

Abba Evagrius on Prayer

The teachings of Abba Evagrius the Monk

"Reflections on the Eight Thoughts"

-- There are five occupations which help to gain God's benevolence. The first is pure prayer; the second, psalmody; the third, reading the Holy Scriptures; the fourth, contrite remembrance of one's sins, of death and the terrible judgment; the fifth, work with one's hands.

-- If while still in your body you wish to serve God like the incorporeal beings, strive to have in your heart a secret unceasing prayer. For in this way your soul will come near to resembling the angels even before death.

-- As our body becomes dead and full of stench when the soul leaves it, so a soul in which prayer is not active is dead and stenches. That to be deprived of prayer should be counted worse than death is clearly shown us by Prophet Daniel, who was ready to die rather than be deprived of prayer at any hour. One should remember God more often than one breathes.

-- Join to every breath a sober invocation of the name of Jesus and the thought of death with humility. Both these practices bring great profit to the soul.

-- Do you wish to be known by God? Try as much as possible to be less known to men. If you will always remember that God is the Seer of all you do with soul or body, you will not sin in any action, and will have God as your Companion.

-- Nothing so makes a man resemble God as doing good to others. But in doing good to them, one should take great care not to transform these good deeds into a thought.

-- In the end you will become worthy of God by the fact that you do nothing unworthy of Him.

-- You will pay glorious homage to God if, through virtues, you imprint His likeness on your soul.

-- Men become better as they come nearer to God.

-- A wise man who offers to God honor and worship is known by Him. So he is in no way troubled if he remains unknown to all men. The task of good judgment is to incite the part of the soul where anger lies to the waging of inner warfare. The task of wisdom is to urge the mind to constant attentive watchfulness. The task of righteousness is to direct the part, in which lies lust, towards virtue and towards God. Finally, the task of courage is to govern the five senses and

not let our inner man, that is the spirit, or our outer man, that is the body, be defiled through them.

-- The soul is a living substance, simple, incorporeal, invisible to the physical eye, immortal and endowed with mind and reason. What the eye is to the body, that the mind is to the soul.

-- Evil is not an actual substance, but absence of good; just as darkness is nothing but absence of light.

-- Occupy yourself with reading with a calm spirit, so that your mind may be constantly raised up to contemplation of the wondrous acts of God, lifted, as it were, by some hand outstretched to it.

-- Every soul, by the grace of the Holy Spirit and by its own work and diligence, can conjoin and combine in itself the following qualities: word with mind, action with contemplation, virtue with science, faith with knowledge free of all forgetfulness, in such a way, moreover, that none of these qualities would be greater or less than another. For then it will be united with God, Who is good and true, and with Him alone.

from "Early Fathers From the Philokalia," translated from the Russian text, "Dobrotolubiye," by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, eighth edition, (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1981), pp. 113 - 114.