

INSCAPE February 2016

©Stillpoint Contemplative Ministries

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and the communion of the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

Weep: There is No Other Way To Perfection

This year on the Day of the Lord, *Zaccheus* Sunday (February 14th), the Orthodox Church begins its five weeks of preparation for the blessed entry into the sacred liturgical season of the Great Fast. I have chosen this month's topic to include mourning, weeping, *penthos* and the gift of tears as intricately related to repentance.

As Christians, we are being driven into the desert of our hearts by the same Holy Spirit who drove Jesus and so many other great ascetics, mystics and "athletes" into the physical desert. "And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized in the Jordan by John. And immediately, as he came up out of the water, he saw the sky was wide open, and the Spirit like a dove came down upon him. And a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son, I am pleased with you. And immediately the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, being tested by Satan; and he was with wild beasts; and angels ministered to him" (Mark 1: 9-13).

The Church now calls us to enter more deeply into our "hearts," the scriptural term for our deepest levels of consciousness which are permeated by the workings of the Holy Spirit. This has been for Christians throughout all ages the model for returning "to one's true self," for entering into the heart and there doing the battle against the crippling, demonic forces that inhabit our interior psyche as well as the world around us.

Christians, forever eager to experience now the Paschal victory, know that true freedom comes only through a prayerful attentiveness to the "heart." This has been interpreted always in the image of the desert or wilderness where the Spirit of Jesus drives us Christians ever deeper and deeper into fuller freedom.

When we have the courage to enter into the process of *metanoia*, the conversion or return to our true self, we begin to look honestly at our creatureliness, our "nothingness." This nothingness is beyond our own rational control. It is a total gift from God which the Fathers and Mothers of the desert called *penthos*. That is, an abiding sense of our inner, creaturely poverty before the rich lovingness of the Holy Consubstantial Undivided Trinity.

It is an inner weeping for our own sinfulness and brokenness that was meant to be a constant element in all our prayer, whether individual or communal (public), liturgical or personal (private). For we all know that sin in us prevents us from experiencing God's great love for us. That love is experienced by us only when we have the honesty to confess our inauthenticity and our many denials of God's goodness and merciful love for us.

As we cry out for the love of God **this** approaching Lenten season (the school of repentance) may we joyfully find through experience that those who mourn shall be comforted.

There is a universal doctrine of the Eastern Christian Fathers concerning their sense of sin and the necessity they taught of weeping for such sins, even unto attaining the very important gift of tears. We can examine the teachings of these true Christian ascetics and mystics where *orthodoxia* (right teaching) meets *orthopraxis* (right practice).

This is such an essential teaching stressed by all the early Eastern Fathers that remains applicable for us moderns. They saw weeping for their sins as a necessary obligation for any Christian because such a truth was integrally tied to the fundamental message of Christ's Gospel. "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matthew 5:4) was the

exhortation of Christ and therefore also of Origen, Ephraim, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Isaac the Syrian; in a word, the common doctrine of all the early Christian ascetics.

THE—HAVEN—SHELTER—THE OASIS OF TEARS

Christian prayer is adoration, praise and worship of God as our Supreme Being, the Center of our lives. He alone is the Lord and Master and is deserving of all our love. One aspect of authentic Christian prayer, however, which is often most overlooked, at least in our modern world, is that of confessing our brokenness and sinfulness before the Lord in humility by his power. This confession of brokenness impels us to leave the world of illusory, self-created desires and move into God's real world of love, peace and joy in harmony with God and his entire created universe.

We must realize there is a powerful, negative force within us that influences our inner and outer behavior. We tend to deny this since we know God as only positive and Life-Giving. In order to be healed of our sinful tendencies, we must acknowledge this negative force, admitting that we are really unhealthy and sick and not what we should be. We must receive God's grace which summons us to awaken from our sleep, from a life spent in the darkness of spiritual ignorance. To receive such grace takes discipline and honesty. There truly exists a "freeing power of discipline." In a word, it requires an inner transformation away from our false self to move into humility and the discovery by God's illumination of our beautiful true self in Christ.

Early Christian writings on the spiritual life and prayer, especially those inspired by Eastern Fathers and Mothers of the desert, stress the absolute necessity on our part of being in touch with our own darkness and nothingness through a dread of being conquered by the enemy that lives inside of us. This process they called in Greek, *penthos*. It was meant to be a constant element in all prayer, whether individual or public. They knew that sin in us prevents us from experiencing God's great love for us. That love is always active in our lives, but we so often are dead to its presence. Such love can be experienced only when we have the honesty to claim our brokenness and confess our inauthenticity and our many denials of God's goodness and love for us.

WEEP; THERE IS NO OTHER WAY

One of the great graces that we all can receive through the study of early Christian mystics is a deep conviction of the utter necessity of recognizing our sinful condition. In a state of continual conversion we must cry out constantly for God's healing. We must beg him to transform our brokenness to new life as we turn ourselves totally to him, the source of all strength and healing. This is summarized succinctly by Abba Poemen (*The Shepherd*) of the 4th century Egyptian desert: "Weep; there is no other way (to perfection)." **Troparion:** With the rivers of your tears, you have made the barren desert fertile. Through sighs of sorrow from deep within you, your labors have borne fruit a hundred-fold. By your miracles you have become a light, shining upon the world. O Poemen, our Holy Father, pray to Christ our God, to save our souls.

We must purify ourselves, with God's grace, from all attachments in order to listen to God in the clear, pure air that is found only in deep silence and solitude (*hesychia*). In Holy Scripture we find the basis for what we consider the divine command, "to mourn according to God." The Old Testament uses the word in Greek, *penthos*, 120 times to indicate the grief experienced by those in public or private mourning. Isaiah announced God's desire "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me and sent me to preach good tidings

to the meek; to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of the salvation of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to give to the mourners of Zion beauty instead of ashes, perfume instead of mourning, a cloak of beauty instead of the spirit of heaviness; they shall be called men of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, which is glorious” (Isaiah 61: 1-3).

Saint John Chrysostom in two works on compunction holds up David the Psalmist as a model of those who practice *penthos*. David’s example encouraged the monks of old to imitate him. “I am weary with my groaning; and every night I water my bed and wash my mattress with my tears” (Psalms 6:6). David’s writings become a lesson in true prayer “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my sins. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin; for I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (Psalm 51:1-3). Saint John Chrysostom, the golden-mouth, stresses that it is more important to experience sorrow for sins, compunction, than to define it.

SIN IN OUR MEMBERS

When we begin to live most consciously and more interiorly, we make contact with what Saint Paul describes as “sin which lives inside my body” (Romans 7:23). Sin becomes something more than our deliberate acts of transgression against a divine law. We can learn much from the early Christian saints of the desert who had passed beyond the extrinsic aspects of the law. They had entered into a deep self-knowledge of the inner movements of the “heart” as well as a deep consciousness of God’s very immediate and tender love for them. In a word, sin for them was anything that was an obstacle to joyfully living the good news of the Paschal Mystery.

CLAIMING OUR OWN BROKENNESS

True Christian prayer possesses four main characteristics: adoration or worship of God; petition; thanksgiving; sorrow unto forgiveness. Let us now explore together our own unworthiness before the awesome transcendent God which the prophet Isaiah experienced: “What a wretched state I am in! Woe is me, I am dismayed, I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have looked at the King, the Lord of Hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). For one who lives superficially, such a confession of unworthiness before God has very little meaning. But for those who with Saint Paul enter deeply into their consciousness and even unconsciousness, the reality of a whole inner world of fragmentation and darkness opens up.

Perhaps in prayer you have experienced such an inner duality as Saint Paul: “For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh enslaved to sin. For I do not know what I do; and I do not do the thing which I want, but I do the thing which I hate. That is exactly what I do. So then if I do that which I do not wish to do, I can testify concerning the law that it is good. Now then it is not I who do it, but sin which dominates me. Yet I know that it does not fully dominate me (that is in my flesh); but as far as good is concerned, the choice is easy for me to make, but to do it is difficult for me. For it is not the good that I wish to do, that I do; but it is the evil that I do not wish to do, that I do. Now if I do that which I do not wish, then it is not I who do it, but the sin which dominates me. I find therefore that the law agrees with my conscience when I wish to do good, but evil is always near, distracting me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and it makes me a captive to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this mortal body? I thank God for deliverance through our Lord Jesus

Christ. Now therefore with my mind I am a servant of the law of God; but with my flesh I am a servant of the law of sin” (Romans 7:14-25).

A SELF-CREATED PRISON

When we do take time to move into deeper prayer, we will discover within ourselves two centers that vie with each other to control our value system. There is, on one side, the false or “Kingdom of Mammon” which is characterized as fearful of and hostile to the outside world, proud, greedy, deceitful, guilt-laden, inferiority mixed with an aggressively attacking pride. The other center is the true self that has been made by God according to his image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). This true self is noble, self-sacrificing, loving toward God and neighbor (and ultimately toward our enemies) and radiates humility, peace, and joy in all its relationships with God’s real world.

The false ego is illusory and has been created through our guilt and the fear of not being loved by God and others. We create such an inner prison every time we move away from true love and enter into a state of self-centeredness. We build the prison and we are the prisoner but we are also the jailer who holds the key to open the prison door, if only we should wish to do so. Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941; English Anglo-Catholic writer known for her numerous works on Christian mysticism and spirituality) describes this self-created prison: “By false desires and false thoughts man has built up for himself a false universe; as a mollusk, by the deliberate and persistent absorption of lime and rejection of all else, can build up for itself a hard shell which shuts it from the external world, and only represents in a distorted and unrecognizable form the ocean from which it was obtained. This hard and wholly un-nutritious shell, this one-sided secretion of the surface consciousness, makes as it were a little cave of illusion for each separate soul.”

It is God’s love above all that shows how tightly constrained we are within the prison of our selfishness and egoism. When we have the courage to turn within and, in silence and honesty, look into the tomb of our inner darkness, there the light of God’s tender merciful love illuminates us with the pure light of his divine knowledge. Ever so softly and healingly, interior tears well up in our spiritual eyes. We whisper in the depths of our heart: “Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness” (Psalms 51:1).

AUTHENTIC CONVERSION

In such inner quiet we gently yield to the operations of the Holy Spirit, who shows us what needs continual healing from deep within us. We see our fragmentation and we sorrow at seeing what could have been, now knowing what we should and must be. We experience how great and tender and lasting has been God’s love for us and we see also our ingratitude. We feel caught in a prison of darkness and yet we can see a delicate ray of light leading us through the bars toward a *metanoia* conversion to the Lord Jesus. The words of the prophet Joel take on a great sense of urgency as we begin to experience our own inadequacies and a strong desire to set ourselves free from all falsity within us by our own power: “Therefore now, says the Lord, RETURN to Me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God; for He is gracious and merciful, patient and of great kindness, and he averts disaster” (Joel 2:12-13).

As we sit within our interior desert, that is so much like the exterior desert of the athletes of earlier centuries, we learn to yield to the Indwelling Presence of Jesus Christ. The Divine Physician alone can bring life and give us that life more abundantly (John 10:10). We cry out as often as we can, day and night, with distrust of our own power to save and heal ourselves, but with childlike trusting Jesus the Healer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,

a sinner.” This demands a life of reflection, of sensitive inner knowledge in the light of God’s indwelling presence and infinite and perfect love. In his light, we see our darkness.

In that darkness we honestly recognize our guilt and sinfulness. We claim it as our own without justification or rationalization. We are broken and in need of God’s great mercy which is above all his works (Psalm 144:9). We are sinners, that by our own free will choice, have separated ourselves from God and we have gone astray from his Divine Providence. The spirit of compunction or abiding sorrow for our godless past and the fear of a future without God strangely enough allows us to humbly contact God. God gives himself to the weak, the poor, the needy. He looks with love upon the lowliness of his children who have entered into an experiential knowledge of their creaturehood. God loves the righteous and has mercy on sinners!

In the spirit of our Christian Liturgy we the faithful through our own individual fragmentation, bring a broken world before a merciful God. We implore and pray and beg of God for the inner healing of all that is false and proud and not loving within our being. This is a vital part of all our individual prayer before God and is what determines the depth of our true and effective conversion to the Lord.

Gabriel Marcel points out how we innately resist being converted away from our false self to make God our sole Center: “When we are at rest, we find ourselves almost inevitably put in the presence of our own inner emptiness, and this very emptiness is in reality intolerable to us. But there is more. There is the fact that through this emptiness we inevitably become aware of the misery of our condition, ‘condition so miserable,’ says Pascal, that nothing can console us when we think about it carefully. Hence the necessity of diversion.”

Such dread and existential anxiety cannot be removed without a complete upheaval and regeneration of our false selves by God’s grace to become what God has always desired us to be. In the deepest reaches of inner agony, our dread becomes a wrestling with our nothingness and a doubt that assails our very integrity and spiritual identity. We seem to be lost on a dark ocean with no direction or light to guide us.

A prideful person will not persevere in such inner strife of true faith, seeking rather to escape the darkness and feelings of nothingness by prayer and busy activities, any distraction that will perpetuate the illusion of being in charge of our own life and destiny. Dread divests us of any sense of self-importance by therapeutically cleansing us in God’s Spirit from all remnants of a false world. We must experience this before we can live in God’s real world of love and self-sacrifice.

SECOND MOVEMENT IN A TRUE CONVERSION

Another aspect of humility in any true Christian conversion is the positive enlightenment that results when we yield to God’s grace in our brokenness and begin to live a new life in Christ. Initially, we stretch out to possess a new life promised us by Christ. The darkness within our hearts becomes light as we make contact with our Lord and God and Saviour. He promised us that he and the Father would come and abide within us (John 14:23). At the center of our being we can still fall down and confess our belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Cry out to him that you are broken in body, soul, and spirit and desperately need his healing love.

He releases his Holy Spirit who reveals that Jesus Christ, the image of the Father, loves you unto the madness of the cross. The statement, “For me he dies!” (Galatians 2:20) becomes for you an experience that leads you into the awesome presence of the heavenly Father as perfect holiness, beauty, and love. You experience the integration of your frightened spirit, your scattered mind. Guilt and fears, anxieties, hatred, feelings of inferiority to and judgment against others dissolve in the tears of your own joyful reconciliation to God’s

immense love. You discover yourself as if for the first time. You feel as though nothing on the face of the earth, not even death itself, can ever take you from the love of God (Romans 8:34).

There are aids that foster an abiding sense of compunction recommended by the Fathers; frequent examination of conscience, especially in order to know oneself and one's weakness, and a constant state of vigilance (*nepsis*) before the attacks of the traditional eight thoughts that lead human beings into inordinate passions and a state of enslaving sin. Vigils, prayers, fasting, love of silence, the practice of human tasks and charitable works of service toward others all create an environment in which compunction can grow.

THE GIFT OF TEARS

Tears were considered as a concrete criterion of a Christian intense sorrow which necessarily, if it were real, would have repercussions throughout the entire body and psyche. Compunction gave a sense of self-identity in one's relationship to God and in this experienced unity tears flowed forth as a register of a sorrow that touched the person at his or her deepest self. Saint John Climacus writes in his *Ladder of Divine Ascent*: "Groanings and sorrows cry to the Lord. Tears shed from fear intercede for us; but tears of all-holy love show us that our prayer has been accepted" (Step 7.). Saint John Climacus also stated: "I have seen small tear drops shed with difficulty like drops of blood, and I have also seen fountains of tears poured out without difficulty. And I judged those toilers more by their toils than by their tears, and I think that God does too."

The Fathers also knew tears could measure the interior compunction when the total person was deeply moved by sorrow. Climacus adds that "tears are the product of thought and the father of thought is a rational mind." The Fathers applied to the spiritual life the same experience that is found in one's natural relationships to others, for if a person were to experience a great sorrow, regret, or fear of losing the most precious possession in life, that person would surely show this deeply felt emotion by tears. Saint Nilus of Sinai exhorted the deacon Agapet: "Weep and pour forth tears before God by at least your desire and in this way you will be purified of your sins...In regard to this, I have known those who have not stopped there, but who by force of their faith and prayer have changed the rock of their soul into a source of water (Psalm 113:8). Thus spurring on their hearts without ceasing by the word of Christ and by the remembrance of the divine wonders, they have caused to burst forth from within outwardly a flood of tears flowing from eyes of stone."

Evagrius Ponticus (Evagrius the Solitary; 345-399A.D.) in his treatise on prayer, true repentance and weeping exhorts monks (and all of us): "Before all else, pray to be given tears, that weeping may soften the savage hardness which is in your soul, and having acknowledged your sin unto the Lord (Psalm 31:5), you may receive from him the remission of sins."

We moderns of this century fear today sheer emotionalism, to say nothing of hysteria. What the Fathers were seeking primarily in tears was a psychological state of persuasion that touched the Christian, not on any one level of sense or emotion or mind. They distrusted any degree of interior compunction that did not also manifest itself in a reaction that flowed from their inner "core", their heart knowledge, outwardly into their senses.

The desire to be penetrated with as deep a sorrow as possible before the goodness and mercy of God was the important feature stressed. The interior desire in itself was a spiritual weeping that, the monastic desert dwellers (*athletes*) felt, would turn to physical tears as a gift of God when the individual Christian reached an intense and abiding sense of compunction. Compunction itself deeply experienced was the important goal to be attained. The gift was never desired as a separate "charism" in itself or for the consolations they would bring the penitent.

ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH TEARS

Abba Poemen is the one who taught the necessity of the gifts of tears: “For weeping is the path which the scriptures have taught us, and the fathers have also wept continually, and there is no other path except that of tears.” But of all the Eastern Fathers no one described this gift of tears so eloquently and connected the gift with the highest levels of enlightenment as did Saint Isaac the Syrian: “the eyes of a person who has reached this degree become like a spring of water for up to two years and more after which he comes to the stilling of thoughts. After the stilling of thoughts, as far as nature permits it, in part, there comes that rest of which Saint Paul speaks (Hebrews 4:3). In this peaceful tranquility the mind begins to contemplate mysteries. Then the Holy Spirit begins to reveal to him heavenly things and God comes to dwell in him and resurrects in him the fruit of the Spirit. When you enter the realm of stillness of thoughts, the profusion of tears is taken from you—tears come to you in moderation and at the proper time.”

The Eastern Fathers were convinced that the reason religiously dedicated persons do not make continued progress in perfection is a lack of an abiding sense of sorrow. An examination of the obstacles to a living sense of compunction listed by the early Fathers might prove to be equivalent to an examination of our own personal failings in striving for perfection. In general, any neglect of spiritual exercises—such as frequent examination of conscience, the reception of the sacraments...especially the Eucharist, serious meditation on the words and life of Christ along with his eschatological stress on one’s end and judgment unto eternal reward or punishment—would cause a corresponding insensitivity in the human soul and open it to a spirit of dissipation.

The door would be open for the entrance of the eight passions that lead to inordinate attachments. *Parrhesia*, in the sense of an excessive looseness in uncontrolled speech, is one of the main avenues of dissipation and begets, in the words of Saint Dorotheus, all other vices. In fact, any excess or immoderation, which in itself indicates a self-centeredness and a failure to refer to God as our measure of proper conduct, must be avoided. This holds also in liturgical matters where overly elaborate chants and preoccupation with nonessentials can dry our hearts and take us away from the true occupation of adoring, praising and thanking God through clearer knowledge of God and of oneself.

Overspeculation in a dry, rationalistic manner of theological problems constitutes another danger to compunction since it tends to make the theologian proud and creates a God too much according to one’s own image. Especially destructive of the spirit of compunction for these desert athletes was excessive laughter. Here again, as in excessive and idle talk, boisterous laughter indicated a general lack of moderation and reflection. Clement, Origen, Ephrem, and John Chrysostom all insisted upon the impending effects of immoderate laughter upon the gravity befitting a serious Christian who is in awe and reverence of God. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus permits “an affable smile or rather a trace of a smile, while holding in check by temperance any immoderation of laughter.”

EFFECTS OF COMPUNCTION

The greatest effect of compunction highlighted by the Fathers is the peace and joy that come through an experienced love of God toward the sinful individual. This we can appreciate even if we have not all experienced it to the same degree as did those earliest great athletes of Christ. Purified of all inordinate passionate desires, such early Christians knew a permanently abiding sense of tranquility that begot interior happiness.

It was not the absence of troubles through a blind resignation to God’s providence, as is often found in Islamic asceticism; nor was it a philosophical stoicism that basically feeds an

inflated ego with a desire to be above all relationships to the world around it by simply ignoring the rest of God's creation.

This joy was at the basis of the Christian experience: *per crucem, ad lucem* (through the cross, to light)...“through the cross, joy has come to all the world” (from the Divine Liturgy). Compunction was the dying process and joy was the resurrection of all of one's powers into a new life that produced a hundredfold in peace and joy. Christ ended his beatitudes with the promise: “Rejoice and be glad, for a rich reward awaits you in heaven.” Heaven was a condition (not a place) that even in this life can be enjoyed to some ever-increasing degree by those who mourn for their sins.

The strangest paradox proved itself in experience as these early monks wept before God and God comforted them. Their interior joy, as their interior sorrow, had to manifest itself in the exterior countenance.

In a marvelous way experienced by all who seriously maintained themselves in this abiding compunction, God revealed himself to them, not in any conceptual knowledge deduced through a reasoning process, but in a direct, experiential knowledge that flooded their soul with an illumination of God's majestic grandeur. The shadows of dark sorrow mingle with the light of God's transcendence. And the Christian is content with repeating the only prayer that seems proper to the experience: “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Paul Tillich, in a short essay entitled “The Eternal Now,” shows how repentance is more than a feeling of sorrow about wrong actions. “It is the act of the whole person in which he separates himself from the elements of his being, discarding them into the past as something that no longer has any power over the present.”

Compunction, for the early Fathers of the desert and for all Christians who have grasped their insights, is the means the Christian uses to live in the “eternal now,” while living also in a past, present and future continuum. God, for the Fathers who wept “because there was no other way to perfection,” was not a goal, an object toward which they moved and which they attained only upon death. God is the abundance of love that is ever overflowing in his Uncreated Energies that bombard his creatures at every moment. We are human beings, made to God's image and likeness and drawn to an intimate relationship of living children of so loving a Father. In the past we have freely turned ourselves away from greater growth by sin. In the present and, hopefully by God's grace, in the future, we will feel the pull within and all around ourselves of a world that is “groaning in travail” (Romans 8:22) until it reaches its perfection in Christ. This “existential angst” cries out for Another, One who lies beyond the ravages of time and space, One who is the possessor of all perfections, who makes all other possessions vain...the One who *is* Unending Life! Love never fails! Love never ends!

A SECOND BAPTISM

It is compunction, that abiding sorrow for the godless past and the fear of a future without God, that allows us to contact God in our brokenness. God gives himself to the weak, the poor, the needy, in a word, to the humble because they have entered into an experiential knowledge of their own creaturehood. The desert Fathers, crying incessantly with penitent David, “Thoroughly wash me O Lord!” experienced a second baptism. Saint John Climacus writes: “But sins committed after baptism are washed away by tears.”

In this freedom from the past and the guilt that the future brings to us, we Christians of true compunction can gaze more clearly on the beauty and goodness of God. “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:6). Filled with great tenderness and longing for greater union with God, Christians find their strength, not in their weakness, but in the merciful forgiveness of God. Because God has given them an abiding experience of their existential weakness, they are filled with great tranquility and joy since their strength is now in

the All-Powerful Father whom they experience mostly in God's tender forgiveness of the weaknesses.

Instead of becoming introverted, repentant Christians have a greater consciousness of their union with all nature, needing the cosmic redemption of God's condescending love. Charity and tenderness are extended to all, for who cannot now understand the need to love and aid the needy when we witness constantly the love and help of God shown already toward us?

Much is outdated and needs demythologizing in the writings of these fiercely serious Christians of an earlier age, but one truth will always remain the same, both for the monk in the desert of Egypt of the fourth century and for the Christian of the cybernetic society of the twenty-first century. We all have need of the baptism of Christ, received not once, but over and over renewed by our own deep traces of resistance to God's love. We can receive the saving waters of baptism only if we cry out constantly. We are in continual need of God's recreating force in our lives. And yet God is always the forgiving Lover, ready to burst into our meaningless flow of consciousness in time with his meaningful presence that allows us to make of now, the eternal *Now* of God.

Father George writes in *Inward Stillness* the reflection and reminder that the waters of baptism only dealt with past sin, while the water of our tears of compunction are intimately connected and related to God's washing away the sins within our present life.

"First pray for the gift of tears, so that through sorrowing you may tame what is savage in your soul. And having confessed your transgressions to the Lord, you will obtain forgiveness from Him" (Evagrius of Pontus).

Tears are like "blood from the wounds in our souls," (Saint Gregory of Nyssa; Funeral Oration of the Empress Flacilla).

"God has removed all tears from the face of this earth by means of baptism, having poured out richly His Holy Spirit. But, as I have heard from the Holy Scriptures, certain adults, upon being immersed in this baptism, have shed tears, because they were pricked by the descent of the Spirit. They were not painful and laborious tears, but sweeter than honey by virtue of the working and the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Saint Symeon the New Theologian).

PRAYER AFTER THE CANON OF REPENTANCE

(From the Unabbreviated Horologion)

O Master Christ God, Who hast healed my passions through Thy Passion, and hast cured my wounds through Thy wounds: Grant me, who have sinned greatly against Thee, tears of compunction. Transform my body with the fragrance of Thy Life-Giving Body, and sweeten my soul with Thy Precious Blood from the bitterness with which the foe hath fed me. Lift up my downcast mind to Thee, and take it out of the abyss of perdition, for I have no repentance, I have no compunction, I have no consoling tears which uplift children to their heritage. My mind hath been darkened through earthly passions, I cannot look up to Thee in pain, I cannot warm myself with tears of love for Thee. But, O Master Lord Jesus Christ, Treasury of good things, give me through repentance and a diligent heart to seek Thee; grant me Thy grace, and renew in me the likeness of Thine image. I have forsaken Thee—do Thou not forsake me! Come out to seek me; lead me up to Thy pasturage and number me among the sheep of Thy chosen flock. Nourish me with them on the grass of Thy Holy Mysteries, through the intercession of Thy Most Pure Mother and all Thy saints. Amen.

Prayerfully yours in Christ's perfect and eternal love,

Father John Michael Zboyovski