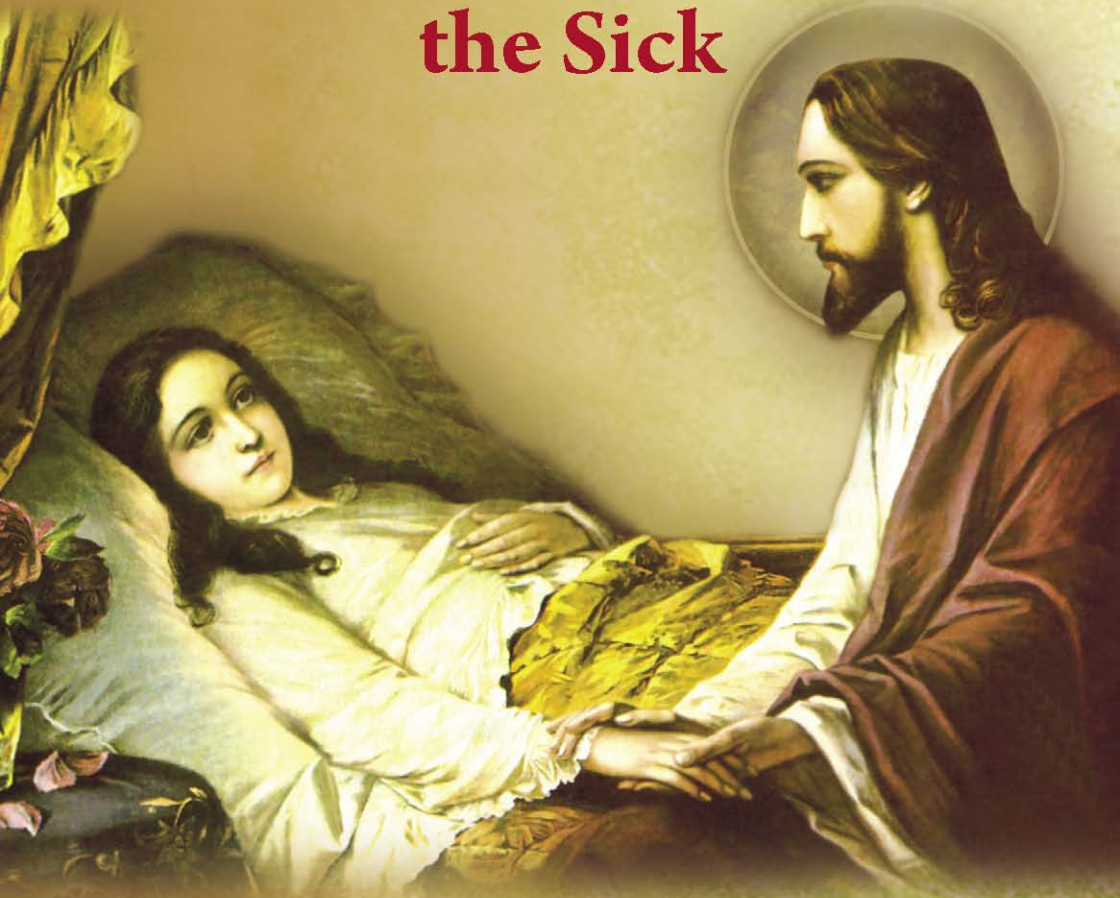




The Touch of Divine Love
**Consolation of
the Sick**



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Introduction

Some people believe that being in good health is the source of happiness. However, many people who were enjoying good health can suddenly become depressed at a seemingly small set-back, like an insult or being put in an embarrassing situation. Thus, if those who lead a hearty life find themselves surrounded by waves of trouble and grief, what could possibly be accomplished if one were living with an illness? Surely, it cannot accomplish anything.

Sometimes the sick person stands in wonder, asking:

- “Is my sickness a sign of God’s anger toward me? Or is my illness the fruit of my sins?”
- “Why does God, the exceeding Love, allow man to suffer sickness and pain? Did He create him to live in pain? My sickness prevents me from going to church and from concentrating on my prayers, so why does God allow it?”

In this booklet, we will try to gain insight on God’s perspective on our illnesses and how He blesses us during our difficult times. We will also explore the following questions:

- What is God’s purpose for our sickness and pain?
- How can we benefit from our burden?
- How can man challenge his sickness?
- How can the faithful experience God’s consolation and touch of love during his sickness?

SUFFERING AND GLORIFICATION

The Judge, Himself, says: “For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them” [Luke 9:56]. God is Love, pouring His love inside us during our joyful times, as well as during our painful moments. He *allows* for the sickness of the body - if that would lead to our salvation, purification, and glory. His hands are always extended and open with love.

“WHO SINNED, THIS MAN OR HIS PARENTS?”

When the disciples saw the man born blind, they asked our Lord, Jesus Christ: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” [John 9:2-3]. It is no wonder then, that this is the first question that comes to mind: “Is this sickness due to my sins?” However, from our Lord’s reply, we learn that it is as if God wants us, in the midst of our sickness, to direct our attention to Him; so that we would not be preoccupied with sin. Rather, we would be filled with God’s exceeding love, be held in His healing embrace, and be able to glorify God through our ordeal.

A DEACON LEARNING WITH HIS HEART, INSTEAD OF HIS EYES

A heathen governor was enraged when he learned of a young deacon supporting many of the confessors who confessed their faith, and bore pain and suffering for their faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord. The governor wanted to make a painful example of him; thus, when he came to know that this deacon loved to read, he ordered his eyes to be put out. The governor's order was executed with utmost cruelty and malice by his soldiers. Later, the governor met this deacon and found him rejoicing! He wondered at his contentment as the deacon explained: "I don't know how to thank you! I used to read with my eyes so that I would learn more about the divine mysteries; but now that you've put out my eyes, the Lord has given me spiritual eyes! I have come to know many new things and to enjoy heavenly matters that books could not reveal to me!"

LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF GOD

Once a monk became deaf, and when he was asked about his feelings about losing the gift of hearing, he replied: "My Lord allowed for me to lose my hearing so that I would stop listening to people's voices and start listening to the voice of God inside me!"

REJOICING IN THE HEAVENLY THINGS

St. Didymus became blind when he was only 4 years old. When St. Anthony asked him whether he grieved for the loss of his sight, he answered "Yes." Then, St. Anthony replied: "Do you grieve for the loss of sight that we share with the insects, while do not rejoice in the internal spiritual sight that we share with the heavenly hosts?"

❖ The bitter disasters that befall us have immense benefits for us. Sickness and hardship educate us. Didn't a father, a teacher, a prince, a policymaker, or a judge teach you to fear?... When physical illness befalls us, it usually brings us back to reason, and we focus once again on the essential and important things in life. Also, we may not be suffering ourselves, but when we behold the suffering and education of others, we come to reason, maybe even more than they do.

St. John Chrysostom

THE TOUCH OF LOVE AND TENDERNESS

My dear friend, take note in the midst of your sickness, that God wishes to appear inside you; so you can see Him, feel His kindness and caring fatherhood, and experience His exceeding love. Sickness is a unique opportunity for those who are burdened with illness to be alone with Jesus Christ to behold Him as "The Good Shepherd," Who sacrifices Himself for His sheep. The hopeful sick person does not focus his thoughts and feelings

on his sickness; rather, his heart ascends to behold Christ's care for him even through the gift of illness. He is not preoccupied by why this sickness has come upon him, but he truly believes that it was not accidental. He believes that his illness was allowed by God for his own spiritual growth and success, for the edification of his brethren, and for the glorification of God. In all that goodness, his soul can rejoice.

A CHILD IN NEED

A certain woman detailed her family's difficult circumstance to me: "I have a big problem and I don't know what to do! My younger child suffers from Autism and needs a lot of love and care. But, his three-year-old brother is extremely jealous from all the care that I give to his younger brother. I even try to conceal the time and care that I offer him." She asked me, "What should I do?" I advised her to explain to the older brother that his brother needs this extra care and kindness, because he is sick. She told me that he already knows that very well, but human nature gets the best of him. He wants all the love and care for himself!

This mother who loves both her children without favoritism offers touches of love to the sick one; how much more does God, the exceeding Love and Kindness, give us! Whenever we suffer from a certain illness He embraces us, draws closer unto us, and is kind to us!

FR. BISHOY KAMEL'S SURGERY

When Tasony (Sister) Angele inquired a Physician in England about the likelihood of success for a surgery for our beloved Father Bishoy Kamel, the answer was "not good" according to the human reasoning. But, Father Bishoy Kamel's heart did not shutter neither did his mind, and he said to Tasony (Sister) Angele: "Are the words we say merely just for preaching, or are they really true?" That example shows us how God works: He hands us over to trials and temptations, as if they were a teacher for us - to educate us and to give us sound reason. In this way, we can exercise patience, learn righteousness, and inherit the heavenly Kingdom. God is like a Father that takes care of us through our difficult times, and not as One Who seeks to punish us with ailments.

A LITTLE PARALYTIC CHILD THAT IS CARRIED IN THE ARMS OF HER HEAVENLY FATHER

Henry came home carrying a bag for his wife. When he opened the door, he found his little paralytic daughter on her wheelchair. He kissed her and asked, "Where is your mother?" She replied, "She's upstairs. Is this bag for her?" Henry answered: "Yes." She said, "Give it to me and I will carry it to her." Her father asked her in curiosity, "How can you carry it to your mother when you can't even walk by yourself upstairs?" With a delicate smile she answered, "Don't worry, dad. Give me the bag and I will carry it in

my arms. Then, you can carry me upstairs.” The father felt ashamed at his daughter’s trustful answer - that her loving father will carry her with whatever she carries to wherever she needs to go. In fact our Lord carries us whenever we are in need, even on eagles’ wings [Exodus 19:4].

❖ Just as healthy people are not sinless, God also allows the righteous people to suffer pain, so they could set an example to those who are weak in faith.

St. Basil the Great

HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDGMENTS AND HIS WISDOM!

As sons of God, we realize that our Almighty Father, the exceeding Wisdom, works for our sakes even if we don’t understand the mysteries of His plans for us. We say with Job: “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” [Job 2:10] Sickness is a wonderful opportunity to lean on God’s chest, to exercise our sonship to Him, and to trust in Him as the Granter of goodness! Sickness is a chance for us to proclaim our love to God, and to reciprocate His love.

A SCORPION’S STING

A Monk told me this true story many years ago, which took place in Upper Egypt

“I was a very religious person; I used to love praying and enjoyed Church life. However, several lustful and evil thoughts had been haunting me, but I always resisted - longing to live a virtuous life and experience chasteness. During my adolescence I met a girl, who was very virtuous, kind and chaste. An innocent friendship grew between us, for we all lived as one family in our small town. I used to see in her everything pure and chaste, but as time passed I grew fond of her and felt that she started to occupy a place in my heart that is not hers. It was my first experience with these feelings. I used to cry out to my Lord day and night, afraid of being dragged down a wrong path that would destroy my spiritual life and my relationship with my Lord. Then one day she called me and asked me visit her while she was home alone. At first I hesitated - it would be my first time to meet with a girl alone without her parents’ knowledge. Eventually, I gave in to my strong feelings towards her. As I walked, I felt I was being drawn against my own will - at the same time I was crying out for guidance from my Savior. I was putting one foot forward and the other backward. It was a bitter struggle, but I found myself in front of her house. When I grabbed the door knob, a hidden scorpion stung my hand! I cried out from the bottom of my heart: “Thank you God! I received Your message.” I hurried back home to get treatment for the scorpion’s sting; but more importantly, to reevaluate my inner heart’s intentions and devotions. I sat alone for hours meditating and praying: “What do you want me to do, my Lord?” Soon, and with full conviction, I reached a

decision: that I would set out to the monastery to dedicate all my energies to Him, who loves me! That scorpion sting changed my entire life!”

SICKNESS: BURDEN OR BLESSING?

Some people believe that sickness is a burden that befalls man. They start to worry incessantly – at times driving themselves to depression. But the true believer, who views life from a joyful and hopeful spiritual perspective, interprets sickness to be an ordeal through which he can grow and gain victory. Even if his sickness becomes increasingly more painful, his heart would still endure that bitterness and set forth with a victorious spirit toward Him, Who said: “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” [John 16:33].

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, does not always remove physical sickness from us, the believers; nor does He always ease our pain. Rather, He Himself accepted all possible pain in His body, and carried the shame of the cross. In Christ’s suffering on the cross, we find precious consolation in our sharing of His suffering.

- ❖ A wise person would accept his physical weakness with joy, and would even give up his body to death for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Such a man’s spirit will not be affected, nor will his physical pain break him if he got ill. He finds his consolation in his struggle for virtuous perfection.

St. Ambrose

SICKNESS IS AKIN TO THE LIFE OF MARTYRDOM

The Fathers of the Church believe that bearing sickness thankfully is akin to experiencing the life of martyrdom.

- ❖ When we bear painful events and circumstances with joy, we come closer to being martyrs - as a part of us is suffering and dying. On the other hand, if one murmurs in annoyance, he does not only lose his share with the martyrs, but he will also be judged for his murmurings. Thus, be joyful!

St. Theophan the Ascetic

A HEAVENLY EXPERIENCE!

Sickness is not only an opportunity for relatives, friends, and colleagues to gather around us; rather, it is a chance for the soul to set forth with the Spirit of God toward heaven. It is not only a chance to make peace with everyone; it is also an opportunity for us to desire holiness, to live with chasteness, and to get a glimpse of Heaven.

When I was in Montreal, I visited with a young married man who recounted the most wonderful year of his life. He told me that he had been suffering from a certain heart disease that doctors reported as having a very poor prognosis. His condition was so hopeless that his family started to make final arrangements in the event of his death. He had spent most of that year in

the hospital while he and his family and friends waited the moment of his departure. What had occupied his thoughts during that time was the afterlife that was waiting for him. He told me: “It was the most wonderful time in my life. My soul drew closer to Jesus Christ, the Lord, and my heart longed to set forth and be with Him. He was with me, inside me, waiting for me, and I was longing to see Him face to Face. But God didn’t allow for my departure, for my mission here was not yet done! I hoped my relationship with Christ would not fade after my recovery!”

Another example is that of Sister Fawzeyya (wife of Dr. Onsey Sorial). She described to me how her advanced cancer and paralysis rendered her disabled - to the point that she was unable to get out of bed without assistance. When her brother, Kamal, came to visit her after being away for a couple weeks, she insisted that he would leave her and go to church with her husband and children to attend the prayers of the Pentecostal feast. She told me: “The moment they left and closed the apartment door behind them, I beheld the doors of heaven open before me. I lived there until the moment they put the key back in the apartment door a few hours later!”

SICKNESS AND THANKFULNESS

When a person is suffering from a certain disease, instead of grieving he should reflect on his previous good health. Then, possibly, one may acknowledge that he had not offered thankfulness to God for the good health that he had before. With this new appreciation in mind, he would then praise God and thank Him for all His previous gifts, as well as his current sickness. He should also remember to thank Him after he is restored to good health once again.

- ❖ When God grants us recovery, we should accept it with thanksgiving. We should be aware of God’s ongoing and indiscriminate care for us, whether this recovery has come from an unseen source or from something material (medical treatment), also accepting the latter as a gift from God.

St. Basil the Great

TO WHOM CAN YOU COMPLAIN THE CREATOR?

If the Creator Himself allowed your sickness, to whom then can you complain? Do you complain about the Lover of mankind to your own weak soul? Do you complain Him to your brethren? Do you complain about the exceeding Love, Wisdom and Almighty to the poor, weak creations that are unable to realize or understand God’s plan?

LEADERSHIP IN SICKNESS

When I visited Sister Fawzeyya, (mentioned earlier), she used to tell me: “Why did you come to visit me? Don’t worry about me. Please go and visit the young people and ask about them, for they are in need of the word of

God!” She didn’t care for priests to visit her in the midst of her enormous pain; rather, she wanted them to work for the Kingdom of God, and for the salvation of every soul!

I also remember Brother Refaat, who lived in Melbourne. Doctors there told him to settle his affairs for his wife and children, for the time would soon come for his departure from this world. However, he did not worry. What actually preoccupied his mind and heart was praising God, enjoying the word of God, and receiving the Holy Communion. During his last days, his house resembled a church. He was always smiling and he was always preaching about heaven to whoever had come to visit him. He was the source of blessing to many people, even in the midst of his suffering!

A REPROACH AGAINST GOD

Father Bishoy Kamel had once visited a sick man, who was suffering from debilitating back pain. As Father was trying to console him with the word of God, the man bitterly told him: “I do not ask for complete recovery! All I’m asking for is for God to give me enough strength to stand to pray, and to alleviate this enormous headache so I could focus during prayers! In the midst of my pain, I cannot even concentrate in the Lord’s Prayer.” Father Bishoy told him: “Don’t worry. You might not be able to go to church, or to stand to pray, or to concentrate in the Lord’s Prayer, but you are sharing the pain of Christ, the Lord, who had carried the cross. Thank Him for letting you share in His pain. For your sake, the Master moaned from His own back pain due to the heaviness of the cross.”

Days later this man came to church where father Bishoy met him with his usual smile. The man told him: “I am upset with God. Just when I started to find sweetness in my pain and to consider myself unworthy to share with Jesus Christ’s pain and suffering, He lifted the pain from my back and cured me!”

Father Bishoy considered sharing the pain of the Master as an ultimate kind of worship, even if this pain prevented someone from going to church or praying. That is because the faithful suffering person is turned into a temple for the Crucified and his life itself to an endless prayer!

A FRIEND FROM HEAVEN

A young monk quietly knocked on the door of the cell of an elder monk and whispered: “Aghaby (Love),” but the elder monk didn’t respond. He tried again and again, but still there was no answer. The young monk had to enter; he knew that the elder monk was very sick. When he did enter, he was astonished to see him sitting with a man who appeared quite reputable. The elder monk scolded him: “How could you enter without being given permission!?” But, the guest interrupted: “Allow him in, for God wanted him to be blessed!” Then, the guest bid them farewell. The young monk asked:

“Who was that strange guest?” The elder monk replied: “In the abbey you are not supposed to ask about something that is not your business!” But, the young monk insisted to know who this unique guest was; because when he greeted him, he felt some spiritual power filling him up. Finally, the elder monk told him: “I’ll tell you on one condition: that you will never tell anyone about him until the day of my departure. After the young monk agreed, he continued, “I was suffering from immense pain and was unable to stand to open the door of my cell, so I left it open for you to come in. Then, the pain became exceedingly severe, so I grabbed the Holy Bible, the source of my consolation, and felt that I needed a friend to console me. I needed to talk to the weeping prophet Jeremiah. I opened the Book of Lamentations and cried out to God to send me the prophet Jeremiah to console me. When I started reading the Book of Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah appeared before me and consoled me. Then, when you entered the cell, you found him talking with me and got a chance to meet him!”

My dearly beloved, surely you need to have friends around you to support you. Remember however that we have no greater friend than God, the Word, the Healer of souls and bodies. You can meet with Him whenever you read the Holy Bible, the written divine pronouncement. Through it you can enter into a conversation with your Divine Friend, the Word, the Granter of life and enjoyment, the fulfilling of the soul; then, you could praise with the Psalmist and say: “I will delight myself in Your statutes,” “How sweet are Your words to my taste .” [Psalm 119:16,103].

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE ART OF MEDICINE

MEDICINE IS A USEFUL ART AND A DIVINE GIFT

- ❖ All the arts are a gift to us from God so that we can improve nature's deficiencies. He gave us cultivation, because the harvest of the earth without cultivation is not enough to satisfy our needs. He gave us weaving, because clothes are necessary for our decency and protection from the elements. The matter is the same with construction, and certainly medicine. God granted us the art of medicine, because our body is exposed to various kinds of weaknesses; some are acquired and some are genetic. Our body could suffer from indigestion as well as from lack of food. Therefore, God, who guides our lives, has granted us the art of medicine as a symbol for the remedy of the soul so we could remove what is superfluous and excessive and to acquire what is deficient and lacking.

St. Basil the Great

MEDICATION IS A DIVINE GIFT

- ❖ The herbs that are used to remedy various diseases did not grow on earth haphazardly; rather, it is actually God's will that all that we need grows from the earth's soil. We are thus able to enjoy the natural benefits of the fruits, flowers, roots, leaves, herbs, as well as some minerals and sea products. All of these are useful and necessary for our physical health, and thus should be viewed as food and drink.

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ God granted us the earth, along with its medications, for the treatment of our body. He commanded that the body, which was taken from earth, to be treated with materials that is taken from that earth. When man fell from Paradise, he instantly fell under physical sickness and distresses... Thus, God has granted the earth to give him medications for his treatment, rest and good health. He allows those who are not able to throw themselves completely into the hands of God to use these medications and remedies.

St. Makarius the Great

- ❖ The art of medicine is not an obstacle to righteousness; yet it should be practiced with the fear of God.

Father Parsenophius

GOD IS THE HEALER

- ❖ We should be very careful when using the art of medicine when it is necessary, but we should not be preoccupied by it as the end-all for our health maintenance and disease treatment. Rather, our aim should be for the glorification of God, accompanied by our care for the soul. If medicine

was unable to give us aid, we should not cast all our hope in recovery and cure on the art of medicine; rather we should trust that He will not suffer us to be tempted above what we can bear [Epistle to 1 Corinthians 10:13].

St. Basil the Great

THE PRAYER OF ST. MATTHEW, THE APOSTLE, CITED BY ST. AMBROSE

❖ I will follow only You, Oh Jesus my Lord, for You heal my wounds.
For what shall separate me from God's love that dwells within You;
Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine?
I am fixed with nails and bound with the bonds of love!
Eradicate from me the corruption of my sins, Oh Jesus my Lord, as if
with a sharp sword.
Make me safe in the bonds of Your love.
Eradicate from me all the corruption that dwells in me.
Come soon and put an end to my many hidden pains.
Open up the wound lest the dire suppuration would spread.
With Your new washing, clean every wrinkle within me.
Listen up, ye earthly humans, who are drunk with the thoughts of sins,
for I have found the Healer.
He is distributing His healings all over the earth.
Only He is capable of healing my pain, for He is without pain.
Only He, who knows all the hidden things, is able to eliminate my heart's
grieves and my soul's fears, Jesus Christ!
Christ is the Blessing!
Christ is the Life!
Christ is the Resurrection!
Amen.

St. Ambrose