

Step 19 on Sleep, Prayer, and Psalm-Singing in Chapel.

by St. John Climacus

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, obedience, and vigilance in avoiding demonic interference and cultivating a deeper love for God.

Scripture: Psalm 119:148, Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:6, James 4:7

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

St. John Climacus emphasizes the importance of being vigilant against the various distractions that hinder our prayer life, such as excessive sleep, demonic influences, and lack of focus during communal worship. He encourages believers to engage in prayer with sincerity and contemplation, avoiding distractions and striving for a deep connection with God. St. John also highlights the transformative power of prayer, noting how obedience and dedication in prayer can lead to radiant moments of communion with God, testing and strengthening one's faith and love for Him.

Transcript

1. Sleep is a particular state of nature, an image of death, inactivity of the senses. Sleep is one, but, like desire, its sources and occasions are many: that is to say, it comes from nature, from food, from demons, or perhaps, sometimes, from extreme and prolonged fasting, through which the flesh is weakened and at last longs for the consolation of sleep.

2. Just as prolonged drinking is a matter of habit, so too from habit comes too much sleeping. Therefore we must struggle with the question of sleep, especially in the easy days of obedience, because a long-standing habit is difficult to cure.

3. Let us observe and we shall find that the spiritual trumpet² serves as an outward signal for the gathering of the brethren, but it is also the unseen signal for the assembly of our foes. So some of them stand by our bed and when we get up urge us to lie down again: 'Wait,' they say, 'till the preliminary hymns are finished; then you can go to church.' Others plunge those standing at prayer into sleep. Some produce severe, unusual pains in the stomach. Others egg us on to make conversation in church.

2 I.e. the gong or bell, often of wood; horns and drums of various kinds were also used.

Some entice the mind to shameful thoughts. Others make us lean against the wall as though from fatigue. Sometimes they involve us in fits of yawning. Some of them bring on waves of laughter during prayer, thereby desiring to stir up the anger of God against us. Some force us to hurry the reading or singing--merely from laziness; others suggest that we should sing more slowly for the pleasure of it; and sometimes they sit at our mouths and shut them, so that we can scarcely open them. He who realizes that he is standing before God will be as still as a pillar during prayer and will pray with heart-felt feeling; and none of the aforesaid demons will make sport of him.

4. The really obedient man often suddenly becomes radiant and exultant during prayer; for this wrestler was prepared and fired beforehand by his sincere service.

5. It is possible for all to pray with a congregation; for many it is beneficial to pray with a single kindred spirit; solitary prayer is for the very few.

6. In singing with many it is impossible to pray with the wordless prayer of the spirit. But your mind should be engaged in contemplation of the words being chanted or read, or you should say some definite prayer while you are waiting for the alternate verse to be chanted.

7. It is not proper for anyone to engage in any accessory work, or rather distraction, during the time of prayer. For the angel who attended Antony the Great taught him this clearly.

8. Just as a furnace tests gold, so the practice of prayer tests the monk's zeal and love for God. A praiseworthy work--he who makes it his own draws near to God and expels demons.

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