

Come Back to Me

An Appeal to Repentance

St. Ephrem the Syrian

*Translated from Classical Armenian
with an Introduction by*

Michael Daniel Findikyan

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In Loving Memory of Diramayr

Ursula Findikyan

January 16, 1938 – October 15, 2018

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Foreword

For five years I served as Director of the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America in New York. The heart of the Information Center is its precious 60,000 volume Armenian library, which features hundreds of rare, early editions, many of them yet to be examined, identified and catalogued. Since even a priceless book is worthless if no one knows it exists, as custodian of this great collection, one of my responsibilities was to sort through the countless faceless old books, to identify them, and to enter them into the Center's online catalogue. This tedious work would often reward me with the thrill of stumbling across a precious gem: a rare book found in no other library in the western world, or an Armenian translation of an ancient classic, or, more frequently, a book that simply thrilled and captivated me by its author or content.

Such was the case with *An Appeal to Repentance by St. Ephrem the Syrian* (Յորդորակ Ապաշխարութեան Սրբոյն Եփրեմ Խուրին Ասորոյ), which I uncovered in a book called *Բժշկարան Յոգեւոր (Book of Spiritual Healing)*.¹ Paging

¹ Բժշկարան Յոգեւոր բաժանեալ յերկու մասուևս. Մասն Առաջին. Constantinople, 1822. Second edition, 1856. The text of the *Vafaršabat'* 1882 edition with an Eastern Armenian translation by Vahan Zak'aryan appears in

through the work, I was enamored by its candid approach to the difficult topic of sin and repentance, and by its kindhearted, poignant tone, which I found to be most compelling in our day, when so many people are searching for joy and meaning in their lives. I decided to translate the work so that English readers might benefit from a work that has obviously spoken to the hearts of generations of Armenian faithful.

I would like to thank sincerely three former students for helping me to bring this work to completion. Deacon Timothy Aznavourian meticulously compiled the biblical references. Deacon Christopher Sheklian Ph.D., my successor as Director of the Zohrab Information Center, researched the publication history of the book. Deacon Eric Vozzy read the introduction and made valuable suggestions for improving it. One of the greatest joys in my life has been to observe former students become my colleagues and surpass their teacher in so many ways. I am also grateful to Christopher Zakian for preparing the book layout and for overseeing its publication; and to Armen Edgarian for the cover design.

May all who read this book discover for themselves the delight of knowing and loving the God who says—

*“I have no pleasure in the death of any one,
says the Lord God. So turn, and live.”*

(Ezekiel 18:32)

the journal *Ējmiacin* (January 1998) 60-94. At press time it was accessible at <http://echmiadzin.asi-oa.am/9459/1/60.pdf>.

Introduction

An Appeal to Repentance (Յորդորակ Ապաշխարութեան) hardly seems an attractive title for a Christian devotional essay. In our day, many people, including many of the more clamorous Christian denominations, have become weary of the Bible’s fascination with human sinfulness. Naturally any number of people out there break God’s commandments without a second thought, individuals whose attitudes and behavior toward others fall far short of Jesus’ high expectations and his own personal example. These true sinners are certainly in need of repentance and a radical return to Christian basics.

But aren’t most people basically good? Even if we occasionally fail to meet the Bible’s high moral bar, and perhaps struggle with this or that commandment, most of us are fundamentally decent people. We do our best to pray and to adhere to Christianity’s most basic tenets. Do our lesser, occasional shortcomings require the radical intervention of repentance? Even the word “repentance” evokes any number of uninviting words that suggest reprimand and retribution—penitentiary, penance, penalty, punishment, punitive, pain—even if etymology generally does not support such associations. Who would expect to find inspiration or encouragement by wading through a treatise whose seeming objective is to remind us that we are guilty of untold moral failings and crimes, and

that we had best immediately turn ourselves in for divine judgment?

But this essay is anything but a preachy indictment of human iniquity. It is, rather, a heartfelt plea, in which Jesus speaks directly and personally to the reader, urging him to turn away from this world's distractions and diversions and to set his sights on the Lord, whose love for him is boundless and unconditional. Rather than shaming the sinner with accusations, the Lord expresses his profound love for the reader and his eagerness to be reunited with him. So instead of condemnation, we find compassion. Instead of guilt, we find solace. This is why I have taken the liberty of prefixing the essay's given title with the more descriptive heading, *Come Back to Me*.

What Really is Sin?

The tone of the essay corresponds with a broad understanding of sin as something much more than a moral transgression or the violation of this or that commandment. Sin, as St. Paul explains to the Corinthians, is anything that distracts us from "undivided devotion to the Lord;" anything that separates us from God and from one another; anything that causes division, disunity and enmity in the Body of Christ (see 1Corinthians 7, especial verse 35). Jesus' harsh condemnation of "sinners" stems not from God's desire that we all blindly follow his rules. The Ten Commandments, the Law of Moses, and all of the other Biblical regulations are not an end in themselves. They are intended to facilitate the loving, intimate and eternal union with God and with one another that God keenly desires for his

beloved creatures. Certain behaviors and attitudes are incompatible with that blessed state of being. Sins are “sins” because they turn us away from God. The seven deadly sins that the Armenian Church recalls every Sunday in the confession before Holy Communion—pride, envy, anger, sloth, covetousness, gluttony and lust—are lethal because each, in its own way, effectively cuts us off from God and poisons our relationships with one another.

For example, stealing is a sin (The Eighth Commandment, Exodus 15:13) because to defraud someone of what is rightly hers is contrary to the loving, other-centered attitude that cultivates love and harmony among fellow children of God. Stealing is consequently an assault on the unity of the church, the Body of Christ. Lying is a sin because it is contrary to the Truth. Like all deception, it creates an artificial reality that blinds us to the true reality of God. Truth, furthermore, is not a virtue. It is a person: “I am the way and the truth and the life,” Jesus declares (John 14:6). This is why falsehood in any form separates us from God.

Even more injurious to our spiritual union with God is sexual misconduct. The Bible’s strict and unyielding regulation of sexual behavior, which prohibits any and all sexual activity outside of marriage, is not intended to be a callous assault on our human freedom, or a puritanical rejection of sexual delight, as modern, secular culture would have us believe. It is actually meant to safeguard the exquisitely precious place of sexuality in human life. The ecstatic union in which, through sexual intimacy, the sacramentally-crowned man and woman “become

one flesh” physically, spiritually and emotionally, is the closest experience a human being can have in this life of God’s ecstatic, unifying love. That awesome and powerful divine love is the same force that unites the three persons of the Holy Trinity. It is the creative energy by which God brought all things into existence. It is the magnetic bond of our Holy Communion with God and with one another. Love is the oxygen of divine life and the ether of God’s eternal kingdom. Any other sexual activity or pursuit of erotic euphoria outside the boundaries of sacramental marriage cheapens human sexuality and insults God, who gives us this most precious gift. It turns the most generous, self-giving, expression of devotion to another person into an egocentric exercise in self-gratification. Much more perilously, however, when we misuse our sexuality, we progressively deaden the nerves of the most palpable, physical sense we can have in this life of God’s ecstatic love, of God’s transforming holiness, and of God’s eternal Kingdom. As a result, we gravely reduce our ability to recognize God in the world around us and within ourselves.

Consequently, to live a Christian life is not just a matter of keeping the commandments and upholding traditions. It is more than seeking right over wrong. Jesus condemned the Pharisees bitterly, calling them hypocrites because they reduced their religion, their holy covenant with God to a legal system of laws to be upheld and traditions to be preserved while they entirely overlooked the greater purpose of the Law of Moses, which is to direct people to God. When St. Paul states that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) he is

simply observing that no human being has attained perfect devotion to God. None has fully reflected in his life and faith the magnificent and undying love that God holds for each one of us. All of us have plenty of room to grow in our commitment to the Lord and his holy Church; to embrace more fully and completely his awesome, life-giving love for us. The opposite of sin is not perfection, it is union with God.

Turning Away from Grief

How fundamentally different is this view of sin from what so many of us picked up from a cursory reading of the Bible, from simplistic Sunday School lessons, or the shallow sloganeering of many Christian voices today. When we mistakenly identify “sin” as simply a religious word for “infraction” or “misdeed,” the consequences are treacherous. Jesus is reduced to a judgmental prosecutor. The Bible is brushed aside as a grim, moralistic treatise of little use to most people. The Church becomes a society of misfits and fanatics and its clergy, a caste of hypocrites.

From the perspective of the two thousand-year Christian history of the Armenian people, nothing could be further from the truth. This is already evident in the early fifth-century Armenian translation of the Bible by St. Mesrob and his saintly collaborators. They translated the Greek Biblical word *metanoia*, which is the basis of the English words “penance” and “repentance,” using the Armenian word ապաշխարութիւն / *abashkharootyoon*. The word means literally, “turning away from grief.” The holy translators knew this: that

sin yields sorrow. Those that do not know Jesus and who seek, consciously or unconsciously, to live their lives apart from God can never know true happiness or contentment in life. Despite the message that our society loudly broadcasts, one can never discover the meaning of life, or one's own purpose in it, if one overlooks or denies its divine Author. What is more, like a malignant cancer, sin tends to metastasize and drive people even further away from God, the true reality of the universe, only increasing their anguish. How many people in our day have yet to discover the light of Christ or have rejected it altogether? They stumble aimlessly from day to day in virtual darkness, blind to the mysterious thrill that comes from knowing the Creator of the universe personally. In our affluent world, they lift their heads above the dismal baseline of life largely by means of momentary diversions and fleeting merriments that can be purchased with money or induced with chemicals and hormones.

Such a life is no life at all. It is mere biological existence, a far cry from the "abundant life" that Jesus promises to those who follow him (John 10:10). Following rules to avoid sin is relatively easy, but we are called to something much higher, much more meaningful. When Jesus fervently calls on all people to "repent," his plea is that we recognize our sad state when we are alienated from God. He begs us to turn away from that sorrow and "come back" to him. "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden," Jesus pleads, "and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Repentance is that life-giving, reconciling action by which we sinners, regularly and continuously turn

away from grief and come back to God. Repentance means recognizing for ourselves what innumerable others have discovered during the two thousand years since the Son of God came into this world: that the fulness of life can only be attained in permanent union—Holy Communion—with the Creator of the Universe; and that, uniquely through the mediation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as a member of the Body of Christ, his Church.

True repentance, therefore, is not a penalty. It is a privilege. It is not intended for religious failures, but for all of us who seek to grow in our faith, to come to know and to love the Son of God. Penance should not be an exceptional intervention, but a continuous process of realigning our thoughts, our actions and our commitment to Jesus Christ. The doctrine of Penance as an occasional church procedure, as “one of the seven sacraments,” is a western phenomenon that is totally alien to the Armenian Church’s ancient and traditional understanding of sacraments and of sacramental life. For us, penance is most assuredly sacramental, but it should be as regular and intrinsic to our spiritual lives as breathing is to a one’s physical life.

A Life of Repentance

This is precisely what we find in the Armenian Church. Penance is always and everywhere. It is woven into every fiber of Armenian worship. Of course, when we enumerate our sins to a priest during public or private confession, we are admitting our human frailty and our desire to be reconciled with the Lord. But that same dynamic of “returning to God” applies every time we

chant, “Lord have mercy” (Տէր ողորմեա / *Der voghormya*)—dozens of times in the Holy Badarak and in every single liturgical service of the Armenian Church. In saying that phrase, we echo the words of the corrupt tax collector who, feeling remorse, entered the Temple, beat his breast in despair, and said “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 19:9-14). Whenever we utter that phrase with sincerity, we are saying, “Lord, only You can heal me. I need You. I can’t do this alone. Shower me with Your grace and love. Let me be with You.” Listen carefully to the words of the Badarak and other church services. All of them express a similar turning away from sorrow and returning to the Lord: “Raise us to life, Lord” (Կեցո տէր / *Getso Der*). “Remember us Lord, and have mercy on us” (Յիշեա տէր եւ ողորմեա / *Heeshya Der yev voghormya*). “We commit ourselves to you, Lord” (Քեզ տեառնդ յանձն եղիցուք / *Kez Dyarnut hantsn yegheetsook*).

The rituals of our worship further underscore this sentiment. The sign of the Cross is a “penitential” gesture. When we trace our bodies with the symbol of our Lord’s crucifixion—the ultimate expression of God’s sacrificial love—we are saying, “True life can come only through You, Lord God.” When we bow down at the words, “Let us bow down to God,” (Աստուծոյ երկիր պապեցուք / *Asdoodzo yergeer bakestsook*) we acknowledge God’s authority over us, and we ritually “return” ourselves to God’s loving care. The Kiss of Peace and the hymn that accompanies it (Քրիստոս ի մէջ մեր յայտնեցաւ / *Kreesdos ee mech mer haydnetsav* / “Christ is revealed among us”) are another conspicuous sign of our intention to reject the

aggressively self-serving ways of this world, and to seek “abundant life” by loving one another in Christ. And most important of all, sharing the holy Body and Blood of Jesus in Holy Communion at every Badarak amounts to the ultimate recommitment to God, as we willingly and faithfully open our mouths and lives to the Son of God. Through all of the ancient Christian ways of the Armenian people and their holy church, we come to see how fervently “penitential” their spirituality is. *An Appeal to Repentance* is an exquisite example of this fervent vocation to turn away from heartache to God.

Author and Purpose

Contrary to its attribution, this essay is unlike any other genuine work of St. Ephrem the Syrian. In literary style and language, it differs markedly from the various works of St. Ephrem that were translated into Armenian in the mid-fifth century.¹ Nor is there any indication that the work is a translation from St. Ephrem’s mother tongue, Syriac, or from any other language. This makes the attribution of this essay to the masterly fourth-century church father highly doubtful.

Instead, the work is much more typical of other medieval Armenian penitential writings that began to proliferate after the time of St. Gregory of Narek (d. 1004), and which were unques-

¹ See the incisive introduction in Edward G. Mathews Jr., *The Armenian Prayers (Աղօթք) Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian* (Texts from Christian Late Antiquity 36), George Anton Kiraz, Series Editor (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014) 1-13.

tionably inspired by his monumental Book of Prayers, commonly referred to as the *Book of Lamentation* (Մասնաւ Ողբերգութեան / *Madyan Voghperkootyan*). In particular, it is not unlikely that *An Appeal to Repentance* was composed by an anonymous Armenian monk or hierarch in response to a radical movement that emerged in the northern monasteries of Armenia beginning in the twelfth century, most notably in the monasteries of Hałbat and Sanahin. The highly influential movement, about which we read in various writings of the prolific and progressive intellectual, Bishop Nersēs Lambronats’i, was marked by a severe and unprecedented concept of human sinfulness, a highly restrictive view of the Church and, consequently, the introduction of drastic, new church practices. These included, most conspicuously, the total exclusion of all of the faithful from the church, leaving only the liturgical celebrant of the day standing alone in the sanctuary. Everyone else—not just catechumens and unrepentant sinners—and even the non-presiding clergy and monks were effectively excommunicated. They attended all of the church services, including the Eucharist, from behind the closed main doors of the church. I have argued elsewhere that the sudden emergence around this time, and the subsequent multiplication of monumental narthexes (գաւհիթ / *kaveet*) built onto the western wall of most monasteries in northeastern Armenia, was motivated specifically by this movement.² Many of the medieval monastic narthexes

² “‘When the Householder Rises Up and Shuts the Door’ [Յորսլէ հետէ մըցէ տանտուտերն եւ փակեցէ գորունն, Lk 13:25]: The Function of the *Gawit*’ in

were significantly larger, often many times larger, than the churches onto which they were built. It is unclear from the surviving literary testimony how, if at all, a person might be redeemed and reintegrated into the liturgical life of the church in the mindset of this peculiar movement's promoters. What is patently clear is that this rigorous reinterpretation of Christianity left little room for the Savior's compassion and forbearance toward his beloved creatures.

Come Let Me Help You

That spirit of God's overwhelming love for humanity and God's readiness to stop at nothing to rescue us from our fanciful sinful instincts is exactly what we encounter in *An Appeal to Repentance*. Throughout the forty chapters of the essay, and in the concluding prayer, Jesus sympathizes with the sinner, imploring us to come to our senses and to surrender to his loving embrace. In what amounts to a comprehensive Bible Study, with great emotion, Jesus recounts all of the episodes of his life that illustrate his care for us. He poignantly expresses the distress he feels when just one of God's creatures turns away from the Creator. He steadfastly disputes the notion that God will punish us for our errors. If the Lord did not reprimand those who tormented him, mocked him, crucified him and ultimately killed him, how could he conceivably punish one whose crimes

Medieval Armenian Monasteries," forthcoming in *Proceedings of the Society of Oriental Liturgy*. Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 2016.

could never sink to that level? This doesn't mean we are all off the hook. It means that Jesus' attitude toward us is not that of the ruthless prosecutor, but of the loving parent tenderly pacifying an inconsolable child. Jesus starkly warns of the dreadful fate that awaits those who reject him, as, by contrast, he lists the unfathomable rewards that are enjoyed by God's faithful children.

The overwhelming emphasis of the work is on the gracious generosity of Jesus, not the failures of the sinner. This compassionate, pastoral tone would have represented a striking and welcome alternative to the heartless, legalistic line of those who insisted on banning all the people from the church. The treatise may well be an attempt to counter the monks' penitential excesses with a more orthodox, Biblical vision that would allow them to moderate their harsh views and allow people back into the church. Perhaps that is the deeper meaning of the passage where Jesus is said to declare, "I don't feel the slightest joy in my heart when I see an unrepentant sinner leaving my courtyard, alienated from my flock, having fallen into the hands of Satan" (Chapter 26).

Throughout the work, Jesus' worldview is starkly dualistic. If one is separated from Jesus, she can only be left to cavort with the Devil. One either loves Jesus or one loves Satan (see especially Chapters 18-22). There is no middle ground. This is why it is so urgent that the reader make an about-face and immediately turn her full attention to the Lord. The attribution of the treatise to St. Ephrem may well be an effort to counter

the innovations of the influential monks with the unquestioned authority of the great fourth-century saint.

Penitential Spirituality Today

Whatever its original setting, *An Appeal to Repentance* could not be more pertinent today. It has been argued that in the United States and other western lands, Christianity no longer shapes society's values and moral thinking in any meaningful or recognizable way.³ Consciously or reflexively, more and more people view genuine faith in Jesus Christ as a quaint relic of an earlier, less sophisticated age, when primitive societies were more vulnerable to the delusions of religion and mythology. The churches, for their part, have largely discredited themselves through ghastly scandals, grossly un-Christian management, tepid preaching, puffed-up clericalism, gratuitous traditionalism, and an increasingly diluted worldview that differs little from what secular culture has to offer.

Be that as it so tragically may, while confidently ticking off the churches' legitimate faults, the very same society has no answers for its own very obvious dysfunction, exhibited by epidemic suicide—especially among affluent teenagers; almost daily mass shootings; gender confusion; domestic violence; sexual exploitation of women and children; poverty; dwindling

³ For two recent perspectives, see Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017) and David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2009).

accessibility to health care for the poor and middle classes; chemical addiction; a multi-billion dollar pornography industry; endemic loneliness and rising mental illness... In such an environment, a profound and compelling invitation to reconsider the true Christian path, as experienced by the first Christian nation, should be worthy of a read.

But even those basically decent people who thankfully are not plagued by depression, violence or other such ordeals, men and women who work hard and do their best to live an upright life, should not be so quick to assume that their status vis-à-vis the Lord God is safe and secure. Modern western culture continues to secede progressively from the Christian and Biblical values that not long ago were still considered to overlap largely with “American” ideals. In such an environment it becomes perilously easy for good folks who consider themselves “Christian” to fall into a false sense of security that they are on the right track with the good Lord. Growing numbers of people, especially young people, have adopted a widespread but diluted concept of Christianity that holds just a few basic tenets: God is up there somewhere; he wants us to be happy and nice to each other; he doesn’t care to be involved in our daily lives except if we need him for something; good people will go to heaven when they die. This seriously distorted view of the faith is Pseudo-Christianity. “Devoid of power and life,” it

has no basis in the Bible or historical Christianity.⁴ Not all “nice” people will inherit the Kingdom of God. Not all “basically good” people will be saved. Not every regular church goer will dance with the angels in heaven. Not everyone who donates to charity or volunteers at a food bank will join the choir of saints. St. Paul’s call for “undivided devotion to the Lord” is a high bar. Many are now far short of that bar and we had best not overlook the dire, eternal consequences. *An Appeal to Repentance* is urgent business for all of us. Its author did not spill this much ink for the benefit of a miniscule subset of humanity. Whether it involves a major course adjustment in life with substantial changes in behavior, or the continuous, assessment and resetting of our daily priorities, *An Appeal to Repentance* should be considered a personal letter with your name on it.

The fact that this writing comes to us from the voice of the Armenian people is not to be underestimated. The Armenians are the authors of a rich Christian culture and a singularly prolific and erudite theological heritage that are out of all proportion to that nation’s relatively small numbers on Planet Earth. Early on, the Armenians discovered the “abundant life” about which Jesus speaks, and in what was effectively an act of political suicide, they seized it, stopping at nothing to “turn away from despair” and to follow Jesus Christ. Even the horrific anguish of genocide and the madness of atheistic totalitarian-

⁴ This secularized view of Christianity has been designated “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” See Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy of Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, 10.

ism could not erase their devotion to the Son of God. Perhaps the Armenians are on to something.

Every morning before sunrise at the beginning of the Armenian Church's Night Vigil (Գիշերային ժամ / *Keesherayeen Zham*), the faithful face the doors of the church and renounce "Satan and his every evil deceit." Then, turning toward the holy altar in the direction of the rising Sun, they pledge once again to "turn to the light of the knowledge of God" (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6). May this luminous, life-giving penitential vow become real in their lives and in those of many more.

Come Back to Me

An Appeal to Repentance

1

The blessed Prophet Ezekiel says, “If the offender turns from the offenses he has committed, and does what is right and merciful, he will live richly and will not die. None of the misdeeds that he has committed, nor the wrongs he has done will be remembered. Rather, he will live by the mercy he has shown.”¹

Therefore, abandoning all [wrongs], let us hurry to reach the affluent Father’s generous Son, whose name is “Life”² and “Light”³ and “Savior.” In Him we have believed. In Him we were baptized and enlightened.⁴

He robes his people in the [robe] that he received from the Father.⁵ “The glory that you gave me, I gave them,” he says.⁶ Taking his people by the hand,⁷ he leads them to the Father. “I desire that where I am, they may be with me.”⁸ He leads them into the Father’s loving arms and his embrace. “For as you,

¹ Ezekiel 18:21-22

² John 17:21

³ John 8:12

⁴ Hebrews 10:22-32

⁵ Exodus 29:8

⁶ John 17:22

⁷ Psalm 72:23

⁸ John 17:24

Father, are in me, and I am in you, so let them too be with me and with you, among us.”⁹ What a miracle! What blessed good news! What boundless love for humanity!

Yesterday Mathew was a tax collector and heartless cheat.¹⁰ Today he has risen and resides in heaven.

Yesterday Peter denied Christ.¹¹ Today, seated in a tall throne, he is glorified exuberantly.

Yesterday Paul cursed and persecuted the church.¹² Today, having joined the ineffable saints beyond, he lives with God.

So why do we dawdle? Get up and let us dash to such a merciful Lord! Don’t delay! Don’t be lazy! If the Lord had to traverse many lands and provinces, it shows how urgent it was for him to persuade us, without delay, to fall down before God’s compassion and infinite love for us.

⁹ John 14:8

¹⁰ Matthew 10:3

¹¹ Luke 22:57; John 18:27

¹² 1 Timothy 1:13

2

But knowing our apathy and careless laziness, he came out and stood in the doorway.¹ He summons us, calling out loud, “Come to me all of you, weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”³ All of you who are staggering and dazed will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”² I’m not forcing you. I’m not reprimanding you. I’m not accusing you. Just move your lips and confess what you have done. My burden is light, easy, and effortless. If you want to, you can easily carry it. So why are you wavering and procrastinating? What are you afraid of? It is as if you are facing some enormous ordeal, or some hardship or danger, and you do not want to be relieved of it.

What is more, having looked upon our frailty, [the Lord] shows his universal authority and he asks, “What do you want? Whom do you need?”³ Are you sick? I am a skilled physician. Those who are healthy do not need a physician, only the sick.⁴ I heal for free. I ask nothing of you except [that you let me] heal you. I do not send you to the store. I have nothing to sell. You

¹ John 20:26

² Matthew 11:28-30; cf. 2 Kings 7:11

³ Matthew 20:21; Mark 10:51

⁴ Matthew 9:12

have nothing to beg from others. Just go into the inner room of your heart,⁵ let your tears flow for me, as much as you are able. Even if you shed a single teardrop, that is enough to baptize you a second time and to return you to your former dignity. If you are a sinner, I will show mercy. “I did not come for blameless people. I came to call sinners to repentance.”⁶ Whoever turns to me will not be ashamed.⁷ Not one of them has perished except the ones that have turned away from the Truth.⁸

I set the [corrupt] tax collector straight with a single word.⁹ I washed away the prostitute’s sins with her own tears.¹⁰ I gave healing and mercy as gifts to everyone. I was moved to compassion by Peter’s sorrowful tears even though he denied me three times.¹¹ I called him over to me and I appointed him as my apostle.¹² Mocking me, they sentenced me to the Cross. All creation lamented and trembled. But I prayed for those who crucified me.¹³ They angrily and furiously shook their heads.¹⁴ Yet with gentleness and mercy, I promised them forgiveness. And best of all, out of the kindness of my heart, I set out to

⁵ Matthew 6:6

⁶ Matthew 9:13; Luke 5:32

⁷ Genesis 49:22; Psalm 25:3; Malachi 3:7

⁸ John 17:12

⁹ Luke 5:27

¹⁰ Luke 7:37-44

¹¹ Mark 14:72; Luke 22:34

¹² Matthew 14:29

¹³ Luke 23:34

¹⁴ Matthew 27:39; Mark 15:29

adopt all the nations [as my own].¹⁵ I led the alien sheep into my holy court so there was one flock and one shepherd.¹⁶ I am the same and I do not change. I am the same yesterday, today and forever.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:5

¹⁶ John 10:16

¹⁷ Hebrews 13:8

3

You're thirsty. Don't delay. I am the fountain of life,¹ flowing free and sweet. "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."² And all who drink will never again be thirsty. And rivers of life will flow from his inner being.³

You're starving. Don't turn away from me. "I am the Bread of Life, which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever."⁴

You're naked, you poor sinner! I am your robe and mantle.⁵ Just flee from your wrongdoings and I will dress you in the original robe.⁶ "For all of you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."⁷

If you need shoes, I will put on your feet the finest shoes, which will allow you to step [harmlessly] on snakes and scorpions and trample over the power of the Enemy.⁸

¹ Psalm 36:9; Revelation 7:17, 21:6

² John 7:37; Revelation 22:17

³ John 7:38

⁴ John 6:59

⁵ Song of Songs 5:3

⁶ Matthew 27:31

⁷ Galatians 3:27

⁸ Luke 10:19

If you have become enslaved to sin, I will free you. For anyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.⁹ And if the Son of God frees you, you will become genuinely free people.

⁹ John 8:34

4

You poor sinner. Will you spurn my awesome and fiery power?¹ Don't be afraid. I'm not a stranger. I am family. I am David's son. I am Abraham's grandson. I speak with you and I have a body like yours.² So what do you want? I'm willing and ready [to give it to you]. Tell me! Whatever good thing you wish for yourself, let me know and I will instantly fulfill your wish. "For I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give myself as a ransom for many."³

What do you want me to do for you? Tell me. I will not refuse you because that is not my way. If I was not repulsed by washing the feet of the one who betrayed me to death, then how much more eagerly will I wash the heads and the feet of you, who believe in me?⁴ I do not wash away anything else; I only clean away your sin. And then I clean you again. If you shed one teardrop into my pitcher, I will flood you with more grace than the torrents of the Jordan [River], and I will wash you so that you are even more radiantly joyful than you were after your first baptism.

¹ Ezekiel 1:27-28

² Ephesians 3:6

³ Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45

⁴ John 13:2-5

You poor sinner. You have sinned so often. Aren't you sick of it? Are you afraid that I will grill you? Don't hold back your confession. Let me pour out my kindness. As many times as I told Peter I would forgive him, that same number of times will I forgive you. If you want to be reconciled with me, just abandon your malicious ways and I will abandon my anger.

Ask seven times that your sins be forgiven and I will answer you with the grace of forgiveness seventy times seven.⁵ For "I will not falsify anything that crosses my lips."⁶

Calculate the sum total [of your debts]. Ascertain their number and quantity and do not grumble at your lender.⁷ Do you want me to forgive your debts? I'm not stingy, I am generous, the affluent Father's generous Son. I will not charge interest on your debt. I will not even call in your debts. I am not here to choke you. Just admit and confess what you have done, and I will erase four hundred ninety-nine talents [of your debt]. I will happily free you.⁸

⁵ Matthew 18:22; Luke 17:4. cf Genesis 4:24

⁶ Numbers 30:12; Deuteronomy 23:23

⁷ Luke 16:1-13

⁸ Luke 7:36-50

5

You poor sinner. Why are you running away from me just because you have sinned so much? Come to me, my poor little child, because I am not angry and I do not blame you.¹ You are my creature. You are my image, my likeness, created by my pristine hands,² and for that reason I will take care of you. I will not deface the [divine] image in you.³ I will not ruin what [God] has created. I will not tarnish your [divine] likeness. “For I am merciful and compassionate, tolerant and understanding.”⁴ I ask nothing onerous of you, so why do you vacillate? Just “turn to me, and I will turn to you.”⁵ Just hurry to repentance. Just confess your sins. Only say, “I have sinned,” falling down in my presence, and I will honor you with glory.⁶

Now come to me. Don’t be ashamed. I will not divulge your sins [to anyone]. I will not mock you for whatever you have done. I will not reprimand you for being a sinner. I will not flaunt your shame. I will not hold a grudge for your many wrongs. I will not blame you for your pitiful condition. Not at all.

¹ Revelation 3:17

² Genesis 1:26

³ Daniel 7:14

⁴ Exodus 34:6; Nehemiah 9:31; Psalms 86:15, 103:8, 145:8

⁵ Isaiah 44:22

⁶ Luke 15:11-24

I will be kind to you as to one who has made an innocent mistake. I will show compassion on you, you poor, ravaged thing. I will restore life to you, for you have died.⁷

Do not sadden your Creator by your impenitence. Do not use sin as an excuse. Do not be ungrateful for my love. Do not get in the way of my creative work. Do not lock me out of my temple.⁸ Do not deprive me of my home. Do not despoil my property. Do not bankrupt my treasury. For I did not acquire you except by the price of my own blood,⁹ which I spilled for you. That is how I acquired you. Just look at me, at my grief for having lost you. Repent of your wrongs.¹⁰ I so desperately thirst for your salvation, like deer at streams of water.¹¹

⁷ Romans 8:11; 2 Peter 3:9

⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:16

⁹ Matthew 27:6-9; 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23; Revelation 5:9

¹⁰ Jeremiah 18:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2

¹¹ Psalm 42:1-2

6

You poor sinner. Give me what I ask of you.

Give me what I want—your change of heart.

Give me what I love—remorse.

Give me what I desire—a teardrop.¹

Give me what I wish for—a sigh from the depths of your heart.

Give me what fills me with joy—sorrow on your face.

Give me what fills me with cheer—the lifting up of your hands and the trembling of your fingers [reaching out for me].²

Give me what delights me—the words of your confession.

And I will lift you up to the heights of the Seraphim and the Cherubim.³

So tell me, what harm have I done to you that you should keep your Creator in such tearful grief by your lack of remorse for your wrongs? Remember that I brought you from non-existence to existence.⁴ I separated you from the dead. I separated you from beasts. I made you a human being. I created

¹ Psalm 6:6; Luke 7:38-44

² Psalm 141:2; 2 Maccabees 3:20

³ Luke 20:36

⁴ 2 Maccabees 7:28

you in my likeness.⁵ I molded you with my own hands. I named you in my image. I dignified you with reason.⁶ I enhanced you with wisdom.⁷ I enriched you with many abilities. I embellished you with all kinds of faculties. And I elevated you by giving you authority.⁸ I set you over everything.⁹ I gave you the heavens with their stars; the sky with its birds; the sea with all that swims in it; the earth with all of its animals, plants, and foliage—all of it to dignify and to indulge you. And now, on top of all this I promise you eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁰

⁵ Genesis 1:26

⁶ Genesis 1:27

⁷ Proverbs 20:29.

⁸ Genesis 1:26

⁹ Genesis 1:26

¹⁰ Matthew 5:3, 5:10; John 10:28, 20:31; cf Daniel 12:2

7

So now, you poor sinner, I ask you kindly—not angrily. I beg you! Tell me now, have I hurt you or blessed you? If you are honest, [you know that] I have done nothing to hurt you. I have blessed you. And if indeed I have blessed you, why do you side with Satan, my enemy?¹ Why do you stab my side every day with a four-edged sword?²

Know and understand this: that the sword of the sinner’s sin pierces and wounds me more than the hole in my side where I was stabbed with the lance on the Cross. It pains me more harshly than the nails hammered into my hands and feet by those who crucified me.³ The sword of the sinner’s sin hurts me worse than the weight of the crown of thorns placed on top of my head,⁴ which stung my bones and marrow. The bitterness and stench of the sinner’s sin sears my taste buds and palate even more than the gall and vinegar that I drank on the Cross.⁵

I know that when you see the likes of my crucifiers you hate and disdain them and even wish to destroy them because they

¹ Matthew 13:39; John 8:44

² John 19:34

³ John 20:25

⁴ Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2-5

⁵ John 19:29-30

crucified your Lord. Yet every day, you naïvely do their work for them by dreadfully sinning against me. Now stop your evil deeds and repent, my dear child, so that I am not forced to hand you the bitter cup that I will make them drink.⁶

⁶ Isaiah 51:17-22; Lamentations 2:13, 4:21; Revelation 14:10

8

O society of sinners! Tell me—What evil did I do to humanity that you should turn your face away from your kind Creator as if from your enemy?

Was it not a human being who trampled on the Creator's commandment because he wished to become God?¹ Yet I became a human being in his place and I transformed humanity into God.²

Was it not a human being who ran to the tree [of the knowledge of good and evil]?³ Yet I lifted myself up to the wood⁴ of the Cross.⁵

Was it not a human being who raced ahead on foot [to the forbidden tree]? Yet my feet were nailed [to the Cross].

Was it not a human being who extended his hand to the tree? Yet I spread out [my hands] on the Cross.

Was it not a human being who tasted the sweet fruit? Yet I drank vinegar and gall.⁶

¹ Genesis 3:1-6

² 1 Corinthians 15:21; Psalm 82:6; John 1:14

³ Genesis 3:6.

⁴ փայտ / *payd* (wood). Armenian authors use this word and the word ծառ / *dzar* (tree) interchangeably, as synonyms.

⁵ Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19

⁶ John 19:29-30

Was it not a human being who liked the one born of his rib, and you came from their fruit?⁷ Yet I opened my flank on the Cross for him.⁸

Was it not a human being who caused the curse?⁹ And yet I was called “cursed” on account of him.¹⁰

Was it not a human being who refused to say, “I have sinned”? Yet I cried, “My God, my God”¹¹ to the Father from the Cross.

Was it not a human being who was condemned to death?¹² Yet I surrendered myself to death on the Cross.¹³

And you poor sinners turn your faces away from such a sympathetic Creator. I ask you kindly to come to your senses and receive forgiveness.

⁷ Genesis 2:21-23

⁸ John 19:34

⁹ Genesis 3:14-24

¹⁰ Galatians 3:13, cf. Deuteronomy 21:23

¹¹ Matthew 27:46

¹² Genesis 3:22-23

¹³ Philippians 2:8

9

You poor sinner. I will put my fate in your hands—*You judge me.*¹ If I did not love you, then you would be right to hate me. But if I love you, why do you run away from me?

And if you are thinking, “You did not love me perfectly,”² then know this: You are wrong because I created the whole world entirely for you. I fashioned Paradise for you. I designed the Kingdom of Heaven for you.³ I left the place of the angels for you to inherit. Just turn away from your sins⁴ and I will bring you there so that you can see it and enjoy it with my angels.

Look, it was for you that I came down from heaven to earth.⁵ I, God, became human and I, the Lord, became a servant.⁶ For you I stood in the court as a criminal.⁷ I was condemned by Jews. I was beaten by Pilate.⁸ I was mocked and ridiculed by Herod.⁹ For you I was derided by the soldiers.¹⁰ I

¹ Deuteronomy 4:14; 1 Samuel 24:16; Micah 7:9

² 1 John 2:5, 4:12

³ Matthew 25:34

⁴ 1 Kings 8:35; 2 Chronicles 6:26; Ezekiel 33:14; Sirach 5:8, 8:5

⁵ Hebrews 2:9

⁶ Matthew 20:27, 23:12; Luke 14:11; Philippians 2:7

⁷ Joshua 20:6; Luke 22:66; John 18:30

⁸ Matthew 27:30; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:16; John 18:31

⁹ Luke 23:11

¹⁰ Matthew 27:31; cf. Jeremiah 38:19-20

was slapped by the servants.¹¹ I was spat upon by the priests.¹² I was insulted by the people.¹³ For you I lifted the cross onto my shoulders and carried it up to Golgotha.¹⁴ Out of love for you I was cursed, hated and crucified.¹⁵ For you I was restrained with nails.¹⁶ I was pierced with a lance.¹⁷ I was crowned with thorns.¹⁸ I drank vinegar and gall.¹⁹ I wore a mantle of disgrace.²⁰ I lowered my divine head and surrendered my spirit into the Father's hands.²¹ For you I was sheathed in humanity. Bodily I descended into a tomb;²² spiritually I went to hell and freed the captive spirits.²³ On the third day I rose and I raised you from the fatality of sin.²⁴

¹¹ Matthew 26:67

¹² Matthew 26:67; Mark 14:65

¹³ Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32; cf. Psalm 42:10; Matthew 5:11; Luke 6:22

¹⁴ Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17

¹⁵ Matthew 27:39; Mark 15:29; Luke 23:39; John 9:28

¹⁶ John 20:25, cf. Isaiah 41:7; Jeremiah 10:4

¹⁷ John 19:34

¹⁸ Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2

¹⁹ Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:29

²⁰ Matthew 27:28; Mark 15:17

²¹ Luke 23:46; John 19:30

²² Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53; John 19:41

²³ Matthew 27:52

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:55

10

You poor sinner. Don't you see how very much I love you? When I set out to die on the Cross for your sake, my Father was seized with distress and the Holy Spirit was crestfallen for ever having created man.¹

What shall I say concerning the choir of angels, how unbearable their grief was? For when they saw their Creator dead on the Cross, the heavens and the heavenly ones burned in anguish.

What shall I say about how all creatures lamented, inconsolably grief-stricken, when they saw their Creator naked on the Cross, having surrendered himself to death?

For the sun and the moon with all the stars were stripped of their light and were draped in darkness.² And this earth shook and trembled from its foundations.³ Boulders were split and the temple curtain was torn into two tattered scraps.⁴ Even the dead could not stand it. Rising from their tombs, they lamented with creatures and became witnesses to my resurrection.⁵

¹ Genesis 6:6

² Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25, 23:44; Acts 2:20; Revelation 21:23, 22:5. cf. Genesis 37:9

³ Matthew 28:2. cf. Psalm 17:8; Isaiah 13:13; Judith 16:18

⁴ Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45

⁵ Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:22; John 5:25; Acts 1:22, 4:33, cf. Zechariah 3:8

11

Do you even realize how much my beloved disciples grieved and were filled with sorrow on the night that I was arrested? Look at the enormity of the sorrow of the holy apostles. For even though the soldiers did not arrest their teacher, they could not open their eyes, but fell into a stunned sleep from the severity of their sorrow.¹ And I went off barely a stone's throw away, and I prayed to the Father.

Indeed, when someone fears death his sweat flows like water. But out of my love for you, I permitted so much fear into my divinized body that my sweat, mixed with blood, poured down my forehead in streams.² And from horrific fright my entire body trembled and shook all the way up to my head. There I was, my face to the ground vehemently calling to the Father in prayer.

¹ Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-41; Luke 23:39-46

² Luke 22:44

12

You poor sinner. Do you see how much I love you? When the Jews besieged me with swords and clubs, with lamps and torches, still they could not recognize me because they so thirsted for my blood that they only sent men who did not know about me, and who had not witnessed my miracles, lest perchance one of them should show mercy and run away without having arrested me.

And I asked in a kind voice, “Whom are you looking for?” And they said, “Jesus.” I said, “I am he.” And awestruck, they fell to the ground.¹ I felt sorry for them and helped them up. And still they did not have mercy on me. Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the chief priest’s servant. But I blocked Peter’s sword and pulled him back. And taking the amputated ear, I replaced it and healed it.² But still, through it all, they showed no compassion for me.

¹ John 18:4-6

² Luke 22:50

13

What shall I say about their heartless conduct? The paralyzed man lay by the portico of Bethesda for thirty-eight years. While others quickly rushed into the pool when the water stirred and they went away healed, this poor man had no one to lift him into the pool so that he might be healed when the waters stirred. When I saw the paralyzed man's anguish, I felt sorry for him and I had mercy on him. I healed him and made him well. Later I saw him in the temple and I ordered him, saying, "Do not sin again so that no evil will ever come your way again."¹

That night while the soldiers were standing outside, before they had come up to me, that paralyzed man—because he remembered me from the time that I had healed him—immediately ran up to me and was the first to slap me in the face.² But I did nothing to him because I love you all. And when he repented, I made him worthy of my kingdom.

So then, if he did this to me, how much more did the nameless Jews and soldiers do to me that night? Out of love for sinners I endured all of this. And yet you turn your face away from such a good Creator, and you keep me in agonizing grief.

¹ John 5:1-15

² Matthew 26:67; John 18:22

14

You poor sinner. Look at my love for you. For when they arrested me, my disciples left me and they even fled.¹ Here was this one lamb but many foxes.² Here was this one sheep but many wild beasts.³ Here was this one lambkin but countless bloodsuckers.⁴ Here was this one innocent man in the desert but many cynical hunters. Here was this one fatted bull but many ready to slaughter him.⁵ Here was this one innocent dove but many wild raptors. Here was this one wise, prudent turtledove but many black ravens.⁶

And let me tell you what they did with me next. First, they stripped me of my seamless robe and then they took off my tunic.⁷ They uncovered my head and tied my hands behind my back. They wrapped a leash around my neck and began to drag me. And through it all I kept silent.

¹ Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50

² Matthew 7:15, 10:16; Luke 10:3; John 10:12, cf. Isaiah 65:25

³ Mark 1:13

⁴ Leviticus 14:10; Isaiah 53:7

⁵ Judges 6:25-28; Luke 15:23-30

⁶ Leviticus 1:14, 5:7-11, 12:6-8; Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 2:24, 3:22

⁷ John 19:23-24

Those who were in front of me dragged me ahead. Those who were behind me whipped my back. Those on my right slapped me on the cheek. Those on my left spat on my face. Those standing around threw dirt on my head. Those in the distance shouted insults and swore at me. Those a bit closer mocked and laughed at me derisively. Half of them hurriedly galloped ahead to the palace of the high priests to give them the news.

And then what? When they heard the news from the messengers, immediately they shouted to one another, “They have tied up Jesus and they are bringing him in chains! Come, let us run ahead to meet them!”

And who among those in the crowd that ran ahead did not strike me? Who did not slap me? Who did not ridicule me? Who did not spit in my face? Who did not punch my head? Who did not pummel my back? Who did not cuss at me or disparage me or curse me or humiliate me or taunt me or lampoon me until they delivered me to the palaces of Caiaphas and Annas?

Yet still, in my love for you, I endured all of this.

And you hate me.

And you love sin.⁸

⁸ Revelation 1:5

15

And now if I told you what they did to me when they dragged me into the palaces of Caiaphas and Annas, you would shudder to hear it. They said, “We do not condemn Jesus illegitimately, but according to the rule of law.”¹

They took me to the court and the high priests sat down with the elders. They put up false witnesses,² even though this is contrary to God and an obstruction of justice. They said, “He broke the Sabbath. He destroyed the Temple. He cursed God. He despised the traditions of the fathers,” and many such things. And after that some of them began to shout and say, “He deserves death!”³ Then others began to shout and say, “He deserves death!” Others said, “He should be crucified!”⁴ Others tore their garments, saying, “He cursed God!”⁵ Still others said, “He is a criminal!”⁶

And I took it all. I endured it for you, poor sinner.

¹ John 18:28-31

² Matthew 26:60-65; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:15

³ Matthew 26:66; Mark 14:64

⁴ Mark 15:13; Luke 23:21; John 19:6. cf. Matthew 20:19

⁵ Matthew 26:65; Mark 14:63

⁶ Luke 23:32-39; John 18:30

And from there they took me to the home of Annas;⁷ from there to Pilate's palace;⁸ from there to Herod's abode;⁹ and from there back to Pilate's palace.¹⁰ They did not let me sleep a wink all night but dragged me around from palace to palace... And I won't even go in to how much they mocked and ridiculed and humiliated and tormented me, lugging me around all night long—you wouldn't be able to bear it.

⁷ John 18:13

⁸ Matthew 27:2; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1; John 18:33

⁹ Luke 23:6

¹⁰ Luke 23:11

16

How could there ever be more love than my love for you? I did not even have so much compassion on Mary, my very own mother when she saw her only son, the Creator of heaven and earth, naked on the Cross, my body splattered in blood, fastened with nails, my side split open, my face bruised, my head hanging low, my spirit surrendered...¹

Can any human being or angel comprehend how much grief she bore? How much she was tormented? How much her heart burned? How furious she was? How much she fumed with rage? How she was seething? How stricken with grief she was? How she groaned? How she sighed? How much sorrow she felt? How distraught she was? How tormented she was? How she wailed? How she lamented? How many tears she wept?² The dirges she sang? How she wailed? The words she uttered? How she clasped the cross? How she stretched out her arms toward me, but could not reach me? How she collapsed on the ground? How the dirt crusted on her face? Her piercing shrieks? How she was moved to tears at the sight of her only son dead? How she compelled even the angels of heaven to come down and

¹ John 19:25

² John 20:11-16

lament? How she moved all physical creation to tears? How she moved the oil-bearing women to fall to the ground with her?³

At that time, when she bore so much heart-wrenching anguish, was my mother dead or alive? Was she awake or dreaming? Was she conscious or unconscious? And still, in my own mother's miserable state, I had more pity for you than for her.

Yet you turn your face from me and you run to the side of the enemy.

³ Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:5

17

You poor sinner. Look how tenderly I am now calling you to change your heart but still you refuse to hear me. If you die in your impenitence, do not fear the multitude of your sins as much as my kindness and my suffering. Far more than for the restitution for your sins I will torment you in the fiery furnace a thousand times more because you made a joke of my suffering. You brushed aside my incarnation, and you had no use for my descent from heaven to Earth for you.¹

The suffering that I endured for sinners is the debt [I paid] for you sinners. For if they will not pay that debt of my suffering and receive forgiveness by means of repentance, then on the Day of Judgment I will make them pay for their sins in proportion to what they have committed. And the debt for my suffering will be a hundred times greater because they scorned me.²

¹ John 1:32, 3:13, 6:33-59. cf. Daniel 4:10-20

² Matthew 18:23-35

18

You poor sinner! Tell me. What possible damage did you attribute to Christ your Creator that would cause you to hate me so much? For that matter, what gifts did you receive from Satan that would cause you to love *him* so much, and to do *his* will by doing such awful things? If you will listen to me, I will show you all the “good deeds” that Satan did for you.

Was it not Satan who deceived Eve, your first mother, and through her, your father Adam, by means of the serpent?¹

Was it not Satan who made your forefather eat the fruit?²

Was it not Satan who stripped him of the gleaming attire [of heaven]?³

Was it not Satan who made him run from God’s face and hide behind the fig tree?⁴

Was it not Satan who betrayed your father and mother behind the curses?⁵

Was it not Satan who caused them to be exiled from God’s immortal Garden, and tossed them into death’s abyss?⁶

¹ Genesis 3:4, 3:13

² Genesis 3:6.

³ Genesis 3:10-11. cf. Genesis 3:21

⁴ Genesis 3:8

⁵ Genesis 3:14-19

⁶ Genesis 3:21-24.

Was it not Satan who tortured them for 900 tearful years⁷ while they were locked out of the life-giving Garden?

Was it not Satan who swapped the sparkle of your forefather's gleaming, heavenly attire with a garment of tattered hides?⁸

Was it not Satan who took [your forefather's] life of leisure, as he enjoyed the fruits of the Garden, and turned it into a life lived by the sweat of his brow?⁹

Was it not Satan who deprived him of the angelic manner of child-bearing, degrading it to a bestial process with wrenching pain and sorrow?¹⁰

Was it not Satan who kept your father's spirit locked up in hell for five thousand years, while I had compassion and mercy on you, God's children, at the Cross, where I rescued you?

Now if Satan did all this to your forefather Adam, then what does he want to do to *you* so that you will love Satan so much? Listen closely as I list what he wants for you...

⁷ According to the Armenian version of Genesis 5.5 Adam lived 930 years before he died.

⁸ Genesis 3:21

⁹ Genesis 3:19

¹⁰ Genesis 3:16

19

You poor sinner! Satan wants to annul your adoption by God the Father.¹

He wants to oust you from the Holy Spirit's home.²

He wants to separate you the Son of God's brotherhood.³

He wants to pervert God the Father's tender love for you—which He showed when he sacrificed me, his Only-Begotten Son, to death—turning it into hatred.⁴

He wants to block the Holy Spirit from flowing freely through you.

He wants to deprive you of the joy of God's mysterious grace.⁵

He wants to raze to the ground the divine temple that you are.⁶

He wants to trample on you, the image of the Creator's Wisdom.

Through your ghastly sin, he wants to deface the exquisite imprint of the Holy Trinity upon you.

And so on, and so on...

¹ Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5

² Ephesians 2:22

³ 1 John 3:1-10

⁴ Philippians 2:8

⁵ Hebrews 6:1-6.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

20

You poor Satan-loving Sinner. Look at what he desires for you—

Satan wants to pollute the grace of the baptismal font, which you received from the Holy Spirit.¹

He wants to strip you of the dazzling robe of baptism that was given to you.²

He wants to destroy you by starving you of my life-giving Body and Blood.³

He wants to stain your heavenly wedding garment.⁴

He wants to extinguish the lamp of your virgin purity.⁵

He wants to lock you out of the open doors to the Heavenly Bridegroom's marriage bed.⁶

He wants to uproot you, a beautiful plant in the garden of Eden.⁷

He wants to hack you off with a sword, you beautiful branch blossoming in Christ, the true Vine.⁸

¹ Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5, 11:16

² Galatians 3:27

³ John 6:55

⁴ Matthew 22:11-12

⁵ Matthew 25:1-13

⁶ Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34. cf. Exodus 27:9; Psalm 19:5; Joel 2:16

⁷ Genesis 21:33; Isaiah 61:3; Jeremiah 31:5; Matthew 15:13

⁸ John 15:5

He wants you to shrivel up in the parched desert wind of your sins, you ever-blooming flower of the Creator.⁹

And so on and so on...

⁹ Ezekiel 19:11; Sirach 39:17; 1 Peter 1:24, 5:4

21

You poor sinner. Since you love him so much, consider also Satan's fury. Satan becomes furious when you express remorse for your sin.¹ He becomes furious when you confess your wrongdoing. He becomes furious when you say, "I have sinned," and return to your Lord.² He becomes furious when you fall to the ground and pray to me with tears.³

He is gravely wounded when you receive forgiveness for your sins from me.⁴ He burns with the fire of jealousy when, in repentance, you accept me again into your soul as your Lord. He burns in anguish when you are praised and honored by me, your Creator.⁵ He writhes in agony when you beam [under a crown] of lush laurel branches.⁶ He is fiercely enraged when I crown you with my heavenly glory. He perishes in [his own] wickedness when you revel in ecstasy surrounded by my angels in the eternal life of my heavenly kingdom.

¹ Jonah 3:10

² Psalm 41:4; Luke 15:18-21

³ Psalm 6:6; Luke 7:38-44

⁴ Psalm 31:1; 2 Maccabees 12:46; Matthew 26:28; Romans 3:25; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:24

⁶ Psalm 8:5; Hebrews 2:7

22

You poor sinner. Since you love Satan and do what he wants, consider all the things he promises you—

Satan promises you good things—the deepest grave.¹

He promises you dignity—the hollowed out, pus-filled, revolting and putrid sight of his face, which is more harrowing than hell's fire.²

He promises to let you frolic among the ghastly and hideous choirs of demons.

He promises you rest—boiling caldrons of infernal fury and caverns of scorching fire.³

He promises you a robe⁴—outer darkness congealed into a tangible solid, where there are weeping eyes and gnashing teeth.⁵

He promises you a banquet table—with a void as wide as hell's crypt.⁶

He promises you animals ready for sacrifice—restless worms and leviathans⁷ from the frightful, fiery sea.⁸

¹ Job 38:16; Psalm 63:9

² Wisdom 11:19

³ Job 41:22; Proverbs 6:27

⁴ Luke 15

⁵ Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30

⁶ Proverbs 14:12, 16:25

He promises you food—the molten residue of the grisly people that have been thrown into the foundries of [hell’s] depths.⁹

He promises you drink—horrendous springs of the fiery rivers.¹⁰

He promises you lamps—the reflection of the sparks from fiery lightning bolts¹¹—

Not to mention Tartarus and all the rest that Satan promises to those who love him and do his will...¹²

⁷ Isaiah 27:1

⁸ Psalm 73:13-14; Isaiah 27:1; Amos 9:3

⁹ Ezekiel 22:18-20; Malachi 3:2

¹⁰ Daniel 7:10

¹¹ Job 41:10

¹² Proverbs 30:16

23

You poor sinner. Why don't you recognize the blessings of your Creator?¹ Satan is waiting every day for your death—he wants you to die in your sin.² Meanwhile, in my invisible power, I burn every day like fire, and my angels strike him down with their fiery swords, driving him away so that he may not harm you and lead you to death.³ The evil one knows that I love mankind.⁴ He is afraid that by remaining alive, sinful people may suddenly repent and find mercy from God, and thereby escape Satan's grip.⁵

So why do you run away from me, your kind Christ, when the angels who continuously see me do not tire of my kindness? How evil could I possibly be that you should renounce me in this way? That is why I go after for you, because you have gone astray.

I want to find you, because you are lost.⁶

I want to relieve your pain, because you are hurt.⁷

¹ Psalm 78:11; Wisdom 14:26

² 1 Peter 5:8

³ 1 Chronicles 21:26-30; Wisdom 17:6; 3 Maccabees 6:14

⁴ Wisdom 1:6

⁵ Genesis 19:19; Isaiah 55:7; Hebrews 4:16

⁶ Matthew 18:12-13, 22:29; Mark 12:24-27; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 2:25

⁷ Luke 10:25-37. 1 Thessalonians 2:11

I want to heal you because you have been beaten up.⁸

I want to rescue you because you are drowning.⁹

I want to hold you close because you have been battered by the wind.¹⁰

I want to lead you to the harbor because you have been pounded by turbulent waves.¹¹

⁸ Luke 10:29

⁹ Psalm 69:2; Micah 7:19; Matthew 14:30; Luke 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:4

¹⁰ Matthew 8:26; Luke 8:24; Ephesians 4:14

¹¹ Matthew 14:24

24

You poor sinner. Consider what I want to do for you. Love me because I have loved you. And I love you. And I will continue to love you!¹

I want to cure your sickness.²

I want to raise you from the death of sin.³

I want to lift you out of your implacable grief.⁴

I want to console you in your bitter sadness.⁵

I want to heal your gruesome wounds.⁶

I want to free you from your dreadful anguish.

I want to untie the knots of sin that constrain you.⁷

I want to save you from your addiction to evil.⁸

You poor sinner. Remember that I, your Lord, am lenient. Look what I intend to do for you—

Having come [to you] personally, I intend to see for myself your spirit's incurable wounds.⁹

¹ Ephesians 2:4; 1 John 4:10-19

² Psalm 41:3-4, 102:3; Matthew 4:23, 8:17, 9:35, 10:1; Luke 5:15, 6:18, 7:21, 9:1, 13:12; John 5:1-9

³ Romans 5:12-18; Hebrews 11:19; James 5:15

⁴ Psalm 30:11.

⁵ Wisdom 8:9; Sirach 38:18-21

⁶ Jeremiah 15:18

⁷ Psalm 119:61

⁸ Titus 3:3

I intend to wash away with my own hands the grime that has fouled your spirit.

I intend to wipe away its dirt with my own handkerchief.

I intend to excise its putrid decay.¹⁰

I intend to drain the pus that has collected in your soul.¹¹

I intend to pour out my divine tears like a fountain on your soiled spirit.¹²

I intend to obliterate and clean out every evil thing and restore it to its former splendor.

I only ask that you acknowledge the harmful things you have done and stop doing them. Confess your wrongs and say, "I have sinned." I will wipe away the multitude of your sins even though your sins are many.

⁹ Matthew 17:15-17

¹⁰ 1 Maccabees 9

¹¹ Job 2:8, 7:5; Nahum 3:19

¹² John 11:35

25

O choirs of good people, my faithful servants. Don't be surprised that your Savior is sympathetic, that your Lord and Creator burns with so much kind-heartedness for sinners. Yes—Believe it! Let me tell you just how much I love sinners. The assemblies of the nine ranks of angels¹—whose vast numbers cannot be counted by humans and cannot be known, so fiery are their essences crowned with light—when they see the horrific grief that I feel for a single unrepentant sinner, all of them together, trembling, try to console me.² But they cannot calm my grief in the least because I died on the Cross for that one person so that he might never perish.³ As for the assemblies of all the righteous people who are with me in my kingdom, they tremble and lament in my presence. Neither are they capable of assuaging my sorrow in the least.

¹ Matthew 22:24-33; Galatians 3:26-28

² Matthew 26:53

³ Luke 15:4-6

26

Listen to still more astounding things that I want to tell you. When my mother, the Mother of God, sees me in such a distraught state, she falls down to her knees in front of me and, uncovering her breast from which I nursed, she cries out in lament.¹ Shaking her fingers, she says, “My only son, didn’t you endure enough grief and sorrow in the world from those who crucified you, yet now you’re agonizing even more? Why don’t you have mercy on your weeping mother and settle down just a bit? Wasn’t your mother’s dreadful heartache bad enough, when I saw my only son on the Cross, his blood-stained body hanging dead? And still you scorch my heart with fire by bearing such grief?”

Yet even with all of this, I don’t feel the slightest joy in my heart when I see an unrepentant sinner leaving my courtyard, alienated from my flock, having fallen into the hands of Satan. For my heart aches so much, and my spirit is so saddened over one unremorseful sinner, that heaven with all of the heavenly beings, and Earth with all of the earthly beings, as well as the sea with all of its fullness—they mean nothing to me.²

¹ Luke 11:27

² Matthew 4:8-10

27

Don't be surprised how much I yearn with compassion for sinners. O man, know this: when you plant a vine, and after laboring over it for three years it does not sprout a single bud for you, it hurts! And if it withers, you suffer great sadness because you labored for three years for nothing, and your best efforts were wasted.¹

Then why should I not feel sorry for that sinner for whom I came down from heaven to Earth? I received a physical body from the Virgin. I, God, became human!² I, the Lord, became a servant. I walked on Earth for thirty-three years. Through my life-giving teaching, I continually preached into the ears of sinners. I healed many through my divine miracles. I endured every sort of torment and affront. I was lifted up onto the Cross. I gave my blood as ransom, and seizing them from the captor, I rescued those sinners.³

Now the fruit of all of my suffering was the salvation of the sinner. But if the sinner dies in her sin, the fruit of my suffering

¹ Matthew 21:19

² John 1:14

³ Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23; 1 Timothy 2:6; 1 Peter 1:18-19

will be lost and I will be deeply wounded and hurt. My efforts for her will have been in vain.⁴

But when the sinner repents for her sins and amends her ways, I will rejoice and delight. Then my Father and the Holy Spirit will delight with me. All of my angels will also celebrate.⁵ All the throngs of good and faithful people will leap for joy, and my mother and Queen will be elated with happiness. Gathered together, they will celebrate with me, holding a spectacular feast in heaven because the fruit of my labors was not lost.

⁴ John 8:21-24

⁵ John 10:28; 2 Peter 3:9

28

You poor sinner. Love me because I love you! Invite me into your life, and with me, the enviable angels and archangels, and all good and faithful people. I will not belittle your earthly realm. I will not look down on your poverty. I will not deride you for your impurity.¹

Purify the marriage bed of your heart. Let your prayer flow like a sweet fragrance.² Put your life in order the way you would set a banquet table. Pour out mercy as if it were a fine wine.³ Unfurl your confession like a fine linen tablecloth. Let your love flower like a rose. Let your repentance light up like a many-armed candelabra. Stretch out your ten fingers toward me as if you were plucking the lyre. Call on the saints to speak kindly of you to me, the generous host. Your meal is ample. Your table is overflowing. Your calling is bright.⁴

And if you wish, I will bring my Father along with me. My Father and I will come and stay with you.⁵ If you do this you will dignify me before my Father because the mystery of my coming

¹ Philippians 2:5-11

² Psalm 141:2-3

³ Matthew 26:7; Mark 14:3

⁴ Matthew 22:1-14

⁵ Genesis 18:1-8

into the world will not have been in vain.⁶ Instead, human nature will be exalted even above the angels and archangels.⁷ And overjoyed, my Father will bless you with unparalleled praise from his own mouth. And he will prepare for you a place more lofty than the angels' dwellings. "Where I am, there will my servant also be,"⁸ and "Your life is hidden in me with God."⁹ Furthermore, when I come again, I will lead those blessed by my Father to my Father¹⁰ and I will say, "Behold me and my children, whom you have given me."¹¹

⁶ Matthew 25:27

⁷ Hebrews 1:4

⁸ John 12:26

⁹ Colossians 3:3

¹⁰ 1 Peter 3:18

¹¹ Genesis 33:5; Isaiah 8:18; Hebrews 2:13

29

You poor sinner. Why do you not fear my awesome power?

Why do you not mend your ways even when I am calling you lovingly and gently to repentance? Know that when I merely cast a glance, the earth quakes from its foundations,¹ and mountains melt like wax.² The seas dry up like tinder and hell sinks even lower into the depths of the abyss.

Why aren't you afraid? For my power cuts through wind and fire.

Why aren't you horrified? For the blazing lightning bolts of my awesome presence scorch and consume every conceivable sort of dreadful, demonic power.

Why aren't you terrified when even the Seraphim and the Cherubim cover their faces with their flaming wings³ out of fear of me?

Why aren't you trembling? For even if there were some means of escape, it would never be able to withstand me in heaven. What is more, in sheer terror, every physical element, and the entire earth in its fullness, along with its molten core, would drain into the utter reaches of the bottomless depths.

¹ Job 9:6; Psalm 17:8

² Psalm 97:5

³ Isaiah 6:2

Why aren't you shaking? For even, in awe of me, if the heights of heaven had a place to hide, they would not even be able to crouch beneath my footstool.⁴

And why are you not petrified, for if there were a way to seek cover, all the armies of immortal beings would do it. They would hide from my terrifying rays of light, gleaming as bright as the sun.⁵

That is why I forgive you, so that you would not perish in eternal damnation but instead, feeling remorse, you might be saved from the fires of hell.⁶

But still you offend your Creator and neither fear his awesome power nor tremble at it!

⁴ Psalm 99:5, 109:1; Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 5:35, 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:43

⁵ Habakkuk 3:4

⁶ John 10:28

30

Your poor sinner! Even though I am speaking with you kindly you should still fear me. Think carefully about your plight. For I did not spare the angels that rebelled against me. Instead, in my anger, I hurled them down from heaven into the abyss.¹

And in the days of Noah, when the world had become consumed with fornication, I drowned throngs of people in the flood, one and all.²

As for Sodom and Gomorrah, when their citizens were perpetrating deviant acts, I incinerated them in flames shooting down from heaven.³

The imperious Pharaoh, who rose up against me—I plunged him and the multitude of his forces into the Red Sea.⁴

Korah and Abiram and their followers, who wanted to usurp my priesthood by force—I consumed them in the fire of 250 censers. As for Abiram's camp, I ripped the earth in two and cast them into the abyss.⁵

¹ Luke 10:18

² Genesis 6:11-22

³ Genesis 19:24-25

⁴ Exodus 14:26-31

⁵ Numbers 15:1-35

Jericho, which turned against me and defied me—I liquified its ramparts like water.⁶ And by the blade of the sword I ravaged its inhabitants through the efforts of my servant Joshua.⁷

And the forces of Sennacherib, King of the Assyrians, who profaned my holy name—at the gates of my city Jerusalem, in the twinkling of an eye, in the middle of the night, I ordered my angel to massacre all 185,000 of them with a fiery sword.⁸

Now then, who is the one that will act against my will and not be fiercely punished? I am the very same God. If I did not spare all of those many people, neither will I spare you.⁹ If you do not heed my gentle voice; if you do not repent and turn from your ways, I will punish you in the fire of hell one hundred times more than those. As I said, “It will be easier on the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for this city.”¹⁰

⁶ Joshua 6:5

⁷ Joshua 6:20-21

⁸ 2 Kings 19:35-37

⁹ Romans 11:21

¹⁰ Matthew 10:15

31

Now then, you may say this to me: “My Lord, from now on, like all creatures, I also will tremble and shutter with great fear at your awesome power. But what can I do? I hesitate because my sins are so many. Why would you show me mercy and forgive me?”

But I say this: think about my name and cheer up! Do not hesitate because of the multitude of your sins.

My name is Merciful. My name is Lenient. My name is Most Gracious. My name is Tolerant. My name is Indulgent. My name is Kind.¹ My name is All Good. My name is Loving. My name is Physician for the Sick. My name is Resurrection for those that have Fallen. My name is Life for the Dead. My name is Light for those in Darkness. My name is Savior for Captives. My name is Renewer of the Old. My name is Finder of the Lost. And so on...

So why should you hesitate because of the multitude of your sins?²

¹ Psalm 52:9, 135:3

² Matthew 26:28; Romans 5:20; James 5:20; 1 Peter 4:8

32

And because you declared that “From now on I too will fear you, Christ,” and that your hesitation was due to the great number of your sins, consequently, from now on I too will intensify my love, my compassion and my mercy toward you. And I will tell you all you need to do.

You poor sinner, this is all you need to do: Renounce your complicity with Satan’s evil will and disengage yourself from the routine of your revolting deeds. Show contrition like Lamech.¹ Say, “I have sinned against you, Father,” like the Prodigal Son.² Confess your many sins like the Prophet David.³ Repent of your wrongdoing like Manasseh.⁴ Pray to the Lord, saying, “God, pardon this sinner as you pardoned the Tax Collector.”⁵ Weep for your misdeeds like Peter.⁶ Cease from evil deeds like the Prostitute did.⁷ Say, “Remember me in your kingdom,” like the

¹ Genesis 4:23-24

² Luke 15:21

³ 2 Samuel 12:13

⁴ 2 Chronicles 33:15-19; *Prayer of Manasseh*

⁵ Luke 18:9-14

⁶ Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:72

⁷ John 8:11

Thief.⁸ And then see what I, your almighty Lord, will do with the multitude of your sins.

⁸ Luke 23:42

33

You poor sinner. If you have sinned seventy-times-seven¹ with every breath in and out, and if your evils are more than the stars in heaven; or if your misdeeds are more countless than the waves of the sea, and are more numerous than the sands of the universe,² and more relentless than the drops of rain, and more copious than fine dust blowing through the air; and if your offenses are more vast and massive than any mountain on the face of the Earth; and if your crimes are higher than the sky or lower than hell, or broader than the vastness of the ends of the earth; or scattered beyond the expanses of the atmosphere...

When you repent, if by these measures your sins and evil deeds are more than the fluttering of your eyelids, more than your breaths in and out, faster than the glimmering of the sun's rays, or a blaze of lightning in the air, or the racing of your mind—

Then ten thousand times faster still than all of these will I pardon all of your many sins, because I am the all-powerful Creator and I pardon sins in no time. Even though the sins of the universe are like the torrents of water tossed up by a violent hurricane's winds that are so fierce as to uproot trees and

¹ Matthew 18:22;

² Hebrews 11:12

topple towers—who can withstand them?³ Yet where there is remorse, even if the sins are thousands of times greater, they cannot withstand my overwhelming power.

³ Jude 1:11-25

34

O Sinner, remember that you are a finite human. And although your sins may seem to be many, they are finite like you. Remember that I am infinite God and consequently, my mercy is infinite. So when you surrender your finite sins into the infinite sea of my mercy in confession, they will be instantly snuffed out like a tiny spark flicked into the vastness of the sea.¹

Now since there are various kinds of sin, there are also several different penitential medicines. Some people were corrected by sack-cloth and ashes.² Some were reconciled to the Lord through weeping and tears.³ Some could only be rescued through fasting and prayer.⁴ Some found mercy from me through works of mercy. Some received forgiveness by lovingly ministering to the most vulnerable,⁵ some by lying prostrate on the ground, some in humility and obedience.⁶

As for you, choose one of these that seems simple and doable, and you will thereby be able to heal all of the ailments of your sins. It is not a matter of the number of years or some

¹ Hosea 1:7-11

² 1 Maccabees 3:47; Matthew 11:21; Luke 10:13

³ 2 Kings 20:5; Isaiah 38:5; Psalm 6:6, 38:12, 42:3, 80:5; Luke 7:38-48

⁴ Psalm 35:13, 69:10; Daniel 9:3; Joel 2:12; Tobit 12:8; Mark 9:28; Luke 2:37

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:22-26

⁶ Nehemiah 8:6, 9:6; 1 Esdras 2:17

period of time, but only by true conversion, with sincere heart, separating yourself from your sins, that you will be able to be made right.

35

But hurry!¹ Before you leave this world, send up to heaven whatever you are able, be it a prayer with tears, or a perfect sleepless vigil, or psalmody for relief from sadness, or humble austerity, or renunciation of worldly things, or sincere love, or the desire for Christ, or fasting and charitable works of mercy. If you offer up anything from this list then be certain that you have nothing to worry about in what is yet to come and yet to enjoy.²

If not, then only fear can prevail.

¹ 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:11; 2 Peter 1:10; 2 Peter 3:12

² Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; Song of the Three Young Men 1:16

36

Hearing all of this and understanding it, what response will you have for God after he has offered this supplicatory plea, this promise of gentle lenience, presenting himself as the debtor of our debts?¹ Showing compassion and tenderness, he embraces us again. He begs, he pleads, he solicits, he implores, he promises gifts, and like a father, he is filled with grief.

Like parents pacifying a restless baby, God overlooks your wrongdoing because all he wants is to take care of you. Taking his child into his arms, the father embraces her.² He kisses her. He caresses her face. Crooning tenderly, he cuddles her. He hums. He claps his hands. He does everything to calm the child so that she will stop crying and sobbing. Although the baby swipes the parent's face, pushing it this way and that, chattering and mumbling, clawing at his face, still nothing rattles or irritates her parents. They even give the child delightful gifts, toys, and valuable dishes. If the child smashes [a dish], [the parents] don't get upset. If [the child] loses it, they are not saddened. All they want is to see their child settled down and calm.

¹ Matthew 6:12

² Matthew 9:35; Luke 2:28

The tenderness of God's care shows us this still more. David the Psalmist experiences God's extreme love for humanity when he says, "As a father shows compassion on his children, so does the Lord show compassion on those who fear him."³

³ Psalm 103:13

37

Luke the Evangelist shares the Lord's own expression of the indescribable and unimaginable delight of his endless and boundless love for us, when he says, "Which father among you, if his child asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish will give him a serpent? But if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give you indescribable, endless joy?"¹

¹ Cf. Luke 11:10-13. The reference is actually closer to Matthew 7:9-11

38

Look how beautiful are God’s loving gifts for his creatures.¹ If you wish, you too can become beloved children of the One who stands ever ready to appease and to charm our savage human nature.² Even if we are as hard as stones that can only be broken up and loosened by using powerful solvents, and which are hewn with a blade for use in construction; or like iron, which itself melts when heated by skillful craftsmen to produce useful vessels; or like a beast that is tamed and made to stand mute at the gates of kings, always ready to serve them in obedience; ferocious dragons and fierce, venomous serpents are tamed by the artful sorcerer’s charming words so that passive and docile, they go out to pasture together like a friendly flock—

So how could human nature—endowed with reason, speech and intelligence—not be like these beasts, leaving behind ferocity for the sake of life? Even the Psalmist’s words reproach and admonish you. Comparing you to the serpent and the basilisk and the scorpion, the Psalmist declares, “Their ferocity is like that of a serpent, a viper, or a basilisk, whose ears are

¹ James 1:17

² Galatians 4:5, Ephesians 1:5

shut so that it does not hear the artful sorcerer's voice, nor take the potion of the clever wizard."³

³ Psalm 58:4-5.

39

So you poor sinner, try to be like the Prophet David. The Scripture says, “If he falls, will he not rise?”¹ As we just saw, the prophet’s words were true. He fell as a result of shameless desire, yet he rose as a result of repentance. With his eyes he sinned, fornicating and died. With his lips he came to his senses and confessed and lived.²

Confession relieves the weight of sin.³

Confession wipes away sin’s stain like dust.

Confession burns up the piles of sin’s thorns like fire.⁴

Confession therefore exalts. It makes the rusty vessel brighter than gold. But the one who remains impenitent cannot be made pure.⁵

Confession is what strengthens penance. Without it, no matter how much one does, it remains hopelessly ineffective.

Confession is the door to remorse. It is the beginning of penance. It is the summit of fearless integrity, the weapon of the triumphant, the shield against sin.⁶

¹ Psalm 37:24; Jeremiah 8:4

² 2 Samuel 12

³ 1 Kings 12:4

⁴ Exodus 22:6; Psalm 118:12

⁵ James 5:3

⁶ Ephesians 6:16

Confession is the opportunity for penance, anchor for the penitent, restoration of those who have fallen,⁷ walking stick for those who stagger, white cane for those who are nearsighted.⁸

Confession is the sanitizer of sin's filth, purifier of the impure, reliever of those in agony, awesome ouster from Gehenna.⁹

Confession is the doorway to heaven,¹⁰ escort into the presence of the Lord,¹¹ gatherer of penitents, summoner of sinners to penance,¹² beckoner of the lost,¹³ guide to the heavenly city.¹⁴

Confession is light for those in darkness,¹⁵ sunbeam for those with eyes, tutor for children,¹⁶ hope for the hopeless.¹⁷

Confession is the jewel of the church, declaration of priests, crown of laborers, suit of clothes for the children of the bridal chamber, doorman to the bridal feast.¹⁸

Confession is the rescuer from death's door, invitation to God's banquet table, escort to the Lord's Body, decanter of the precious Blood,¹⁹ gladdener of the sorrowful.²⁰

⁷ Psalm 145:14, 146:8; Micah 7:8

⁸ Psalm 23:4

⁹ Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:5

¹⁰ Malachi 3:10; 3 Maccabees 6:14; Revelation 4:1

¹¹ 2 Samuel 9:10; 1 Kings 15:15; Ezekiel 8:14

¹² Luke 5:32

¹³ Matthew 18:12; 1 Peter 2:25

¹⁴ Hebrews 12:22

¹⁵ Romans 2:19

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:14; Galatians 3:24-25

¹⁷ Judith 9:11; Romans 4:18; 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

¹⁸ Matthew 22:1-14

Confession is the door to penance, pardon for misdeeds, brightener of those who receive it, requisite for kings, gift for the poor.²¹

Confession is refuge for the wealthy and the destitute, place of pardon for prostitutes, defender of thieves.²²

Confession is the collector of intelligent bees, reward for good works,²³ sweetener of bitterness,²⁴ and adorer of every virtue.

And now, how else can I extol confession? For wherever there are wrongs, without it even if one does tens of thousands of virtuous deeds, they are of no use. Whether you fast, or pray, or devote yourself to asceticism, or do charitable works, or master every virtue, without confession they cannot erase your wrongdoing or offer you forgiveness.²⁵

¹⁹ Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; 1 Corinthians 11

²⁰ Proverbs 31:6

²¹ Luke 14:13

²² 1 Thessalonians 5:14

²³ Wisdom 8:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:3

²⁴ Proverbs 27:7

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

40

You poor sinner. With all your strength, battle against your usual sins by means of intense prayer. Call on the ranks of the holy angels and all the saints and righteous ones to advocate for you, especially the holy Mother of God.¹ In addition, invoke the holy suffering of Christ. And unceasingly call on the Father to have mercy on you.² And by the Holy Spirit, the Father will give you the ability to confront your sins.³

If it should happen that as a weak human being you are defeated, just stand right back up again! And as often as you fall, hurry and quickly get up again and God will receive you as if you had never fallen.⁴ For if a piece of clothing that has fallen into the mud and gotten dirty is washed with soap, the one who wears it will not consider it ruined. Then what about [one's] spirit? Having fallen into sin and emerged from it, how could God consider it ruined? For God's love for the human race is much more than some man's love for his clothing.⁵ See how immeasurable is God's love for us—God became human for us

¹ Romans 8:27

² 1 Thessalonians 5:17

³ Luke 11:13; John 14:26; Acts 2:33

⁴ 1 Samuel 2:4; Wisdom 9:5-8; 2 Corinthians 12:9

⁵ Romans 8:37; Ephesians 2:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:15

and though immortal, God died in His body.⁶ And He not only loves us, God lifts us onto His shoulders happily.⁷

Therefore, let anyone who has ears to hear, hear and understand and delight in God's good gifts by means of confession and penance. To Him who crowns and enthrones us in glory,⁸ Christ Jesus our Lord, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, are due glory, dominion and honor. Now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

⁶ John 1:14; Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 John 4:10-12

⁷ John 10:1-18

⁸ Psalm 8:5; Hebrews 2:7-9

Prayer of Repentance

St. Ephrem the Syrian

Lord of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, Prince of life and of death, Judge of the living and of the dead, Hope and Refuge of my spirit, I worship you and offer you the supplication of my prayer. Hear me and pardon my sins, for you alone are without sin, and you alone are holy, and you dwell among the holy ones. You are the only truly compassionate and merciful One. Have mercy on me, my Creator, and bless me. Reconcile me with yourself, O my Rescuer, and remember me as you remembered the thief in your kingdom.

God my Savior, turn toward me as you turn your anger away from me. Do not admonish me in your anger, nor reprimand me in your fury. Do not be forever angry with me and do not count all my wrongs. Do not make me accountable for my misdeeds. Do not deal with me in proportion to my sins and do not punish me for my crimes. Do not eject me from your presence and do not condemn me. For I know very well that I have been guilty since my childhood, and I have no excuse for you.

Instead, mighty and tolerant King, as you forgave the misdeeds of the sinful woman, forgive also the debts of this sinful and unruly servant of yours. For your overflowing goodness is revealed every time you are merciful toward me, even though I am not worthy of your mercy. Your goodness appears

whenever you show me compassion, even though I actually deserve harsh punishment. For I have spent every day of my life in wickedness and I did not uphold your commandments.

Be gentle with me, good and gentle King, and let this prodigious sinner be reconciled with you. Do not turn your face away from me and do not shun your servant in anger. Do not despise me or abandon me, God my Savior. For even though I defiled the temple of the Holy Spirit by my reckless ways, show me compassion, my merciful and indulgent Creator. Do not incinerate my spirit in the eternal flames of Hell's fire. Loving God, be lenient toward me and give me the opportunity to repent with tears of remorse. Strengthen my heart to contemplate your laws wisely from morning to night, to do what is good and right in your sight.

I lift up my eyes to you and with all my heart I call out to you, Christ Lord, only-begotten Son of God, for in your love for humanity you have triumphed. You willingly came down from your place of indescribable splendor and you appeared as a servant. And you endured the suffering of the Cross and of death to save your creatures.

Now, loving Lord, since you have such love for the human race, and you desire that every person should live and come to know the Truth, have compassion on me too, a great sinner. Let my salvation be pleasing to you and show me mercy even though I am more shameful than anyone. For I did not love you with all my heart, and I did not keep your commandments with all my strength. Instead, I squandered my days in vain pursuits and I did whatever my heart felt like doing. While my remaining

days decreased, my crimes increased. There is no hope for my salvation, no place of refuge apart from you. For I have placed all my hope in your goodness and I trust in your abundant mercy.

And now, through my flowing tears I beg you—before the time for me to repent expires, and before I perish entirely, give me the chance to repent. And before my death, free me from the chains of my sin and disregard my countless crimes.

O Master of all good things and Prince who forgives sin, engulf all of my misdeeds in your tender compassion and console my grieving and anguished spirit. From now on lead me to conduct myself honestly, according to your will, during this pilgrimage of my lifetime. Until the time comes for you to come and take me away to rest in the dwelling place of your heavenly kingdom, do not abandon me to my own ways.

Lord, hear the prayers of your unworthy servant and turn your ear to my pleas. For you said, “Seek and you shall find. Knock and [the door] will be opened.” So open the door of your mercy now for me, as I call out to you lamenting. Do not ignore the requests of my sinful self because you did not come to call the righteous, you called the sinners to turn from their errant ways.

Humbled, therefore, with a broken heart and a sorrowful face, I beg you, my tender Lord. Before you sit on the judgment seat, I beseech you; and before the door is closed and the irreversible verdict is reached, I pour out my tears before you, merciful Lord, kind and gentle and tolerant toward your creatures.

Do not convict me with the foolish maidens by shutting the door of your mercy. And do not send me with the evil and wicked servant into the outer darkness, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. Do not reject me from the ranks of your beloved ones and do not exile me from the bliss of eternal life. Do not deprive me of the paternal inheritance, which you have prepared from the beginning of the world for your holy ones. And do not exclude me from your heavenly wedding feast. And for the sake of your great and glorious kingdom, do not prosecute your servant or hold me accountable for my many wrongs.

Instead let me ascend through the luminous clouds in the air to your right side of honor, together with your worthy and perfect ones. And delight me with ever-pleasing joy together with your beloved ones and with those who have done your will. And extol me with bounteous glory in the company of the righteous ones, giving me respite with them in the heavenly Jerusalem in your kingdom in heaven. So that in unison with them I may glorify you with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. Now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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