impious, prompting them to glorify the God in Whom you believe, as it is written:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in Heaven” (St. Matthew 5:16).

...Know well that God has entrusted to each of us the salvation of our brothers and sisters and impels us to keep vigil for them....

...God put every Christian in the world so as to be teachers of the unbelievers and impious and to return them by their word and good manner of life to piety and the Faith.

Thus, God will ask of each Christian what he did not only for his own benefit and salvation, but also for the salvation of others, as St. John Chrysostom says:

“For (God) would have the Christian to be the teacher of the world, its leaven, its light, its salt. And what is that light?

It is a life which shines, and has in it no dark thing. Light is not useful to itself, nor salt, nor leaven, but shows its usefulness towards others, and so we are required to do good, not to ourselves only, but also to others” (Homily 52 on the Gospel of St. John).



■ Almsgiving and Salvation

**The Story of a Sinful Woman of Belgrade\***

**“Oh, how great is God's mercy!”**

**A Priest** from Belgrade recounted to us an unusual story regarding a woman of the streets of Belgrade.

One evening at dusk she was walking the streets, practicing her “profession.”

As she passed by a park, she saw a man who was preparing to hang himself. He tied the rope to a tree branch and put the other end around his neck.

The woman swiftly jumped over the fence, pulled out her pocketknife, and cut the rope, at which the man fell to the ground unconscious.

She rubbed his chest until he came to.

He then said to her: **“Why did you do that? I do not want to live anymore; I am a doomed man. Because of my poverty, I wanted to bring an end to this life of misery.”**

The woman took out all the money she had on her and gave it to him, promising to help him until he found work.

She then continued practicing her immoral pro-

fession, all the while giving a portion of her earnings to the poor man for his sustenance.

\* \* \*

Six weeks later, however, the woman came down with a fatal illness and was bedridden.

A Priest was called for her.

In the presence of the Priest, the woman, at the point of death, began to say:

**“O Angels of God, why have you come to me? Do you not know what a filthy and sinful woman I am?”**

Shortly thereafter, she called out again:

**“O Lord Jesus Christ, have you also come to me, a sinner? How have I been made worthy of this? Why, simply because I saved the poor man from death? Woe is me, the unworthy one! Oh, how great is God's mercy!”**

Having said that, she gave up her soul, and her face became bright, as if lit by a candle.

This is what it means to save somebody's soul.

Behold how one act of mercy covered a multitude of sins!

(\*) St. Nicholas (Velimirović) of Ohrid and Žiža, *Emmanuel* (Chroes: December 2010), pp. 193-194. Translated from the Greek.



The preparation of kollyva for Memorial Services

**“What am I to do, aunt? I am looking for two kernels of wheat to eat!”\***

**Keep the decoration simple**

In a village of Roumele, a rather young man departed this life. When the time came for the fortieth day Memorial Service, his relatives, in order to do honor to the departed—or so they believed—ordered a tray of kollyva from a good pastry shop in the neighboring city. And there, so as to please their

customers, what did they *not* put on the tray! Iced decorations and flowers, sugar, frosting, cream and whatnot! Everything except for wheat! The Memorial Service took



place, and that evening the aunt of the departed saw him in her sleep tossing with irritation all the useless ornamentation off the tray.

“Kosta, my boy” she cried out, “why are you throwing the decoration off your tray?”

He then looked at her sternly and replied:

**“What am I to do, my poor aunt? I am looking for two kernels of wheat to eat!”**

\* \* \*

• **Let** us keep this example in mind, since **kollyva must be made with boiled wheat. Keep the decoration simple.**

The Lord said: **“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit”** (John 12:24).

(\*) *Expressions of the Spiritual World* [in Greek] (Eupalio Dorida, Phokis: Monastic Sisterhood of the Panagia Varnakova, 2009), pp. 100-101.

■ St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite

## What to Do When We Are Wounded in Battle\*

### Consoling Counsel

**W**hen you are wounded by succumbing to some sin out of weakness, or at times even willfully, **do not lose heart and become agitated**, but rather, turning immediately to God, say:

“You see, my Lord, I did such a thing, being what I am. **N**othing else could be expected of me, ill-disposed and weak as I am, apart from falls and transgressions.”



**Thereupon give thanks to Him**

**and love Him more than ever, marveling at His great compassion;** for even though you grieved Him, He once again gives you His right hand and helps you, lest you fall again into sin.

**Finally, with great boldness in His great mercy, say:**

“My Lord, forgive me and do not allow me to live henceforth separated from You; do not let me depart from You or grieve You anymore.”

**And in doing so, do not wonder whether you are forgiven, since that is nothing but pride, distraction, a waste of time, and a deception of the Devil, with a varnish of various good pretenses.**

**Thus, leaving yourself freely in the merciful hands of God, continue with your ascesis as if you had not fallen.**

**And if it so happens that, on account of your weakness, you sin many times a day, do as I have instructed you every time, with-**



**out diminishing your hope in God.**

**Condemning yourself yet more and hating sin all the more, strive to live with greater care.**



**This spiritual exercise is hateful to the Devil, since he sees that it is pleasing to God, and since he is put to shame, seeing himself vanquished by the one he had previously defeated. Hence, he uses diverse methods to hinder us from acting in this way. It often happens that he achieves his goal, owing to our negligence and the lack of watchfulness we have over ourselves.**

\*\*\*

**Hence, the means of acquiring peace is as follows:**

- Entirely put out of your mind your fall and your sin, and instead give yourself over to contemplation of the great goodness of God. **Keep in mind that He remains ready and willing to forgive every sin, no matter how heavy, calling the sinner by various means and various ways to come to his**

**senses and to unite with Him in this life by His Grace. In the next life, He will sanctify him by His Glory and will render him eternally blessed.**

- **Then when the time comes for you to go to Confession—and I urge you to do so very often—bring to mind all of your sins, and with a new pain of heart reveal them all to your spiritual Father and readily do the *epitimia* (penance) he gives to you.**



(\*) St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, *Unseen Warfare*, Part I, Chapter 27.



**F**rom the personal accounts of Elder Jonah\*\* (†September 1, 1908) we know that certain monks, and especially those in positions of authority, disliked him and harassed him. They wanted to expel him from the monastery, but the Abbot protected him.

The rebellious monks only managed to appoint a new guestmaster of their own choice, Father Caesarios, and thus they began to frequent the guest house. They were, however, immediately visited by God's chastisement: the new guestmaster was stricken with paralysis and lost the use of his arms, legs, and tongue.

The monks then ordered that Father Jonah be assigned to care for the sick brother and to stay with him constantly, so that he was not able to leave him even for an hour, not even to go to Church. He endured this trial with joy and eagerness.

But as the Feast of the Theophany approached, he began to feel deeply sorrowful since he would once again not be able to attend the Divine Liturgy.

The Lord, however, consoled him in a wondrous way.

\* \* \*

**In the words** of Elder Jonah:

‘The fourth and fifth of January were difficult days for me. In the evening, after the Divine Liturgy and the Blessing of Water, the Elders came with the Holy Cross and Holy Water. The Elders allowed me to kiss the Cross of the Lord and sprinkled me with Holy Water, but with their usual threats to the ‘outcast,’ as they called me.

When they left, I began to take care for the sick monk. I had to turn him over on his side to give him tea to drink, then some food, then put him in proper order and let him rest. I could hardly force myself to eat a little food...



‘Then I lay down, but could not sleep. And where could

“A good soldier, but weak in spirit; he has no patience; a cowardly soldier.”

## The Extreme Condition to His Servants

“...I felt a hand take hold of my sinful head, and from that hand, Life



sleep come from, when I was in such a state of grief? They rang the bell for the vigil at nine o'clock. The Divine Service began at ten o'clock. I got worse. ‘All the Brothers are in Church, and I cannot go.’ Tears streamed down my face.

‘I had left the door or the cell unlocked. Someone came in and said, ‘The Grace, mercy, and peace of our Lord, and God, and Savior Jesus Christ be here with His coming.’



I was lying down and thought that the other guestmaster had come to check on us. I lay still with my eyes closed.

‘Someone came and stood next to me and said, ‘A good soldier, but weak in spirit; he has no patience; a cowardly soldier.’ He touched my left hand and said, ‘Why are you again giving yourself over to temptation and weakness? Have you been abandoned? Get up on your feet and take on strength and wakefulness of spirit.’

‘He took my hand. I did not know who it was and did not open my eyes (I have the habit of keeping my eyes shut in the dark), and I still thought it was the guestmaster who had come, and I was upset with him: ‘Why does he not leave me alone? I have enough grief; why does he have to add more to it?’

‘Then, I opened my eyes and saw a brilliant light and His radiance. I fell dead, did not feel anything, or understand anything, or remember anything. I do not know how long this lasted; I only know that I felt a hand take hold of my sinful head, and from that hand, life flowed into all my body.

... spirit; he has no patience”

## Ascension of Christ in Their Ordeal\*

... old of my sinful head,  
... flowed into all my body.”



“Shining with light, He said, ‘His spirit is in him.’ Then He took the little stool and sat on it, and sat me next to Him, at His Divine feet, and said, ‘Why are you so grieved?’

“And at this point, I, the wretched one, beheld and recognized my Lord, and God, and Savior, Jesus Christ. He spoke kind words to me, full of mercy, love, sweetness, and life.

“Look and touch Me, My hands, feet, the wound in My side, and know that I am not a hallucination. I am Truth and with My wounds have come to heal you, and others of little soul like you.... Do

not be afraid; look and see, for I have great love for man, and the monastic order is a great joy for Me, and I love a monk to the very end.’

“I, the wretch, did not dare to touch Him. But God was pleased to take my hand with His right hand and to place my fingers in the wounds in His hands and feet, and likewise in His pure and Divine side. Terror and fear overcame me. How far has God condescended! Oh, my God, my God! The depth and wealth of Thy wisdom! Thou dost will to save corrupt and insignificant man.

“As I thought this, the Lord spoke:

“Do you understand this, that these are My works, and My will and desire, that all be saved, to help the one who is going well in his difficulties, and I am also with those who grieve, with the persecuted and suffering. I am with them. I rejoice with the rejoicing. When someone somewhere remem-

bers My Name, I am there. And you, God-loving monk, be vigilant henceforth, stand firmly and bravely, and do not give yourself over to discouragement. I and My Mother are with you. And now I have come, and these Saints are witnesses, who are standing here with Me.’

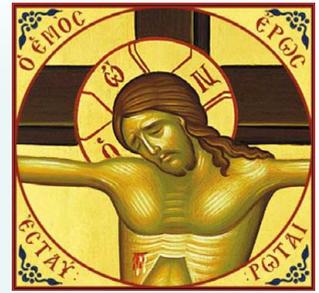
“Then the Lord placed His sacred hand on my wretched head, and turning to the sick Monk Caesarios said, ‘He did not succeed; he fell ill; such are the works of man. Serve him in his illness to the end; this will be for his salvation.... Take courage; now accompany us a little way.’

“After these words, our Lord went out of the cell with the Saints accompanying Him and I followed them.

“When we reached the Icon of the Mother of God ‘of the Three Hands,’ He said to me, ‘Revere her, you and all the faithful that have been redeemed by My blood, for she granted salvation to the world. And now, at this moment in Church they are magnifying the All-Holy Mother of Light at the Ninth Ode.’ And they began to ring the bell and strike the talanton for the Ninth Ode.

He turned His Divine face to my wretchedness and said to me, ‘Peace be with thee; save thyself.’

And a cloud of light lifted the Lord of Glory on High, and the radiance of the glory of the Lord cannot be described.



(\*) *Elder Jonah of Kiev: A Brief Account of His Life and Struggles*, translated from the Russian by Hieromonk Ioannikios [now John] (Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies: Etna, California, 1998), pp. 16-19.

(\*\*) Elder Jonah of Kiev was a disciple of St. Seraphim of Sarov and founder of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Kiev.

■ After Holy Communion

**The Wondrous Fragrance\***  
**The Redolence of the Precious Gifts**

**F**ather **Gabriel** (1844-1915, † September 24) was possessed by love for God and its life-giving power. Thus, he endeavored to put his whole being into submission to God, and to reach the fullness of self-denial.



“For a long time, I attempted to break myself, but did not succeed. Then I finally broke,” he used to tell us later. Unfortunately, it remained indefinite what exactly he “broke” within his heart, after which, as it were, all his strength of soul was applied to the love of God and all inner obstacles disappeared.

The path of spiritual perfection in the life-giving rays of this creative love was made smooth, peaceful, and perfectly clear to him. Father Gabriel's entire life in general became simple, owing to his spiritual insight. There were no obstacles, doubts, hesitations, or confusion. His faith in God became strong, even undoubting. Hope strengthened him with a foretaste of the future blessedness—in particular, of the blessed immortality in the Lord and with the Lord. The unspeakable love of Christ completely exalted Father Gabriel's heart and thoughts away from the visible world to the world on high.

This was aided by the various wonderful manifestations of the goodness of God. Often, for example, Father Gabriel would smell a **wondrous fragrance**. Unable to hide his joy he would call his cell-attendant and ask:

“Do you smell that fragrance?”

“Don't believe it, Father Gabriel! You are not well. No, I do not smell it; there isn't any such fragrance.”

“The reason you cannot smell it is that **you have been reading cheap romances and you are surrounded by demonic spirits**. Disaster is in store for you! You offend the Spirit of God with your cheap romances! I implore you not to read them anymore!”

\* \* \*

Father Gabriel's cell was in the main corridor on the way to the monastery's main Church; therefore, the brothers, going to Matins at 4 a.m. would stop to visit their ailing, but always cheerful, Elder, to encourage him. Almost every day, the kind Father Bessarion (the Administrator) would visit



him. Other Fathers would also come frequently.

One of these, Father Epiphanius, also sensed the **fragrance** in his cell and immediately turned to Father Gabriel's cell-attendant:



“Joseph, what kind of cologne did you put on the Elder? My goodness, it must have been very expensive! How wonderful it smells!”

After Father Epiphanius left, Father Gabriel turned to his cell-attendant and said:

“Well, what do you have to say now?”

Joseph cried aloud and made a prostration before Father Gabriel's bed:

“Forgive me, and pray for me.”

Soon another Hieromonk entered, Father Abernir, who himself liked to use cologne. He also smelled the **unknown fragrance** in the Elder's cell and also turned to Father Gabriel's cell-attendant with the question:

“Where and for how much did you buy such a fragrant perfume?”

“And I,” remembered Father Gabriel, was lying wounded like the one who fell among thieves. **But I had received Communion of the life-giving Body and Blood of Christ, and thus, the life-giving Spirit**. And we sensed His fragrance physically. Christ, like the Samaritan of the Gospel, pours into the wounds of the man who has “fallen among the thieves” the wine and oil of His Grace.”

\* \* \*

Once the fragrance in Father Gabriel's cell was also sensed by the doctor, M.E.F., who formerly treated him. He was a man who never thought about questions of the faith and salvation, and therefore was disposed to give all miracles in life a “natural” explanation.

He likewise thought that Father Gabriel had used an expensive cologne. But Father Gabriel plainly told him that it was not a perfume, but rather **the fragrance of the Holy Gifts, of which he had just partaken prior to the doctor's arrival**.

“Oh, that's what it is! Certainly it must have been very fine wine. That is very interesting. Where was it bought? I would like to buy some.... Very fine wine! But why do you receive Communion so often? Do you fear that you are going to die?”

“No, I am not afraid of death; or rather, I am no longer afraid. And this is why I receive Communion.”

(\*) “One of the Ancients: The Life and Struggles of Schema-Archimandrite Gabriel of Kazan and Pskov,” *The Orthodox Word*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (118) (September-October, 1984).

■ We should have trust in Divine Providence

“For My Own Good!”\*

“Glorified be Thy Name, O Lord.  
Whatever comes from Thee is good”

**M**anolios Sphiakianakes tends some two hundred sheep near a village in the region of Chania, Crete. Every Sunday, after feeding his sheep, he leaves them in their enclosure and goes down to the village for the Divine Liturgy, to pray for his “young’uns,” his wife, and his animals.



Manolios is a man of faith.

Just as he calls out to his sheep, so he repeats the Jesus prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” Sometimes he says it aloud, sometimes silently, in his heart. Whether good or bad befalls him, he always glorifies God, saying: “Glorified be Thy Name, O Lord. Whatever comes from Thee is good.”

\* \* \*

Once Manolios became very ill and went to Chania in search of treatment. The doctors told him that he would have to go to Athens for heart surgery. Manolios, as always, simply repeated the phrase:

“That is for my own good!”

One day, he lost track of time as he was shopping for something, when he noticed that he would have to run to the harbor to catch the boat. Suddenly, he tripped on a rock, fell down, and broke his right leg. He was once again taken to the hospital. The doctors splinted his leg and

settled him in a cot. There, he constantly repeated to himself:

“Glorified be Thy Name, O Lord! That is for my own good!”

A nurse overheard him, was puzzled, and asked him with curiosity:

“What are you mumbling, Uncle?”

“Well you see, my girl, I broke my leg this morning and am glorifying God, because I believe it is for my own good!”

“Have you lost your mind, Manolios? You broke your leg, missed the boat, and so will have to stay at least a month! All of that is for your own good?”

“I am not at all upset, my dear. I believe that everything that our good God gives us is for our own good!”

The next day, the same nurse ran into the patient's room.

“Manolios! Manolios!”

“Why are you shouting, sister? Is something wrong?”

“Yes, you are a very fortunate person! Go light a candle your size in thanks!”

“Why, sister? What happened?”

“You haven't heard the news?”

“No, no!”

“The ferryboat ‘Heraklion’ sank just off Fal-konera island [December 1966]. Many people drowned! You have a Saint protecting you, Manolios!”

Manolios froze. He repeatedly made the sign of the Cross while murmuring: “Glorified be Thy Name! I broke my leg and escaped death! I would have been among the dead now!”

“Didn't I tell you, sister? Am I not right? Whatever comes from God is for our own good!”

(\*) Theodore K. Bgontza, *Thank You for the Pain!* [in Greek](Lychnia: 2009), pp. 151-152.



■ Almsgiving: “It embraces the members of Christ”

“It places the lovers of it by the side of the King”\*

This makes men like God...

Though virginity, fasting and sleeping on the ground are more difficult than this, yet nothing is so strong and powerful to extinguish the fire of our sins as almsgiving.

It is greater than all other virtues. It places the lovers of it by the side of the King Himself, and justly. For the effect of virginity, fasting, and sleeping on the ground is confined to those who practice them, and no

other is saved thereby.

But almsgiving extends to all, and embraces the members of Christ.

And actions that extend their effects to many are far greater than those which are confined to one.

(\*) *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Homily VI, Titus iii. 8-11 (Oxford: 1843) p. 327.



■ An Angelic “referral”!

**The Holy Angels  
Direct the Faithful  
to the Most Holy Theotokos\***

**A** pious woman from the region of Antirrio (Western Greece) frequently visited the Convent in Varnakova dedicated to the Most Holy Theotokos, to whom she was filled with great gratitude, reverence, and devotion.



**O**ne day she explained how she had formed such a profound bond with her.

“My husband,” she said, “was in very bad health and the doctors could do nothing for him. So I prayed night and day to God to help

him, and one evening I received... ‘instructions’ what to do!”

“I dreamed that I was in a forested area surrounded by mountains. Before me lay a dirt road which a great crowd of people was ascending.

“On one side of the road stood a majestic and radiant woman, imperially dressed, and beside her was an Angel. He also wore a crimson garment and sandals. Shining brightly and with sweet countenance, he directed the throng of faithful, who called out: ‘The Panagia of Varnakova! Varnakova!’

“The Holy Angels turned to me for a moment, and, pointing upwards, said: ‘Go there!’ I looked in that direction and saw an old monastery towering on a hilltop.

“So then, I went with the crowd of faithful in that direction. When we arrived, we found ourselves in front of the Icon of the Panagia, which everyone was venerating. It was large

and silver-plated, with a gold halo. I was especially struck by her face, which was white like a lily and was shining.



“The crimson-clad Angel then reappeared, and seeing me venerating the Icon of the Mother of God, he nodded his head approvingly, as if to say:

“‘Now I am pleased! I brought you to the Most Holy Theotokos, who can help you.’

“I woke up filled with emotion. I told my dream to my husband and the unknown name that I had heard: ‘Varnakova, Varnakova.’ I had never heard of that monastery before.

“But my husband knew about it and said with emotion: ‘How is it that you do not know? The Panagia of Varnakova has been our Protectress from time immemorial! That is where we will go! She will help me!’

“And indeed, that is what came to pass. We turned to the Panagia and, contrary to the prognosis of the doctors, my husband was healed and is now healthy! Yet another miracle of her love, among so many others!”

\* \* \*

**What is distinctive** about this miracle is that the “referral” to the great Healer of the world and Mother of God was given by an Angel, or rather an Archangel, since his royal garments indicated that he was “near to the Queen and Theotokos.”



(\*) Sisterhood of the Convent of the Panagia of Varnakova, *New Miracles of the Panagia of Varnakova and Stories of Eternity* [in Greek] (Eupalio Dorida, Phokis: 2007). pp. 187-189.

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