



November 15, 2009

23RD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**FEAST OF THE HOLY PASSION-BEARERS AKINDYNUS, PEGASIOUS,
ANEMPODISTUS, APHTHONIUS AND ELPIDEPHORUS**

RESURRECTIONAL TROPARION - TONE SIX:

The angelic powers were at Your tomb; and the guards became as dead men; and Mary stood by Your grave, seeking Your most pure Body. You did capture hell, not being tempted by it. You did come to the Virgin, granting life. O Lord who did rise from the dead: Glory to You!

HOLY PASSION-BEARERS TROPARION - TONE TWO:

Blessed is the earth that received your blood, Passion-bearers of the Lord, and holy is the dwelling place which received your spirits. You triumphed over the enemy in the stadium and you preached Christ with boldness. Since He is good, we pray that you beseech Him to save our souls.

RESURRECTIONAL KONTAKION - TONE SIX:

When Christ God, the Giver of Life, raised all of the dead from the valleys of misery with His mighty hand, He bestowed resurrection on the human race. He is the Savior of all, the Resurrection, the Life, and God of all.

HOLY PASSION BEARERS KONTAKION - TONE TWO:

You have received into the enjoyment of Your goodness and repose, O only Good One, the pious and God-bearing martyrs, who abandoned all earthly things: Akindynus, Pegasus, and Anempodistus, together with Aphthonius and Elpidophorus.

HYMN TO THE MOTHER OF GOD - TONE SIX:

Steadfast Protectress of Christians and constant advocate before the Creator, do not despise the cry of us sinners; but in your goodness come speedily to help us who call on you in faith. Hasten to hear our petition and to intercede for us, O Theotokos, for you always protect those who honor you!

EPISTLE & COMMENTARY

THE PROKIMENON IN THE 6TH TONE:

O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.

EPHESIANS 2: 4-10

Brethren, God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

THE ALLELUIA VERSES: PSALM 91: 1, 2

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the heavenly God. He will say to the Lord: My Protector and my Refuge; my God in whom I trust.

COMMENTARY

Two unequal, spiritual kingdoms are at war. The lesser kingdom (of the flesh) is ruled by the adversary, Satan. The King of the other Kingdom is uncreated, God the Father. His realm is the heavenly places. He rules by mercy and love. The beginning of his rule is redemption to eternal life. The desires of his subjects are thankfulness and glorifying God. Their deeds are righteous, as is proper to those who reign with Christ. The result of His Rule is exceeding riches and kindness, and hence, eternal life.

One can get from the lesser kingdom to God's Kingdom by the unity of grace, faith, and works. Not that these are equal, for grace is uncreated and infinite, whereas our faith is limited and can grow; good works flow out of authentic faith. Works cannot earn us this great treasure—it is a pure gift—but those who receive this gift do good. We are not saved *by* good works, but *for* good works!



GOSPEL & COMMENTARY

LUKE 8: 26-39

At that time, Jesus and His disciples sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!" For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness. Jesus asked him saying, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," because many demons had entered him. And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss. Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them. And He permitted them. Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned. When those who fed them saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. They also who had seen it told them by what means he who had been demon-possessed was healed. Then the whole multitude of the surrounding region of the Gadarenes asked Him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. And He got into the boat and returned. Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged Him that he might be with Him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you." And he went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.

COMMENTARY

The Lord came to the world **to free man from the tyranny of evil—*Demonic evil***. There exists no bigger and more **serious form of evil** outside of Man's control. Two men were possessed by evil. The evil held them captive, keeping them **in cemeteries**, because **the demonic evil is connected with death!**

The Lord opens **a dialogue** with these two men. "**What have you to do with us**"? There is not and never will be **any reconciliation** between demons and God. "Leave us alone! You mind your work and we shall mind our work!" They want to confirm the **division in the existence**, the gap, and **two separate areas!** Many times we organize our life, social and political, and we say to the Church: "Do not interfere with the concerns of the world. The world belongs to Satan." "**What have we to do with you**"? This is **a method that evil has invented** so that it **survives and enables** it to have some influence over the world.

Furthermore, they add the phrase “**Son of God!**” **Faith** is not enough to recognize that there is God. “Even the demons believe and tremble”! It is **TRUST IN GOD** that He can **make the impossible possible!** Demons teach us what the faith is *not* about.

The dialogue continues: Have you come here to torment us **before the time?** The demons know that their end is torture, eternal hell. They wish **the postponement**, as much as possible!

On the contrary, we as Christians say: “Thy Kingdom come!” Quickly! **Maran Atha!** But anyone who is dominated by evil prays for the Kingdom not to come quickly! Mystery of the freedom in history! The winner is the Lord in His Second Coming.

The dialogue continues into something moving. “If you cast us out, *send us away into the herd of swine.*” This implies that evil does not influence only man! **Evil is transferred from man to the creation.** The Ecological crisis testifies to this – the transfer of evil from man to the innocent creation! We have responsibility for the whole creation!

There are many stages and steps of evil, ranging from the extreme to the more subtle and deceptive forms. Let us struggle! The Church is the place for therapy!! Thy Kingdom come!!! Amen!

SPIRITUAL ARTICLES

From *The Prologue* for Nov. 2/Nov. 15 by St. Nikolai Velimirovic:

The Holy Martyrs Acyndinus, Pegasus, Anempodistus, Aphthonius, Elpidophorus and others with them

They were all Christians from Persia and suffered during the reign of King Sapor in the year 355. The first three were servants at the court of this same king but secretly served Christ their Lord. When they were accused and brought to trial before the king, he asked them where they came from. To this they replied: “Our fatherland and our life is the Most-holy Trinity, one in Essence and undivided, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God.” The king subjected them to cruel tortures but they endured all heroically, with psalmody and prayer on their lips. During the time of their torture and imprisonment angels of God appeared to them many times, and one time the Lord Christ Himself appeared to them as a man “with a face radiant as the sun.” When one of the torturers, Aphthonius, beheld a miracle, when boiling lead did no harm to the martyrs, he believed in Christ and cried out: “Great is the Christian God!” For this, he was immediately beheaded, and many others saw and believed. Then the king ordered that Acyndinus, Pegasus and Anempodistus be sewn into animal skins and cast into the sea. But St. Aphthonius appeared from the other world with three shining angels, and led the holy martyrs to dry land and set them free. Elpidophorus was one of the king’s nobles. When he revealed that he was a Christian and denounced the king for his slaughter of innocent Christians, the king

condemned him to death and Elpidophorus was beheaded along with seven thousand other Christians. Then those first three martyrs [Acyndinus, Pegasus and Anempodistus] were finally thrown into a burning furnace along with twenty-eight soldiers and the king's mother, since they also believed in Christ—and thus, in the flames, they gave up their righteous souls into the hands of the Lord.

The Venerable Marcian of Cyrus

Marcian was from the town of Cyrus in Syria. He was distinguished by his noble ancestry as well as by his physical beauty. He left all for the sake of Christ and withdrew into the wilderness of Halkis to live as a hermit. He was a contemporary of Patriarch Flavian of Antioch and the Emperors Constantius and Valens. A heavenly light shone in his cell at night by which he read the Holy Scriptures, and he never had need of any other light. He was a great miracle-worker both during his life and after death. Before his death, he ordered his disciple Eusebius to conceal his body and bury it secretly because of his many admirers. He entered into rest in the Lord in 387.

The Hieromartyr Victorinus, Bishop of Patav

Many maintain that he was a Slovene by ancestry. Blessed Jerome points him out as a learned and devout man. He knew Greek better than Latin. He wrote the interpretations of several books of the New and Old Testaments. He suffered for the Christian Faith in about the year 303.

HYMN OF PRAISE

The Holy Martyrs Acyndinus, Pegasus, Anempodistus, Aphthonius
and Elpidophorus

The martyr Acyndinus and with him Pegasus,
Courageous Anempodistus and with him Aphthonius,
And the gentle Elpidophorus, a royal dignitary:
All—sacrificial lambs, snow-white lambs.
They showed themselves servants of the Most-holy Trinity,
And declared Christ to Sapor, face to face.
For them, martyrdom was a celebration.
Christ was dearer to them than youth and health;
Christ was dearer to them than royal delights;
Christ was dearer to them than royal honors.
Whatever the world gave them, they gave away for Christ;
They fell as noble sacrifices for Christ;
They fell in disgrace and rose in radiance;
They fell on earth and rose in Paradise.
For the Church on earth, they shed their blood;
In the heavenly Church they completed the edifice of their souls.
Filled with love for the Christian race,

They now pray to the risen Christ
That He preserve the Church on earth from misfortune,
And lead it to the final victory.

REFLECTION

How will one who transgresses love toward his parents raise himself toward love for his enemies? Love for one's parents—this is the main and fundamental school of love. Without this school, one can go no further. The Serbian King Dragutin rose up against his father with an army in order to sit on his father's throne. But it so happened that he later broke his leg, and this awakened in him pangs of conscience which did not leave him in peace until his death. Dragutin withdrew from the throne and relinquished his authority to his younger brother Milutin, and began to widely distribute alms, build churches, and perform other good works. In addition to this, he lived a strict life of asceticism in secret. He girded himself with a belt of reeds around his naked body, dressed in coarse sackcloth, and prayed to God at night in a secretly dug grave. This penitent king did all this only that God would forgive him the sin of lack of love toward his parents, and God forgave him. Many holy martyrs joyfully received their executioners who were seeking them, and treated them hospitably in their homes while they themselves prepared for death. To entertain one's mortal enemies—is this not an expression of great love toward one's enemies? When King Sapor harshly tortured Acyndinus, Pegasus and others with them, he suddenly went mad, became dumb and unable to speak, and began to claw his face with great fury. Seeing his tormentor in such despair, St. Acyndinus wept and prayed to God for the king and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, speak!" and the king's tongue was loosed and he began to speak. Here is an example of true love for one's enemies!

IMPORTANT REMINDERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

FIRST ANNUAL PAN-ORTHODOX CLERGY RETREAT – December 1-3

All Clergy of our Diocese are invited to participate in the first Annual Pan-Orthodox Retreat to be held at St. Nicholas Ranch in Dunlap, CA. For more information visit: <http://www.westsrbdio.org>

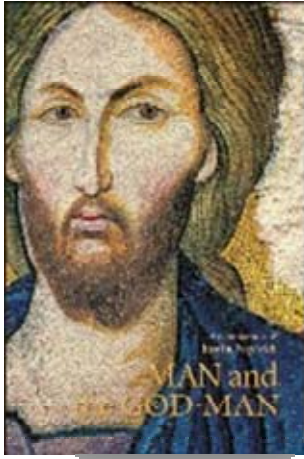
ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY – January 29-30, 2010

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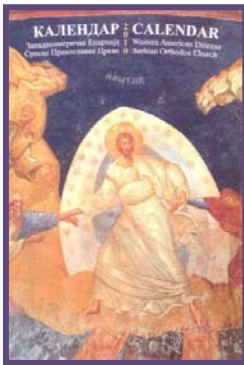


MAN AND THE GOD-MAN by Archimandrite Justin Popovic

This newest publication of our Sebastian Press Publishing House is now available for purchase online at:

http://www.westsrbdio.org/ads/man_and_the_godman.html

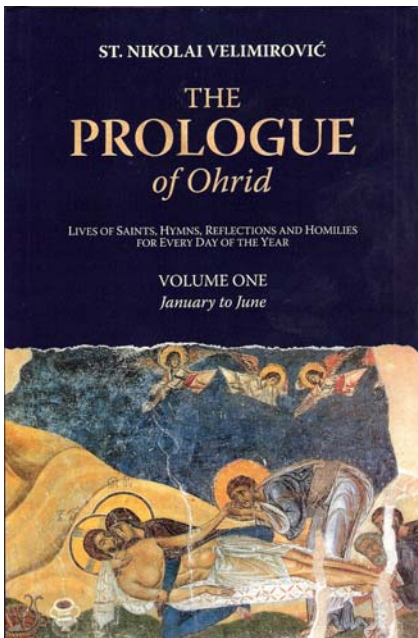
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THE PROLOGUE OF OHRID

St Nikolai of Zica (Velimirovic) (1880-1956) has been called the "Serbian Chrysostom" for his theological depth and golden-tongued eloquence. Now for the first time, a complete and unabridged English translation of St. Nikolai's Prologue of Ohrid has been made available. St. Nikolai's Prologue has become a much-loved spiritual classic for Orthodox Christians worldwide. An inspirational source-book of the Orthodox Faith, it contains within its pages a summation of the Church's wisdom and Her experience of sanctity through the Grace of Jesus Christ. Lives of Saints, Hymns, Reflections and Homilies are presented for every day of the year. St. Nikolai's beautiful Hymns have never before appeared in English. –

Retail \$120 per set

For **Continual Education in Liturgy and Theology**, we recommend the following article: http://www.westsrbdio.org/pdf/Archm.Justin_on_Saint_Issak.pdf

We will offer the article here in sections on a weekly basis; today is the Part V.

The Theory of Knowledge of Saint Isaac the Syrian

Contemplation

In the philosophy of the holy fathers, contemplation has an ontological, ethical and gnoseological significance. It means prayerful concentration of the soul, through the action of grace, on the mysteries that surpass our understanding and are abundantly present not only in the Holy Trinity but in the person of man himself and in the whole of God's creation. In contemplation, the person of the ascetic of faith lives above the senses, above the categories of time and space. He has a vivid awareness of the links that bind him to the higher world and is nourished by revelations that contain those things which "eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" (I Cor. 2:9).

St. Isaac strives to put into words his great experience, gained through the grace that brought him to contemplation. As far as human language permits the grasping and translation of the truths of religious experience, he seeks to explain as clearly as possible what contemplation is. According to him, contemplation is the sense of divine mysteries hidden within things and events.¹⁹³ Contemplation is found in the finest workings of the mind and in continual pondering on God. Its abode is unceasing prayer,¹⁹⁴ and thus it illumines the spiritual part of the soul, the intellect.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ *Homily* 58, p. 234.

¹⁹² *Homily* 56, p. 227.

¹⁹³ *Homily* 30, p. 131.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

“Sometimes contemplation springs from prayer, silencing the prayer of the lips. Then the man at prayer becomes through contemplation a body without breath, outside himself. This state is known as the contemplation of prayer”. “In this prayerful contemplation there exist various degrees and a diversity of gifts”, for “the mind has not yet passed” into that realm where there is no longer prayer (where “prayer does not exist”), for in that realm there is something greater than prayer.¹⁹⁶

By the help of a good life lived in grace, the ascetic of faith ascends to contemplation. “To begin with he becomes confident in God’s providence towards men and is illumined by love towards his Creator and marvels at His care for the rational beings that He has made. After this there arises in him the sweetness of God and a burning love for God in his heart, a love that burns away the passions of both soul and body”. He is then “drunk with the wine of divine love... and his thoughts are drawn beyond themselves and his heart led captive after God”. “It seems to him at times that he is not in the body or even in this world. Such is the beginning of spiritual contemplation in a man—of contemplation and at the same time of all revelation to the mind”. The mind “grows” with the help of contemplation and rises up to revelations “that are beyond human nature”. In brief: in contemplation “there are brought to man all the divine contemplations and spiritual revelations that the saints receive in this world, and all the gifts and revelations that nature itself is capable of knowing in this world”.¹⁹⁷

The virtue of understanding “humbles the soul and purifies it from clouded thoughts, that it may not loiter among the passions but press forward to contemplation”. This contemplation brings the mind close to its primal nature and is called “immaterial contemplation”. It is a “spiritual virtue”, for “it lifts the soul up above the earth, bringing it close to the primal contemplation of the Spirit, introducing the mind to God and to the contemplation of His ineffable glory... holding the mind apart from this world and the perception of it”.¹⁹⁸ The life of the Spirit is an activity in which the senses have no part. The holy fathers wrote about this: “As soon as the intellects of the saints have made this life

¹⁹⁶ *Homily 31*, p. 134.

¹⁹⁷ *Homily 40*, pp. 169 and 170.

¹⁹⁸ *Homily 17*, p. 59.

their own, material contemplation and the opacity of the flesh fall back, and spiritual contemplation takes their place”.¹⁹⁹

“The modalities of prayer” are manifold, says St. Isaac, but they all have one aim: pure prayer. In the depths of this pure prayer there lies “a rapture that is not prayer, for everything that can be called prayer ceases, and there remains a contemplation in which the mind cannot utter prayers”. “Prayer is one thing, but this contemplation-in-prayer is another, although one flows from the other. Prayer is the sowing, and contemplation the gathering-in of the sheaves, in which the harvester stands amazed at the wondrous abundance of the full ears that have grown from the poor little grains he has sown”. In this state of contemplation, the intellect passes beyond its own limits and enters “that other world”.²⁰⁰

Transformed by prayer and other ascetic practices, the mind becomes purified and learns “to contemplate God with divine and not human eyes”.²⁰¹

He who guards his heart from the passions contemplates God at every instant. He who maintains a constant vigilance over his soul “at every hour contemplates the Lord”. “He who watches over his own soul at every hour will see his heart rejoice in revelations. He who draws the contemplation of his intellect within himself will contemplate the dawn of the Spirit. He who recoils from the diffusion of his mind will contemplate the Lord in the inner recesses of his heart... Behold, heaven is within you, if you are pure, and you will see the angels in their radiance and, with them and within them, their Lord Himself... The soul of a righteous man shines more brightly than the sun, and rejoices at every hour in the contemplation of things revealed”.²⁰²

When, after the strict asceticism of the Gospel, a man finds within himself the divine center of his being—and finds there also the center of the transcendent divinity in this visible world—then he rises above time and beholds himself as from eternity. He sees himself as above time and space, deathless and eternal. At its root, true self-knowledge is also true knowledge of God, for man carries the shortest path between himself

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁰⁰ *Homily 32*, p. 135.

²⁰¹ *Homily 35*, p. 154.

²⁰² *Homily 43*, p. 176.

and God in the Godlike nature of his own soul. Here lies the shortest distance between man and God. All of man's paths towards God may well meet a dead-end; only this one leads surely to God in Christ. In his philosophy, St. Isaac lays great emphasis on self-knowledge. "He who has been counted worthy to see himself", he says, "is greater than he who has been counted worthy to see angels".²⁰³

To acquire the capacity to see into his own soul, a man must first open his heart to grace.²⁰⁴ "To the extent that souls are impure or darkened they can see neither themselves nor others". Insight will come "if a man purifies his soul and brings it back to its primal state".²⁰⁵ "He who desires to see God within himself must strive by constant recollection of God to purify his heart; and thus, with the light from the eyes of his mind, he will see God at every hour. As it is with a fish out of water, so it is with an intellect that has turned aside from the recollection of God... For the man with a pure mind, the realm of the Spirit is within himself; the sun that shines within him is the light of the Holy Trinity and the air breathed by the inhabitants of this realm is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter... Their life, their joy and their gladness is Christ, the radiance of the Father's light. Such a man is always gladdened at the contemplation of his soul, marveling at its beauty that is indeed brighter than a thousand suns. This is Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God, hidden, as the Lord says, within us (Luke 17:21). This realm is the cloud of God's glory into which only the pure of heart may enter to behold the face of their Master and to fill their intellects with the radiance of His light... A man cannot see the beauty that is within himself until he has discounted and despised all the beauty that is outside him... A man who is healthy of soul, who is humble and meek—such a man, as soon as he turns to prayer, sees the light of the Holy Spirit within his soul and rejoices at beholding the rays of His light, delighting in the contemplation of its glory".²⁰⁶

A man can understand the nature of his soul by the light of the Holy Spirit. "By nature the soul is free of the passions. When, in Holy Scripture, passions of the soul and of the flesh are spoken of, this refers

²⁰³ *Homily 34*, p. 153.

²⁰⁴ *Homily 73*, p. 291.

²⁰⁵ *Homily 67*, p. 265.

²⁰⁶ *Homily 43*, pp. 177–78.

to their causes, for the soul is by nature passionless. This is not accepted by the adherents of profane philosophy”—or, as we would say today, the adherents of materialist, realist, and phenomenalist philosophy. On the contrary, God created the soul in His image, and therefore passionless.²⁰⁷

There exist three states of soul: natural, unnatural, and supernatural. “The natural state of the soul is the knowledge of God’s creation, both visible and spiritual. The supernatural state of the soul is the contemplation of the super-essential Divinity. The unnatural state of the soul is its involvement in the passions”, for the passions do not belong to its nature.²⁰⁸ Passion is an unnatural state of the soul, but virtue is its natural state.²⁰⁹ When the mind is fed by the virtues, especially that of compassion, the soul is then “adorned with that holy beauty” through which man is indeed in the likeness of God.²¹⁰ The “holy beauty” of man’s being is revealed in a pure heart, and the more a man develops this holy beauty within himself, the more he will see the beauty of God’s creation.²¹¹

This shows that self-knowledge is the best way to come to a true knowledge of nature and the material world in general. “He who submits himself to God”, says St. Isaac, “is close to being able to submit all things to himself. To him who knows himself is given to know all things, for knowledge of self is the fullness of the knowledge of all things”.²¹² If a man humbles himself before God, all creation humbles itself before him. “True humility is born of knowledge, and true knowledge is the fruit of temptation”²¹³—that is, it comes through the battle with temptations.

Human nature is capable of true contemplation when it is cleansed from the passions by the exercise of the virtues. The true contemplation of the material and immaterial world, and of the Holy Trinity Itself, is the gift of Christ. He revealed this contemplation to men and instructed them in it “when He, in His own Divine Person, completed the renewal of human nature and, through His life-giving commandments,

²⁰⁷ *Homily* 82, p. 314.

²⁰⁸ *Homily* 83, p. 316.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

²¹⁰ *Homily* 1, p. 6.

²¹¹ *Letter* 3, p. 366.

²¹² *Homily* 16, p. 58.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 59; cf. *Homily* 44, p. 186.

cleared a path to the truth. Human nature only becomes capable of true contemplation when a man first puts off the old Adam through enduring the passions, through fulfilling the commandments and by suffering misfortune... In these circumstances the intellect becomes capable of spiritual birth and of the contemplation of the spiritual world, its true fatherland... The contemplation of the new world revealed by the Spirit, in which the intellect takes spiritual delight, occurs under the action of grace... This contemplation becomes a food that nourishes the intellect, preparing it to receive a contemplation that is yet more perfect. For one contemplation leads into another, until the intellect is brought into the realm of perfect love. Love itself is the abode, the 'place' of spiritual man; it dwells in purity of soul. When the intellect reaches the realm of love, grace works in it and the intellect receives spiritual contemplation and becomes a beholder of hidden things".²¹⁴

Mystical contemplation "is revealed to the intellect when the soul has been made whole".²¹⁵ Those who have cleansed their souls by the practice of the virtues become worthy of spiritual contemplation.²¹⁶ "Purity sees God".²¹⁷ Those who have cleansed themselves from sin and unceasingly ponder on God behold Him.²¹⁸ "The kingdom of heaven is called spiritual contemplation, for this is what it is", says St. Isaac. "It is not found through the activity of thought, but can be tasted by grace. Until a man cleanses himself he is in no state even to hear of the Kingdom, for no one can acquire it through teaching", only through purity of heart.²¹⁹ God gives pure thoughts to those who live pure lives.²²⁰ "Purity of thought springs from striving and from guarding the heart, and from purity of thought comes the enlightenment of the understanding. From there grace leads the intellect to the realm where the senses have no power, where they neither instruct nor are instructed".²²¹

²¹⁴ *Letter 4*, p. 389.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

²¹⁸ Cf. *Homily 5*, p. 26 and *Homily 43*, p. 177.

²¹⁹ *Homily 19*, p. 70; cf. *Homily 35*, p. 154.

²²⁰ *Homily 25*, p. 105.

²²¹ *Homily 30*, p. 131.

By vigilance in prayer “the mind takes wing and flies upwards”, “towards the delights of God”. “It swims in a knowledge that surpasses human thought”. “The soul that strives to persevere in this vigilance receives the eyes of the cherubim with which to dwell in constant, heavenly contemplation”.²²² “The soul of man sees the truth of God through the power of his way of life, that is, through the life of faith. “If his contemplation is true, he will find the light and what he contemplates will be in the realm of truth”.²²³ “The vision of God comes from the knowledge of God, and cannot precede this knowledge”.²²⁴

The goal of a Christian is life in and contemplation of the Holy Trinity. According to St. Isaac, love is “the primal contemplation of the Holy Trinity”. “The first of the mysteries is called purity, and is attained through the performance of the commandments. But contemplation is the spiritual contemplation of the intellect”. It comes from “the mind’s entering into rapture and understanding both that which was and that which will be. Contemplation is the vision of the intellect. In it the heart is chastened, renewed, and cleansed of evil, becoming familiar with the mysteries of the Spirit and the revelations of knowledge, rising from knowledge to knowledge, from contemplation to contemplation, and from understanding to understanding, learning and growing secretly until it is caught up into love, incorporated into hope, until joy takes up residence in its inmost parts, until it is lifted up to God and crowned with the natural glory of its own created being”. Thus the mind “is purified and endowed with mercy, actually being counted worthy to contemplate the Holy Trinity”.²²⁵ For there are three sorts of natural contemplation in which the mind “is uplifted, active and engaged”: “two are of the created world—of the rational and the non-rational, the spiritual and the bodily; and the third is the contemplation of the Holy Trinity”.²²⁶

²²² *Homily* 29, p. 125; cf. *ibid.*, p. 124, and *Letter* 4, p. 364.

²²³ *Letter* 4, p. 388.

²²⁴ *Homily* 16, p. 58.

²²⁵ *Letter* 4, p. 387.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 384.