



Patrology

The Fathers of the Early church



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DAILY MEETING WITH MY GOD
THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF

THE FATHERS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

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1 January

GOOD STARTING AND GLORIOUS END

St. Basil The Great¹

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts”. (Rom 13:14)

Not even the blessed David was blameless, when his thoughts went astray and he sinned against the wife of Uriah (2 Sam. 11).

One example is the fall from better to worse of Judas, who after being so long Christ's disciple, sold his Master for a mean gain and got a halter for himself.

Learn then, brother, that **it is not he who begins well who is perfect. It is he who ends well who is approved in God's sight.** Give then no sleep to your eyes or slumber to your eyelids that you may be delivered “as a roe from the net and a bird from the snare.” For when you are passing through the midst of snares you are treading on top of a perilous high wall.

Do not attempt extreme discipline and be aware of over confidence in yourself. When attempting extreme discipline, you may bring upon yourself a crowd of temptations caused by irritating your passions all at once. It is better to advance a little at a time from certain pleasures of life, and therefore gradually destroying all your unwanted habits. When you have mastered one passion, and then begin to wage war against another. In this manner you will in due time overcome all passions.

2 January

FEED US, THE CHILDREN, AS SHEEP

St. Clement of Alexandria²

“He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.” (Isa. 40:11)

¹ Letter, 42. *Joselyn Yacoub*

² Paedagogus 1:9. (*cf. N & PN Frs.*)

Feed us, the children, as sheep.

Yea, Master, fill us with righteousness, Your own pasture.

Yea, O Instructor, feed us on Your holy mountain the Church, which towers aloft, which is above the clouds, which touches heaven.

“**And I will be,**” He says, “**their Shepherd,**” and will be near them, as the garment to their skin. He wishes to save my flesh by enveloping it in the robe of immortality, and He has anointed my body.

“**They shall call Me,**” He says, “**and I will say, Here am I.**” You did hear sooner than I expected, Master.

“**And if they pass over, they shall not slip,**” says the Lord. For we who are passing over to immortality shall not fall into corruption, for He shall sustain us. For so He has said, and so He has willed.

Such is our Instructor, righteously good. “**I came not,**” He says, “**to be ministered unto, but to minister.**” Wherefore He is introduced in the Gospel “wearied,” because toiling for us, and promising “to give His life a ransom for many.” For him alone who does so He owns to be the Good Shepherd. **Generous, therefore, is He who gives for us the greatest of all gifts, His own life; and beneficent exceedingly, and loving to men, in that, when He might have been Lord, He wished to be a brother man; and so good was He that He died for us.**

5 January

DENIAL OF THE FLESH LUSTS

St. Augustine¹

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For

¹ Contenance, 5, 8, 20. (cf. *N & PN Frs.*)

sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” (Rom 6:11-14)

Although there be not as yet that perfection, wherein continence shall not strive with vice. But now, so long as “the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh,” (Gal 5:17) it is enough for us not to consent unto the evils, which we feel in us. But, when that consent takes place, then there goes out of the mouth of the heart what defiles the man. But when through continence consent is withheld, the evil of the lust of the flesh, against which the lust of the spirit fights, is not suffered to harm...

There is therefore in us lust of sin, which must not be suffered to reign. There are its desires, which we must not obey, lest obeying it reign over us. Wherefore let not lust usurp our members, but let continence claim them for herself; that they be weapons of righteousness unto God, that they be not weapons of unrighteousness unto sin; for thus sin shall not rule over us.

There are therefore in us evil desires, by consenting not unto which we live not ill. There are in us lusts of sins, by obeying not, which we perfect not evil, but by having them do not as yet perfect good... Therefore there take place in us evil lusts, when that pleases which is not lawful; but they are not perfected, when evil lusts are restrained by the mind serving the Law of God (Rom 7:25).

6 January

GOD KNOWS MY DEPTH

St. Augustine²

“For You will light my lamp. The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.” (Ps 18:28)

For it is You, Lord, that judges me;” for although no “man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is

² Confessions, 10:5:7. (cf. *N & PN Frs.*)

in him,” yet is there something of man which “the spirit of man which is in him” itself knows not. But You, Lord, who has made him, knows him wholly.

I indeed, though in Your sight I despise myself, and reckon “myself but dust and ashes,” yet know something concerning You, which I know not concerning myself.

And assuredly “now we see through a glass darkly,” not yet “face to face.” So long, therefore, as I am “absent” from You, I am more “present” with myself than with You (2 Cor. 5:8).

I know that You canst not suffer violence; but for myself **I know not what temptations I am able to resist, and what I am not able. But there is hope, because You are faithful, who wilt not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able,** but wilt with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.

I would therefore confess what I know concerning myself; I will confess also what I know not concerning myself. And because what I do know of myself, I know by Your enlightening me.

What I know not of myself, so long I know not until the time when my “darkness be as the noonday” in Your sight.

7 January

PRAISE TO GOD, THE BELOVED ONE

St. Ephram the Syrian¹

“Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil 2:5-8)

BLESSED be that Child, Who gladdened Bethlehem today!
Blessed be the Babe Who made manhood young again today!

Blessed be the Fruit, Who lowered Himself to our famished state!

Blessed be the Good One, Who suddenly enriched our necessitousness and supplied our needs!

Blessed He Whose tender mercies made Him condescend to visit our infirmities!...

Praise be to Him Who made void the Sabbath by fulfilling it!

Praise too to Him Who rebuked the leprosy and it remained not, Whom the fever saw and fled!

Praise to the Merciful, Who bore our toil!

Glory to Your coming, which quickened the sons of men!

Glory to Him, Who came to us by His first-born!

Glory to the Silence that spoke by His Word.

Glory to the One on high, Who was seen by His Day-spring!

Glory to the Heavenly, Who was pleased to have a Body, that in it His virtue might be felt, and He might by that Body show mercy on His household’s bodies!

Glory to that Hidden One, Whose Son was made manifest!

Glory to that Living One, Whose Son was made to die!

Glory to that Great One, Whose Son descended and was small!...

Glory to that Hidden One, Who even with the mind cannot be felt at all by them that pry into Him; but by His graciousness, was felt by the hand of man!...

Blessed be He Whose own will brought Him to the Womb and Birth, to arms and to increase [in stature]. Blessed He whose changes purchased life for human nature.

Blessed He Who sealed our soul, and adorned it and espoused it to Himself.

¹ Hymns on Nativity, 2.

10 January

THE FURNACE OF THE TEMPTATIONS

St. John Chrysostom¹

"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22)

For as a gold refiner having cast a piece of gold into the furnace suffers it to be proved by the fire until such time as he sees it has become purer: even so God permits the souls of men to be tested by troubles until they become pure and transparent and have reaped much profit...

Let us not then be disturbed, neither dismayed, when trials befall us. For if the gold refiner sees how long he ought to leave the piece of gold in the furnace, and when he ought to draw it out, and does not allow it to remain in the fire until it is destroyed and burnt up: much more does God understand this. **And when He sees that we have become more pure, He releases us from our trials so that we may not be overthrown and cast down by the multiplication of our evils.**

Let us then not be repining, or faint-hearted, when some unexpected thing befalls us; but let us suffer Him who knows these things accurately, to prove our hearts by fire as long as He pleases. For He does this for a useful purpose and with a view to the profit of those who are tried. On this account a certain wise man admonishes us saying, "yield to Him" he says, "in all things," for He knows exactly when it is right to pluck us out of the furnace of evil.

We ought therefore everywhere to yield to Him and always to give thanks, and to bear all things contentedly, whether He bestows benefits or chastisement upon us, for this also is a species of benefit.

For the physician, not only when he bathes and nourishes the patient and conducts him into pleasant gardens,

¹ On The Paralytic Let Down Through The Roof, 1-2.

but also when he uses cutlery and the knife, is a physician all the same.

A father not only when he caresses his son, but also when he expels him from his house, and when he chides and scourges him, is a father all the same, no less than when he praises him. Knowing therefore that God is more tenderly loving than all physicians, do not enquire too curiously concerning His treatment nor demand an account of it from Him. Whether He is pleased to let us go free or whether He punishes, let us offer ourselves for either alike. For He seeks by means of each to lead us back to health, and to communion with Himself, and He knows our several needs, and what is expedient for each one, and how and in what manner we ought to be saved...

Let us then follow whither-soever He bids us, and let us not too carefully consider whether He commands us to go by a smooth and easy path, or by a difficult and rugged one.

11 January

THE REAL GLORY

St. John Chrysostom²

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven. And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the Lord of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch." (Mal 4:1)

Fly we then vainglory, for this is a passion more tyrannical than any. Hence spring covetousness and love of wealth, hence hatred and wars and strifes. For he that desires

² On John, homily 28.

more than he has, will never be able to stop, and he desires from no other cause, but only from his love of vainglory...

If then we cut this off, we shall slay together with the head the other members also of wickedness, and there will be nothing to hinder us from **dwelling on earth as though it were heaven...**

Wherefore if we wish to attain to glory, let us flee from human glory, and desire that only which cometh from God; so shall we obtain both the one and the other; which may we all enjoy, through the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus.

12 January

THE HEAVENLY TREASURES **St. Clement of Alexandria¹**

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” (2 Cor 4:16)

Some there are, who, like worms wallowing in marshes and mud in the streams of pleasure, feed on foolish and useless delights, swinish men. For swine, it is said, like mud better than pure water.

Let us not then be enslaved or become swinish; but, as true children of the light, let us raise our eyes and look on the light, lest the Lord discover us to be spurious...

Let us therefore repent, and pass from ignorance to knowledge, from foolishness to wisdom, from licentiousness to self-restraint, from unrighteousness to righteousness, from godlessness to God.

It is an enterprise of noble daring to take our way to God; and the enjoyment of many other good things is within the reach of the lovers of righteousness, who pursue eternal life,

¹ Exhortation to the Heathen, 10.

specially those things to which God Himself alludes, speaking by Isaiah: “There is an inheritance for those who serve the Lord.”

Noble and desirable is this inheritance: not gold, not silver, not raiment, which the moth assails, and things of earth which are assailed by the robber, whose eye is dazzled by worldly wealth. But it is that treasure of salvation to which we must hasten, by becoming lovers of the Word. Thence praiseworthy works descend to us, and fly with us on the wing of truth. This is the inheritance with Which the eternal covenant of God invests us, conveying the everlasting gift of grace; and thus our loving Father, the true Father, ceases not to exhort, admonish, train, love us.

13 January

A CLEAR VISION **St. Clement of Alexandria²**

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1)

Nothing is wanting to faith, as it is perfect and complete in itself. If aught is wanting to it, it is not wholly perfect. But faith is not lame in any respect; nor after our departure from this world does it make us who have believed, and received without distinction the earnest of future good...

And where faith is, there is the promise; and the consummation of the promise is rest. So that in illumination

² Paedagogus 1:6.

what we receive is knowledge, and the end of knowledge is rest...

As, then, inexperience comes to an end by experience, and perplexity by finding a clear outlet, so by illumination must darkness disappear. The darkness is ignorance, through which we fall into sins, purblind as to the truth.

Knowledge, then, is the illumination we receive, which makes ignorance disappear, and endows us with clear vision...

Those bonds of ignorance are with all speed slackened by human faith and divine grace, our transgressions being taken away by divine medicine, the baptism of the Word. We are washed from all our sins, and are no longer entangled in evil. This is the one grace of illumination, that our characters are not the same as before our washing. And since knowledge springs up with illumination, shedding its beams around the mind, the moment we hear, we who were untaught become disciples Of Christ... For instruction the Holy Spirit trains leads to faith, and faith with baptism. For that faith is the one universal salvation of humanity.

17 January

JESUS NEVER DECEIVES US

St. Cyprian¹

**“But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.”
(Mark 13:23)**

For he who wars for God, dearest brethren, ought to acknowledge himself as one who, placed in the heavenly camp, already hopes for divine things, so that we may have no trembling at the storms and whirlwinds of the world, and no disturbance, since the Lord had foretold that these would come.

He predicted and said that wars, and famines, and earthquakes, and pestilences would arise in each place. With the exhortation of His fore-seeing word, instructing, and teaching,

¹ Treatise 7, On the Mortality, 2, 3.

and preparing, and strengthening the people of His Church for all endurance of things to come.

And lest an unexpected and new dread of mischiefs should shake us, He previously warned us that adversity would increase more and more in the last times.

Behold, the very things occur which were spoken; and since those occur which were foretold before, whatever things were promised will also follow; as the Lord Himself promises, saying, “But when you see all these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is at hand.” (Luke 21: 31)

The kingdom of God, beloved brethren, is beginning to be at hand; the rewards of life, and the rejoicing of eternal salvation, and the perpetual gladness and possession lately lost of paradise, are now coming, with the passing away of the world.

Already heavenly things are taking the place of earthly, and great things of small, and eternal things of things that fade away. What room is there here for anxiety and solicitude?

Who, in the midst of these things, is trembling and sad, except he who is without hope and faith? For it is for him to fear death who is not willing to go to Christ. It is for him to be unwilling to go to Christ who does not believe that he is about to reign with Christ.

For it is written that the just lives by faith. If you are just, and live by faith, if you truly believe in Christ, why, since you are about to be with Christ, and are secure of the Lord’s promise, do you not embrace the assurance that you are called to Christ, and rejoice that you are freed from the devil?

18 January

MAY YOUR HEART BE PURE

Hermas²

**“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”
(Matt 5:8-9)**

² Shepherd, Commandment 2.

St. John Chrysostom¹

**“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”
(Matt 5:4)**

And how says Paul, “Rejoice in the Lord always?” (Phil 4: 4) The joy he is speaking of is what springs from those tears. For as men’s joy for the world’s sake has a sorrow in the same lot with it, even so godly tears issue a germ of perpetual and unfading joy.

In this way the very harlot became more honorable than virgins when seized by this fire. That is, being thoroughly warmed by repentance, she was thenceforth carried out of herself by her longing desire toward Christ; loosing her hair, and drenching with her tears His holy feet, and wiping them with her own tresses, and exhausting the ointment. And all these were outward results, but those wrought in her mind were far more fervent than these; which things God Himself alone beheld.

And therefore, every one, when he hears, rejoices with her and takes delight in her good works, and acquits her of every blame.

But if we that are evil pass this judgment, consider what sentence he obtained from that God who is a lover of mankind; and how much, even before God’s gifts, her repentance caused her to reap in the way of blessing...

For I seek those tears which are shed not for display, but in compunction; those which trickle down secretly and in closets, and in sight of no man, softly and noiselessly; those which arise from a certain depth of mind, those shed in anguish and in sorrow, those which are for God alone.

20 January

**THE NEED OF DAVID’S KEY
St. Jerome¹**

¹ On Matt. Hom. 6:8.

Be simple and guileless, and you will be as the children who know not the wickedness that ruins the life of men.

First, then, speak evil of no one, nor listen with pleasure to any one who speaks evil of another. But if you listen, you will partake of the sin of him who speaks evil, if you believe the slander, which you hear; for believing it, you will also have something to say against your brother. Thus, then, will you be guilty of the sin of him who slanders.

For slander is evil and an unsteady demon. It never abides in peace, but always remains in discord. Keep yourself from it, and you will always be at peace with all.

Put on a holiness in which there is no wicked cause of offense, but all deeds that are equable and joyful.

Practice goodness; and from the rewards of your labors, which God gives you, give to all the needy in simplicity, not hesitating as to whom you are to give or not to give. Give to all, for God wishes His gifts to be shared amongst all. They who receive, will render an account to God why and for what they have received. For the afflicted who receive will not be condemned, but they who receive on false pretenses will suffer punishment. He, then, who gives is guiltless. For as he received from the Lord, so has he accomplished his service in simplicity, not hesitating as to whom he should give and to whom he should not give.

This service, then, if accomplished in simplicity, is glorious with God. He, therefore, who thus ministers in simplicity, will live to God.

Keep therefore these commandments, as I have given them to you, that your repentance and the repentance of your house may be found in simplicity, and your heart may be pure and stainless.”

19 January

THE JOY OF THE TEARS

“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in Your law.” (Ps 119:18)

In the apocalypse a book is shown sealed with seven seals, which if you deliver to one that is learned saying, ‘Read this,’ he will answer you, ‘I cannot, for it is sealed.’

How many there are today who fancy themselves learned, yet the scriptures are a sealed book to them, and one which they cannot open save through Him who has the key of David, “He that opens and no man shuts; and shuts and no man opens.”

In the Acts of the Apostles the holy eunuch when reading Isaiah he is asked by Philip “Do you understand what you read?,” makes answer, “How can I except some man should guide me?”... Then Philip came and showed him Jesus, who was concealed beneath the letter. Wondrous excellence of the teacher! In the same hour the eunuch believed and was baptized; he became one of the faithful and a saint. He was no longer a pupil but a master; and he found more in the church’s font there in the wilderness than e had ever done in the gilded temple of the synagogue...

It is idle to try to teach what you do not know, and, if I may speak with some warmth, is worse still to be ignorant of your ignorance.

21 January

WHEN OUR LIFE IS RENEWED

St. Justine²

“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.” (Isa 55:7)

¹ Letter 53:5, 7.

² Apology 1:14.

For we forewarn you to be on your guard, lest those demons that we have been accusing should deceive you, and quite diver you from reading and understanding what we say. For they strive to hold you their slaves and servants; and sometimes by appearances in dreams, and sometimes by magical impositions, they subdue all who make no strong opposing effort for their own salvation.

And thus do we also, since our persuasion by the Word, stand aloof from them (i.e., the demons), and follow the only Living God through His Son - we who formerly delighted in fornication, but now embrace chastity alone. We, who formerly used magical arts, dedicate ourselves to the good and Living God.

We, who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to every one in need.

We who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them. We pray for our enemies, and endeavor to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ, to the end that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all.

23 January

THE FREE WISDOM THAT GRANTS

RENEWAL

Lactantius³

“And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.” (Col 3:10)

³ Divine Institutes, 3:26.

Great is the power of divine wisdom, that, when infused into the breast of man, by one impulse it once for all expels folly, which is the mother of faults.

For the effecting of which there is no need of payment, or books, or nightly studies. These results are accomplished gratuitously, easily, and quickly, if only the ears are open and the breast thirsts for wisdom.

Let no one fear; we do not sell water, nor offer the sun for a reward. The fountain of God, most abundant and most full, is open to all; and this heavenly light rises for all, as many as have eyes.

Did any of the philosophers affect these things, or is he able to effect them if he wishes? For though they spend their lives in the study of philosophy, they are neither able to improve any other person nor themselves (if nature has presented any obstacle).

Therefore their wisdom, doing its utmost, does not eradicate, but hide vices. But a few precepts of God so entirely change the whole man, and having put off the old man, render him new, that you would not recognize him as the same.

26 January

A TOWER CANNOT BE BUILT BY ONE STONE

St. Gregory of Nyssa¹

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it.” (Luke 14:28)

A soldier does not arm himself only on some points, leaving the rest of his body to take its chance unprotected. If he were to receive his death-wound upon that, what would have been the advantage of this partial armor?

Again, who would call that feature faultless, which from some accident had lost one of those requisites, which go to

make up the sum of beauty? The disfigurement of the mutilated part mars the grace of the part untouched.

The Gospel implies that he who undertakes the building of a tower, but spends all his labor upon the foundations without ever reaching the completion, is worthy of ridicule.

And what else do we learn from the Parable of the Tower, but to strive to come to the finish of every lofty purpose, accomplishing the work of God in all the multiform structures of His commandments? **One stone, indeed, is no more the whole edifice of the Tower, than one commandment kept will raise the soul’s perfection to the required height.**

The foundation must by all means first be laid but over it, as the Apostle says, the edifice of gold and precious gems must be built; for so is the doing of the commandment put by the Prophet who cries, “I have loved Thy commandment above gold and many a precious stone.”

¹ On Virginity, 17.