

Father Matta El-Meskeen

Repentance





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The Spiritual Father of the Monastery of St Macarius

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The Monastery of St Macarius
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1. REPENTANCE IS BUT A SECOND VICTORY OF FAITH, AND IS ITSELF A NEW TESTIMONY.

IF humanity has enjoyed the early eras of faith and has been revived by martyrdom as a seal of faith, yet there still waits for it an age of repentance which will be one of its most flourishing spiritual ages and will be by no means less enjoyable or less flourishing than the early eras, on condition that repentance be practised correctly.

For repentance is but a second victory of faith, and is itself a new testimony. Returning to the faith formerly held is almost a greater joy than embracing it for the first time. Look at the widow's joy after finding the lost penny; at the shepherd whose joy over finding his one lost sheep was greater than the knowledge that he had ninety nine more abiding in the sheepfold. Thus the Lord teaches us that the pleasure of the returning penitent to the bosom of Christ is equal in its power and honor to a whole sheepfold (i.e. a whole church).

Hence, God—blessed be His name—desired to endow repentance with double honor, happiness, pleasure and joy so that the sinner might not be despondent or bashful at coming to

the bosom of Christ; and so that the glory of the cross might prevail instead of the ignominy of sin, that the meek God who is ready to justify the ungodly might be glorified. Although a repenting sinner could hardly be noticed by the world or by people, the Bible says that the whole heaven welcomes his repentance and rejoices at his justification. It is as if repentance is the greatest of works wherein humanity takes pride; and this is true, for a penitent is that man who has responded to God's power of forgiveness and justification, and has thus gained by means of anguish the fruit of the cross and the sanctification of God. Look how the penitent by means of his contrition can give joy to the entire heaven and to the heart of God !

Hence, when saints perceived the honor pertaining to repentance and remorse—an honor originally belonging to sinners, adulterers and to the slothful—they snatched it for their own, and subdued themselves craftily and shrewdly to the severe disciplines of repentance, as though they themselves were slothful, in such a manner that people thought repentance to be the work of saints, and contrition that of the righteous!

As for our wretched selves, we think that it is our righteousness which introduces us to God, and that our virtue, piety, learning, service, zeal qualify us for communion with heavenly beings. We do not realize that “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13), and that we have nothing good whereby to approach God; “There is none righteous, no not one” (Rom. 3:12), and that “all our works are but an unclean rag.”

If only we had known that Christ came to “justify the ungodly,” (Rom.4:5) and to “call her beloved which was not

beloved" (Rom.9:25), if we could be sure of this, we would immediately renounce all our righteousness, all our false piety and all artificial ostentation, and would pose at once as ungodly, not deeming our sin as too great to be washed away by his blood, nor our uncleanness as too great a burden for his love.

It is no business of man to justify the ungodly, for he cannot. This is a divine action, a supernatural ability incomprehensible to man. It is the richness of heaven which has been poured out with the blood of Christ into our hearts. It is the richness of offering and total bountifulness; it is the kindness of God mixed with overwhelming compassion and with love to such an extent that it has been overcome by its own affection, so much so that it could not have mercy on its own self one day, but slew it on the cross for the misery of sinners.

Justifying the ungodly is a divine mystery, one of the profoundest mysteries of divine economy concerning the concept of salvation. For it would be sufficient for man to believe only that God is able to justify the ungodly and this self-same faith of his would be considered as righteousness on its own, let alone if man approached God as an ungodly person believing that he is to be justified by means of God's ability to justify and sanctify, which if done would bring him at once to the depth of the incomprehensible mystery of salvation.

Jesus Christ came to the world to save sinners!

The sinner—yes, the sinner who is but a quantity of filth mixed with lusts, evil, vanity and the painful experience of wantonness. The sinner who is loathsome both to people and to himself, is himself the cause of Christ's coming to the world.

The sinner who feels within himself a total deprivation of all

that is holy, pure and solemn because of sin; the sinner who in his own eyes is in utter darkness, severed from the hope of salvation, from the light of life and from the communion of saints, is himself the friend whom Jesus invited to dinner, the one who was asked to come out from behind the hedges—the one asked to be a partner in his wedding and an heir to God. God has promised not to remember any of his sins but to drop them into oblivion as a summer cloud that is swallowed up by the glare of the sun.

Is it not for him that he has crucified himself and has borne misery and dereliction?

The wonderful power of Christ as a God who redeems and loves even to death can by no means be conceived or experienced except in the person of the sinner who is cast on the ground and repudiated by all people!

Without the sinner we are able neither to comprehend the love of Christ, nor measure its depth, nor can it show itself in an action which reveals the superlative quality of the divine love. Divine love appears as most dignified in the sight of man when he comes to know it in its condescension to him while he is fallen into his state of misery.

For the sake of the sinner the mysteries of God's love to man have been unveiled, and the richness of Christ has been opened to us; that richness which is offered for nothing, neither for gold nor silver. O! How great is the poverty of the sinner; for it is solely the extreme destitution of the sinner which draws out the richness of Christ with a confidence similar to that of a hungry child when it draws milk out of its mother's breast!!

Christ never enriches the one who is rich, nor does he feed the

one who is satisfied, nor justify the one who is righteous, nor redeem one who relies on his own power, nor teach a scholar!

For his richness is only for the poor and needy, to those who are cast away, the contemptible and wretched in their own eyes; his rich food is for the hungry, his righteousness for sinners, his right arm for the fallen, his knowledge for the children and those belittled in their own eyes!

For whosoever is poor, hungry, sinful, fallen or ignorant, he is the guest of Christ.

Christ has descended from the glory of his kingdom to ask for those in the furthest depths; those who have reached the state of utter misery, perdition and abominable darkness; those who have lost hope in themselves, for in those is manifested his power of action and the power of his Godhead, when his slaughtered love steps out to bring the sinner out of the quagmire and the dunghill, and to sprinkle and wash with the holy blood every member that has been defiled. In such people is the righteousness of God glorified. In them he finds a field of compassion, mercy and tenderness; and it is in the souls of those who are despised and cast off that his humility finds comfort, for he finds in condescending to them a work for his meekness.

O! If sinners only knew that they are the work of God and the pleasure of his heart; "We are his workmanship" (Eph.2:10). If the sinner were to be sure that his rank in God's eyes is foremost among the cares of the Almighty and his dispensation from eternity, and that the mind of God has been preoccupied—throughout the ages—with his returning, and that the entire heaven waits in expectation for his return, he would never be ashamed of himself, condemn his ability nor

procrastinate about his return.

If the sinner knew that all his trespasses, transgressions and infirmities are but the point of God's compassion, his pardon and his forgiveness, and that however great and atrocious they might be, they can never repel God's heart nor extinguish his mercy, nor fetter his love even for a single moment. O! If only the sinner knew this, he would never cling to his sin, nor would he seek isolation from God as a veil to cover his shame from seeing the face of God who is trying to show love toward him and who is calling him.

2. SIN IS NO LONGER ABLE TO SEVER THE SINNER FROM GOD!!

*“Come now, and let us reason together, said the Lord:
Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow:
Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”*

(Is. 1:18).

Such is God who is always condescending to us, who, knowing how sin enfeebles the heart of the sinner, and drives him into a state of hiding and deadly shamefulness, in order that by repelling him from coming to God he might not live, he started calling the sinner importunately, and inviting him to confer and reason together.

The sinner thinks that sin prevents him from seeking God, whereas it is for this that Christ has descended to ask for man! Is it not that God has come to the flesh of man to cure its illness and redeem him from the sin that has ruled over him, and to raise him from the curse of death? Sin is no longer able to sever the sinner from God after he has sent his Son and paid the price—the whole price—on the cross. For it is the dismay of the sinner, his shame and false delusion which hide the pierced side of Christ, wherein the whole world may be purified several times!

Sin has no longer the right to exist or abide in our new nature; it is now like a stain on a garment, removed immediately in less than a wink of an eye when the sinner repents and seeks the face of God.

The sinner should not look around to seek any autonomous power or any medium other than the blood of Christ wherewith to enter into God to find redemption and forgiveness, lest he should insult the love of God and his superb mercy, or dishonor his omnipotence, his kindness or his compassion. Yet, in all the saints of the Church and its penitents he has but an assistance in coming. For we have seen and heard and bear witness that the greatness of God's pardoning, his total forgiveness and his ability of sanctifying the sinner does not reach its utmost power and greatness except when the penitent reaches his utmost feebleness.

There exists a false sinner who speaks of himself as the great sinner and tells about his countless sins, yet—within himself—he does not perceive them as a reality, nor do they cause him any anguish or a pricking of conscience.

For such an one there exists no repentance even though he might have a thousand works and a thousand prayers every day; for Christ is a shrewd doctor who discerns the true patient from him who pretends to be one.

Christ did not come only with water to wash away the dirt of the body, but with water and blood to wash first of all the bleeding wounds of sin which have rent the heart and conscience of man, then supply him with pure doses of his exhilarating blood, so that he might recover from his deadly faint, rise and live.

When Isaiah the Prophet described our sins as crimson in color (or red) he was actually referring to the bleeding of sin which has tinged the life of man with the tinge of death! For bleeding always puts a man in a state of despair and

apprehension as someone stabbed in the heart or as a murderer the hands of whom have been smeared with blood; possessors of such sins, with bleeding, burdened, grieved and desperate consciences are those invited by Isaiah to the depth of God's forgiveness and mercy. For these has Christ descended from the Father, to call them on the hill of Calvary. Look at him raising his arms on the cross to reveal the width of his bosom asking for those who are lost and banishing despondency from the hearts of the desperate.

Christ came to ask for real sinners sinking under the puncture of remorse and despair, giving no heed to liars who claim to be penitent and condemn themselves before other people to gain more prestige by their humility, that their fame might be glorified as penitents while they are not.

It is to offer freedom to captives that Christ came, pursuing them to the hidden places of darkness, but if you have not yet felt the captivity of sin nor are you aware of its darkness nor awakened by its smothering horror, how then can you cry out of the depths, and if you do not cry in alarm, how then is the savior to hear your voice and how is he to know your place?

Christ came to give sight to the blind. If you have not discovered the blindness of your heart and have not felt as deprived of the divine light, trying to open the eyes of others while you yourself are blind, how is he to endow you with sight and where is he to give you the light?

The essence of repentance is an awareness of sin, a cry of the pain of crime, a certitude of the absence of light.

3. REPENTANCE IS BUT A FALL INTO THE HANDS OF GOD!

“To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.” (Rom. 7:18)

This is a terrible obstacle which has hindered a lot of people from stepping into repentance. At the gate of repentance stands the sinner gathering his will, but finds no stock even to begin by doing any good work; he then compares himself to those who have gained mercy and forgiveness, and thus cannot control himself, but loses courage and sinks into deep despondency and grief, seeing repentance as though it were a tedious task.

This is a device of the enemy; for who said that repentance is a gathering of will, an act of courage, or power and activity? Is not repentance only a fall into the hands of God and at his feet in a fainting of will, with a wounded heart bleeding in regret, and members shattered by sin, having no power to rise except by God's mercy?

The penitent is described by Christ as a stranger who has fallen into the hands of robbers in a foreign country. They strip him of his clothes, rob him, humiliate him, wound him and leave him more dead than alive. The penitent is like a man stripped of the garment of his honor by the devil, whose will has therefore been stripped naked and his members defiled. The devil then robs him of his treasure—the treasure of man being the sanity of his

mind, the light of his insight and the action of his conscience—his person being humiliated, his fall disclosed and his will shattered. Last of all, he wounds him deeply with lust to draw off his life quickly. At the end he leaves him a dead corpse unable to live! It is thus that the good Samaritan finds no occasion to ask questions nor has time to reproach, but immediatly gathers him in his arms.

The good Samaritan in the parable (Luke 10:30-37) is Christ, and our interpretation hits the mark exactly, for he does not upbraid him, nor does he ask him to perform any action, but comes to him personally where he fell and stoops over him with his affection, washing and dressing his wound by his own wound, stops his bleeding by his own bleeding, pours upon him the oil of his compassion and of his life, carries him on the arms of his mercy, offers him a ride to the inn of his Church, and asks his angels to serve him, and expends his grace on him till he recovers.

Such is the penitent, a wretched man that has fallen on the way, after being attacked by the oppression of man and the spite of the devil, and no longer able to do anything; so after his strength has been drawn off, he finds room at the house of the Benign; room in his heart, room between his arms, on his beast of burden and in his kingdom.

4. CHRIST HAS SNA- TCHED SIN FROM THE ENTRAILS OF MAN!

“The children are come to the birth and there is not strength to bring forth” (Is. 37:3).

Such also is the state of the sinner when he stands at the gate of repentance, travailing in the hope of salvation and renewal of life. Yet, when he looks back at the past which he has defiled he weeps, and when he aspires to the future which he desires he faints, for he finds that feebleness has pervaded his entire being, and that he is no longer able to pull himself out of the mire, encompassed by weakness. It is as if sin were an illness of withering infecting a plant and not leaving it till the gloom of death surrounds it from every side. This is exactly the nature of sin, which is cast into the entire being of man, desiring to expel the spirit of life.

Man is not only weakened by sin, but is already killed by it. And when Christ came he knew that we are “dead by sins and transgression” (Eph. 2:1). The person dead by sin is one who was conceived in iniquity and after a period of time the travail of death befell him. His birth of sin is a condemnation and true death felt by the sinner within himself. Christ has snatched sin from the bowels of man and has thus redeemed us from an inevitable death, and instead of sin he has entered into the depths of our being and has been formed in our inmost

parts. Wherefore our creation has been renewed, for after death had ruled over us, now life has reigned in us, and the travail of death is turned into the joy of life and deliverance Christ underwent death to save us from such a death, and is still carrying on his saving work.

Truly, it is unbelievable that a good man should die instead of a sinner, but God is not like man, for all that is incredible and impossible God does when he "commandeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Hence, the sin of the sinner, his extreme shame due to that sin which is latent in his inmost being, the odor of death suffusing his being due to the iniquity of his former life—all this has been measured by God by his deep love and has found a solution for it in the coming down of his Son to the flesh of the Virgin to bring fruit out of her womb—a fruit of life instead of the fruit of sin which man had conceived; and instead of the feebleness of the travail of death which Isaiah spoke of as though man could not help it, God has overshadowed the Virgin womb with his Almighty power so that it gave birth to man, but O! what a birth, he is born a God!

The sinner is asked to have confidence in the work of Christ which he has accomplished by his birth and his cross on account of man's sin, his extreme feebleness and his death. Nothing is asked of him (of the sinner) but to stretch out his hand like the woman with an issue of blood (Luke 8:43), and touch the garment of the Savior, and he will then realize how the power of the Lord comes forth to abide in him. Bleeding stops; weakness is turned into strength; and death flees away from before life!

Will you not stretch forth your hand to have your share of power in order to cease being weak or dead? I would have you

remember this when you cry out with the chorus of Holy Week: "The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation," (Ex. 15:2, Ps. 118:14).

If you want to know how the power of God might flow in you remember Jericho, how its walls collapsed not by the sword, nor by war, but by the outcry of victory in the name of the Lord. Remember also how the Red Sea was split apart with the staff of trust in God, and how the Jordan River was split apart under the feet of the priests. The self-same power of the Lord is always there for the weak man, the distressed, the perplexed and oppressed man.

"Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding ...

"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength ...

"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young man shall utterly fall... But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."

(Is. 40:28-31)

5. THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO THE COMING DOWN OF AID FROM ABOVE!

“For thou hast cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about; all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight...

“The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

“I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me forever....

“When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee...”

(Jonah 2:3-7)

This is the state of man who is torn apart by thoughts of remorse for his sins, yet he is suspicious of God's mercy, cast down like a drowned body driven away by a river of desperate conceptions and imaginations; and whenever he tries to float to inhale the breath of life, heavy billows of mental darkness oppress him and cast him far away from his hope.

His soul, as it were, is thus drowned more and more in endless worries; it is as if despair began to press upon him as a surrounding chaos, where sad pessimistic thoughts swoop down on him from all sides. Doubt, distress and grief are wrapped

around his mind as sea-weed is wrapped around the neck of the drowned, blocking for him the means of deliverance so that there may be no salvation.

It is a bitter war which the sinner undergoes, that sinner who is sinking under the cares of his many sins; when he thinks of salvation the demons of darkness rise up to avenge themselves. No acumen avails the sinner, nor does the reasoning of mind, nor reading books, nor consulting wise men. For the war is a mental one, and the mind is in an affliction of captivity; hence there is no alternative as to the coming down of aid from above, from beyond reason, from there, from God who abides in the highest: "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord" (Jonah 2:7).

For those penitents in tribulation we present the verse of deliverance which will be for them an anchor in which they may trust, pulling the soul out of the abyss of perdition and leading it into the world of light, hope and peace in the comfortable bosom of repentance:

"All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men"

(Matt. 12:31)

Blessed is the living God who has previously known and measured every tribulation we are to undergo and all war devised against us; he has stooped with his ear always toward the voice of those crying, to receive the first hint of appeal for help:

"My prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple" (Jonah 2:7).

Who is a God like ours so close to our prayer, so close to our supplication. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Ps. 46:1).

6. CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST SHOULD BE AS PERFECT AS CHRIST!

“I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.

“...Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.”

(Jonah 2:2,4,6,9)

When the enemy molests us as those who have perished because of our blasphemies, we recall the saying of the Lord that he came to ask for and to save that which has already perished. Whenever he says that we have become hopeless sinners as to salvation, due to the abiding of sin in our minds and our bodies, we say that Christ died for sinners: “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin” (I Jn. 1:7). When he rebukes us by saying that we have been utterly polluted and have become wanton sinners, ungodly and old hands at evil, we cling to the promise: “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6).

Satan's logic is always a reversed logic; for if the rationality of

despair adopted by Satan implies that because of our being sinners and ungodly we are for that reason destroyed, yet the reasoning of Christ is that because we are destroyed due to every sin and every ungodliness we are saved by the blood of Christ!

It is from there that the repentant sinner's confidence in Christ springs with a rationality that remains unvanquished and unshaken. Yet such confidence in the ability of Christ to save from the most dire states of despondency should be total and pure confidence in his person without reasoning or debating with the devil, regardless of the weakness of the will and of the flesh, and with no account of the loss or the price. The confidence in Christ should be as perfect as Christ vigorous as Christ and confident as Christ.

If Christ came to save us then he must save us and it is impossible that he might not save us; for our salvation is the work of Christ, and it is impossible that Christ should abide within us and not work within us. The creed of our faith demands and comprises that we are saved and have become penitents of Christ, for we maintain that Christ came to save sinners. And whereas we confess that we are chief among sinners, it is inevitable that we are to be the firstfruits of redeemed penitents. When we thus repent before him every day, we repent not as mighty and righteous but as ungodly and weak.

He came to ask for what is already destroyed, and here we are—as destroyed—we demand him, and as dead cling to his life.

* * *

7. HE CAME TO PUT HIMSELF IN THE SER- VICE OF THE WEAK

"I am like a broken vessel... Fear was on every side" (Ps.31:12-13)

"I loathe it; I would not live always" (Job 7:16)

Sin dissolves the will, spoils the personality and loosens the bonds of the soul, and man is no longer able to stand against the tyranny of lust and the allurements of sin.

For as the small mouse falls into the claws of the cat as soon as his eye catches him, so does the power of the sinner dissolve before the least gesture of lust. And as the heart of the antelope stops at seeing the lion after which he drops dead between his feet, so does the sinner give himself up to evil thoughts.

Whenever he decides to resist he falls, whenever he promises not to return he returns, and thus man no longer has confidence in himself, and his power to do good becomes that on which he himself looks with disdain as a broken vessel.

His hope in God dwindles away, and all his abilities in that respect dissolve and become like chaff blown away by the wind, or as a man without hope in the world.

It is thus that the enemy sometimes takes hold of the soul and binds it with fear, fear of that self-same sin, and drives it in what manner he wishes, from one sin to another, and the soul unable to raise any objection, follows him with a bereaved will, a fallen honor, hurt feelings and troubled conscience, with neither

power to rise nor pleasure in falling.

Ah! What a poor soul! Don't you recall the glory of your first creation and that of your Maker? For in his own image he formed you in courage, truth, sanctity and righteousness.

But does God really know what befalls the sinner as to such pain and distress? For an answer to this question let us hear him say: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

"Woman, hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more" (Jn. 8:11).

"Do you want to be whole?" (Jn. 5:6).

It is thus that our weakness and misery were known unto him from eternity, and he has lastly come himself and put himself in the service of the weak and defeated sinners. He has kept his Holy Spirit in guard of man's soul working day and night to expel terror and fear from the hearts of sinners and turn them (the hearts) into a temple and a place of his habitation.

The personality which has been broken asunder by sin is gathered again by the Spirit. And the soul which had been humiliated by the devil who had sneered at its authority and dissolved its will, is then touched by the grace of Christ, and hence is risen, renewed and strengthened.

A single glance of Christ let Peter throw away his weakness and defeat before the servants and concubines, pull himself together and regain his will which had been shattered as a broken vessel, so that his soul had melted before threat; however, from the eyes of Christ he has drawn forth power of repentance whereby he regained his wholeness.

Christ is still roaming among sinners healing every weakness

and every infirmity of the soul. The Holy Spirit is ever-ready to endow the tremulous with power from the highest. Grace is present every day to support the trembling hands and the feeble knees. And the love of Christ, when enkindled in the repentant heart, changes it from a pusillanimous one to that of a martyr. How often has repentance turned feebleness, defeat and surrender into testimony, witnessing and proclaiming the truth of the Gospel. The remembrance of the previous horrors of the soul, its despair and defeat are turned into a testimony of Christ's mercy. The terror as to the motive force of sin and lust evaporates in smoke, and the servile submission to the call of the company of evil is turned into advice and proclamation.

It is thus that the sinner puts off the image of corruption to be dressed in the new one by the hand of Christ, and the feeble, the cowardly, the timid, the defeated and he who has no control over himself, listen to the promise from the mouth of the Omnipotent:

“For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage”

(Jer. 1:18; Joshua

1:5,6)

8. THE POWER OF REPENTANCE IS IN PERSISTENT STRIFE TO ACQUIRE THE SPIRIT OF LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST!

“But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members... O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:23,24)

“The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”

“When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again” (Prov. 23:35)

Much anxiety and care befall the soul when it discovers the sway of sin over the organs in much persistence, stubbornness, arrogance and impertinence, while a resonance of sorrow mingled with oppressing despair flow in the soul when it discovers, after recurring trials, the futility of oaths, promises, works of penance, remorse and many tears.

But there is no avail; for there stands the law of sanctity impressed by the hand of God on the heart of every man, calling the depths of the soul incessantly: that there is no comfort nor rest whatever but in chastity, and no joy or peace except in ceasing from sin! Any perversion in respect of this law creates immediately a great contention with conscience, opposition to life itself, disagreement with the Spirit, estrangement from the aim of creation, loss in the darkness of thought, lack of balance

in judgement as to the nature of things, mutiny against truth and thus antagonism with the Author of the law.

Nevertheless, it happens that man rashly starts—in foolish enthusiasm—clashing with sin in a direct manner. But Oh! what sorrow when he discovers how crippled he is, and how tyrannical sin is! And while he goes mad with enthusiasm he repeats the trial and is then greatly shocked to find out that the phantom of Satan is there embodied behind sin and latent in those organs which have become his own, whereby he rules over the faculties of the soul and the motion of the flesh in a profound and organized manner, the scheme of which he has planned a long time ago, so that it acquired roots and law! Lastly—yea, at the very last—after man has exhausted all his efforts and displayed all his wiles and thought, he is then convinced that it is easier for him to contain water in a handkerchief, gather the wind in his palm or go up the sky with his feet than to control the law of sin by his will, or to exert his rule over the powers of evil that are moving within the depths of his members!

It is here that Christ's action takes place; Christ solely, for he has condemned sin in the flesh! *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death”* (Rom. 8:2).

Yet, it is in the persistent strife to acquire the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that the power of repentance lies, wherefore the flesh is to be emancipated from the law of sin by means of grace whereby—since we own it—we can strive unto blood against sin, being sure that by it we will be more than victors: *“For I know whom I have believed”* (II Tim. 1:12).

It is not the aim of repentance to be justified before God by means of remorse and outward repression of sin through acts of

penance and of torturing the flesh, but to be sanctified inwardly by the Spirit of Christ *“that the body of sin might be destroyed,”* (Rom. 6:6) and to be freed from sin itself within the depths of conscience, that its power might vanish and fear of it might disappear, and that grace might be a guide to the movements of conscience, curbing the actions of the flesh, controlling the birth of thoughts, guiding asceticism, mingling itself with austerity and sweetening regret.

It is not merely the forgiveness of sin which is the whole action of grace within man, nor is it the ultimate aim of faith in Christ; but to withhold sin from the organs, that its power might cease to exist and its law might vanish from our nature, is the aim of repentance and of faith, and that pertains to the great sovereignty of grace.

“And we know that he (Christ) was manifested to take away our sins” (I Jn. 3:5).

On the cross Christ was wounded in his side to bring forth water and blood to all who believe and come to him; water for washing away the impurity of sin, and blood to withhold its power.

How blessed is that day on which Christ’s side was opened on the cross for the sinner to find in it his righteousness, his sanctity and his redemption.

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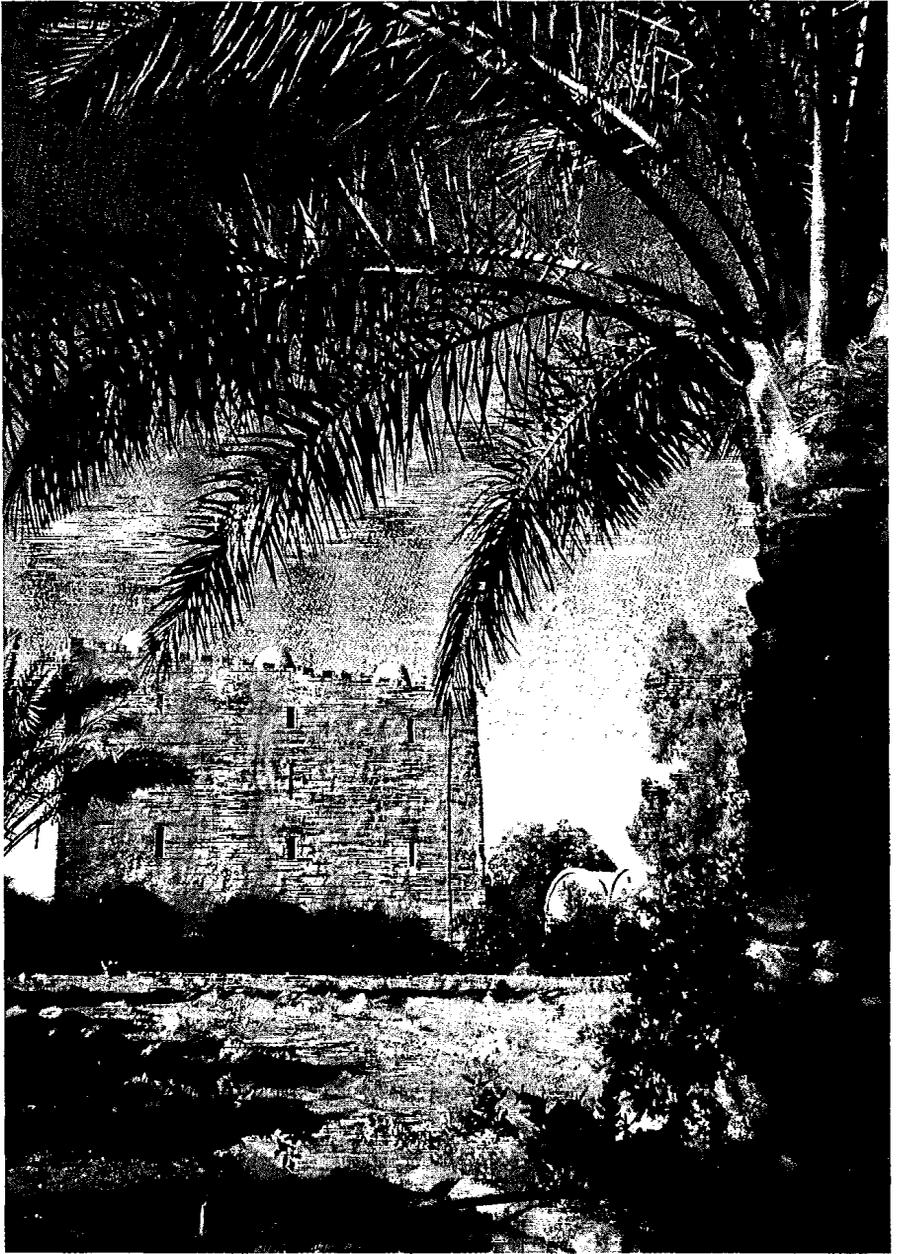
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