

## PSALM 62 (63)

1 A psalm by David, when he was in the desert of Judea.

2 O God, my God, I rise early to be with You; My soul thirsts for You. How often my flesh thirsts for You In a desolate, impassable, and waterless land.

3 So in the holy place I appear before You, To see Your power and Your glory.

4 Because Your mercy is better than life, My lips shall praise You.

5 Thus I will bless You in my life; I will lift up my hands in Your name.

6 May my soul be filled, as if with marrow and fatness, And my mouth shall sing praise to You with lips filled with rejoicing.

7 If I remembered You on my bed, I meditated on You at daybreak;

8 For You are my helper, And in the shelter of Your wings I will greatly rejoice.

9 My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand takes hold of me.

10 But they seek for my soul in vain; They shall go into the lowest parts of the earth.

11 They shall be given over to the edge of the sword; They shall be a portion for foxes.

12 But the king shall be glad in God; All who swear by Him shall be praised, For the mouth that speaks unrighteous things is stopped

### **A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.**

THEODORET: Fleeing from Saul, the divine David reached Ahimelech and from there Achish, who was king in Gath. (1 Sam 21; 22:5'23:14; 24:1) Then, falling into danger again and eluding it he came upon the wilderness; there he wrote this psalm, both revealing the love he had for God and prophesying the overthrow of Saul. He also gave everybody who was in debt the opportunity of earnestly entreating God and awaiting for help.

Aimilianos: Psalm 62 is a love song, a canticle of desire for God. For the singer of such a song, God is an utterly concrete and compelling reality. And so David speaks to Him, cries to Him, and at the same time searches after Him, as if he were crying out: Have you seen Him Whom my heart loves? (cf. Song 3:3).

Where is God? Where has He gone? The psalmist is deeply troubled. God had been his friend; he knew Him well and encountered Him often. His only desire was to live with Him always. That's why he cries out to Him, why he calls upon Him so simply and so directly, saying my God, my God.

REARDON: Psalm 62 is long associated with prayer at the hour of dawn. In this case it is an association readily justified by the opening line: O my God, I rise to

You at the break of day," as well as a later verse, "I have been mindful of You on my bed, and I will meditate on you during the morning watch."

Psalm 62 is especially to be recommended as partial preparation for Holy Communion.... As the highest possible communion with God on this earth, the Holy Eucharist is the supreme fulfillment, this side of heaven, of the aspirations of Psalm 62.

## **2 O God, my God, I rise early to be with You; My soul thirsts for You. How often my flesh thirsts for You In a desolate, impassable, and waterless land.**

Aimilianos: What does it mean to rise early at dawn? In the first place, «dawn» (ὄρθρος) was the name given the second-to-last shift of the night watch kept by the ancient Israelites. This means that David is speaking to God very late at night, just before the break of day, before the rising of the sun. But David is a king, burdened with the cares of office: shouldn't he be sleeping at such an hour? Of course he should, for sleep is sweet. But is there anything sweeter than prayer, which is an encounter with God? The Hebrew text lends an additional element to this, since the phrase, to You I rise early at dawn, also means, «even though it is still night, I search for you with warmth and ardor».

Sleeplessly, therefore, the psalmist seeks God. He can find no rest. He searches for God in the small hours of the night, in the early hours of the morning. And where is David at this time? Is he safe in his palace, attending to the affairs of state, meditating on God throughout the day, and now searching for Him at night? No. He is in the desert, pursued by Absalom, his son. He is being hunted like an animal by a band of conspirators and rebels (cf. 2 Sam 15:1-23 ). He is hungry, thirsty, stripped of his royal garments, and in peril from desert storms and violent men. And yet he asks neither for deliverance from this desperate situation nor for the punishment of his enemies. He seeks only God.

In the arid desert, David's desire for God flourishes. To be sure, all the things that he might normally have wished for, that he might once have wanted, are now without meaning or purpose. In the depths of the night, he senses that he needs only God and nothing else. He realizes, moreover, that prayers said during the day, if they have no root in prayers said at night, are very, weak and suffer, as it were, from lack of nourishment. Take a small sapling with no roots and plant it in the ground. The first storm will quickly knock it down. If, however, it is deeply rooted in the earth, it will survive the violence of the winds and rain. In the same way, our spiritual life must have roots in the night. The life of the Christian begins and is formed in the night, in the vigil of prayer offered to God. Do we interrupt our sleep, rise at night, and raise our hands in prayer to God? If not, our experience of God during the day will be shallow and superficial.

My soul has thirsted for You. «Like a parched throat, my soul thirsts for You; my entire being longs for You. I have always thirsted and longed for You». The Hebrew says «My soul, O God, desires You». It is melting with the thought of You, wasting away, suffering, filled with anguish. Anxiously awaiting you, my soul has melted away.

From this it is clear that, not only does David's soul long for God, but also his flesh, which likewise suffers on account of God's absence. How often: in other

words, «very often, endlessly, without ceasing, my soul and body have sought You. With all my heart and soul, with all my mind and strength, with all my psychological, spiritual and bodily energies I seek after You (cf. Mk 12:30), in a desert land, parched and impenetrable. According to another version of the text, David says «I thirst for You, O God, like a thirsty land, which is parched and impenetrable».

The psalmist compares his spiritual state to that of soil before the start of the rainy season. Such soil is hardened and dry; when furrowed by the plough it breaks into pieces and turns to dust. It needs water. «In the same way, my God, I thirst for you». The Judean Desert, which is David's external, physical landscape, enables him to contemplate the inner desert of his soul. And what is the soul when God is absent from it, if not a barren desert? But thanks to his prayers at night, the psalmist is emboldened to seek a living, personal encounter with God. THEODORET: Desire for you O Lord, he is saying, dispels even sleep and awakens me to adoration of you... The flesh is in harmony with the soul's love, and is not in conflict with its wishes. It wishes to say, Both my soul and my body yearn for you and long for you, like the person thirsting for the sweetest clearest water.

REARDON: Communion with God is the goal of all prayer, no matter how elementary, pedestrian, or dry. This psalm, in fact, speaks of the soul's sense of dryness, even as it aspires to divine union

### **3 So in the holy place I appear before You, To see Your power and Your glory.**

Aimilianos: My God, often have I turned to you, appearing before you in Your sanctuary, that I might see Your power and Your glory. Often have I come to this holy place in order to see You. And how have I come here? How have I appeared? Thus [so], by which he means «like this», that is, «with this same intense desire for You; with this same powerful longing have I come here so often and presented myself to You, to see Your power and Your glory». «Power» and «glory» are two words with overlapping meanings: God's glorious power and His powerful, indeed, all-powerful glory. David says «Your power», for he had experienced God's power many times in the past, and now he feels the need of it acutely. The «glory» mentioned here is the manifestation of God's awesome presence (cf. Ex 16:10; Num 16:19). That I might see Your power and Your glory. «That I might be-hold You in prayer and contemplation, that I might see Your pillar of cloud (Ex 13:21-22), Your thick darkness (Dt 4:11), and whatever else You make Your dwelling place. That I might see whatever it is that reveals You to me, which is the uncreated activity of Your essence by means of which I perceive that You, my God, exist».

To see, to taste, to savor and take delight in, to be filled with Your glory. The prophet seeks a vision. Merely speaking to God does not satisfy him. He wants to see Him.

And how will such a vision come about? By appearing before You in Your sanctuary. Not in the Tent of Meeting, not in the Temple, but in the sanctuary, a word with particular significance. As the «Holy Place», the sanctuary is that which is separate and separated from all. It is a place set aside exclusively for religious

purposes and dedicated permanently to God. Thus the holy chalice, the holy paten, their holy coverings, as well as the holy table, are likewise set aside strictly for devotional use. They are «useless» with respect to other functions or activities. They exist solely and exclusively for the service of God, and so they are holy, and wholly set apart.

«O Lord, it is only when our hearts have been separated from the world that we can communicate with You, entering into the divine darkness of Your presence». For the Eternal One does not mingle with the transitory things of time. God is inaccessible to all, yet accessible to the soul, giving Himself to those who turn to Him with their whole heart, and who have the kind of spirit expressed in the following verse.

THEODORET: I sustained no harm from the wilderness; instead, situated in it as though in your sacred tabernacle, I offer you singing in this way. The phrase "the holy place" means the tabernacle, the divine Temple not yet being built...I stand in your presence, imagining your ineffable power; since your nature is beyond our grasp, I take a basis for praise from what has been done by you. The people from the nations that has come to faith would always say, "Thus I appeared to you in the holy place," that is, in the temple where you sacrifice without sacrifice, divide without division, and consume while remaining unconsumed.

#### **4 Because Your mercy is better than life, My lips shall praise You.**

Aimilianos: David realizes that God's mercy is better than life itself, better than «many lives», and better than any particular kind of life. One person believes that his purpose in life is to serve God. Another believes that money, power, influence, and pleasure are the things that give meaning to human existence. From another point of view, the phrase better than life itself also means «better than a long life». Let us suppose that our life span could be extended once, twice, or a thousand times beyond its natural limits. Even then, God's mercy would be above and beyond all the good things of life, above and beyond anything I could hope to gain or accomplish in a thousand years, beyond anything available to me in the entire world. Your mercy, O God, is beyond compare. «Mercy» is another word for God's love. It is that particular quality or activity of God that makes it possible for us to be united with Him, to communicate with Him. It is God's love and mercy alone that enable us to draw near to Him, not our righteousness or our virtues. ~ «Your mercy, O Lord; this experience of communion with You, this union with You, is sufficient for me. Beyond all the good things of this world, beyond thousands of lives and endless lifetimes, You my God are the One Whom I love. My lips will praise You for that is the purpose of my life». Instead of saying «my mouth» will praise You, he says my lips, substituting the part for the whole. «My lips will praise You, exalt You, glorify you, magnify You. I live to praise You, to worship You, to extol You throughout my life. And if I should die here in this barren desert, where unjust men are seeking to kill me, it would be of no importance. It is enough for me to be with You. Above and beyond my life I have You, my God. My only desire is to praise You». These thoughts carry David further, and lead him to make a promise to God, which appears in the next verse.

THEODORET: Your mercy I prefer to all the life of the rich and influential, an indolent life and a busy one, a luxurious life and a careless one, and I move my lips in singing your praises.

REARDON: There is a communion with God expressed chiefly in rest and silence; such was the tone of the two previous psalms. In the present psalm, however, the emphasis lies rather on the rapture of blessing and praise.

### **5 Thus I will bless You in my life; I will lift up my hands in Your name.**

Aimilianos: Thus, in other words, «in this manner», that is, with all my strength, filled with desire and longing for You, I will bless You throughout my life. «The meaning of my life is found in the act of blessing You, in glorifying You. Apart from that, it would be as if I did not exist, as if I were not even alive. My life has meaning only to the extent that it revolves around You; to the extent that I magnify and glorify You». Let us consider the etymology of the verb «to bless», which in Greek means to «utter a good word». God is truly glorified when we enter into communion with His Word, when we are united to His Word, when our life becomes Word-like and Christ-like. There is no better way for us to «bless» God. Thus in Your name I will lift up my hands. «To You I will pray; to You I will address myself. I will have no other God; I will set up no idols within my heart (cf. Ezek 14:3). I will have no alien thoughts or desires, for my whole mind and life will be turned toward You and You alone. My hands are lifted up to You like two lamps of fire, the flames of which rise up to heaven». What an extraordinary image the psalmist offers to us, and yet one which is well known. In place of a sacrifice, he offers the lifting up of his hands as an evening sacrifice (cf. Ps 141:2). «My act of blessing, indeed my entire life, becomes a sacrifice to God». This is how our hearts should be!

THEODORET: I shall continue to do this throughout the whole of my life, singing with my tongue, reaching out my hands and begging for your loving kindness.

### **6 May my soul be filled, as if with marrow and fatness, And my mouth shall sing praise to You with lips filled with rejoicing.**

Aimilianos: As with marrow and fatness—what a wonderful image! «Just as a hungry man might grab a piece of rich, fatty meat and devour it, as if there were nothing else in the world that could satisfy his appetite, so too do I hunger for You, my God. And this hunger itself fills me with pleasure». With joyful lips my mouth will praise You, or «my mouth will praise Your name», according to another version of the text. «My lips, jubilant with happiness, will praise Your name». There is no other way for the soul to rejoice, or to know happiness. God fills our life with joy, and makes our soul rejoice.

THEODORET: I take hymn singing to you as richness of soul, and think of it as rich and luxurious; meditation on your sayings is unchanging luxury an opulence...For this reason I shall offer you the hymn with all enthusiasm, realizing the benefit coming from it.

AMBROSE: Now let us turn our attention to the characteristic of fatness or richness of which David speaks intelligibly when he says, “Let my soul be filled as with marrow and fatness.” Before that he had said, “And may your whole burnt

offering be made fat.” By this he means that the requirements for a sacrifice are that it be fat or rich, that it be glistening and that it be weighted with the sustenance inspired by faith and devotion and by the rich nourishment of the Word of God. Frequently we use the word fat or rich when we refer to something that is heavily and elaborately adorned, and to the finest victim as one that is not thin and scrawny. Wherefore we designate as “rich” a sacrifice that we desire to be regarded as the “finest.” We also have proof of this when we consult the prophetic passage in the Scriptures where fine cows are compared with years of fertility! CAIN AND ABEL 2.5.17.

### **7 If I remembered You on my bed, I meditated on You at daybreak;**

THEODORET: The divine David means, Lying in bed I resisted the most enjoyable sleep so as to meditate on you at each watch, and I repaid with hymns the kindness done to me; after all, you guard me with invincible providence as with a shelter of wings. The people that came to faith from the nations as a whole also make mention of this same thing on their bed, praising the Savior of all at daybreak.

CHRYSOSTOM: Why do we forget about wickedness? It is due to our remembrance of good things, due to our remembrance of God. If we continually remember God, we cannot remember those things also. For [he says], “When I remembered you on my bed, I thought on you in the morning dawn.” We ought then to have God always in remembrance, but then especially, when thought is undisturbed, when by means of that remembrance [one] is able to condemn himself, when he can retain [things] in memory. For in the daytime indeed, if we do remember, other cares and troubles entering in, drive the thought out again; but in the night it is possible to remember continually, when the soul is calm and at rest; when it is in the heaven, and under a serene sky. “The things that you say in your hearts you should grieve over on your beds,” he says. For it was indeed right to remember this throughout the day also. But inasmuch as you are always full of cares and distracted amid the things of this life, at least then remember God on your bed; at the morning dawn meditate on him. ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 14.9.

### **8 For You are my helper, And in the shelter of Your wings I will greatly rejoice.**

Aimilianos: For You have become my helper. Here David uses the past tense in order to express the certainty, the definitive character, of his experience of God. It is a terrible thing for a person not to have experiences of God's presence. How can one live without them? The psalmist derives strength from his experience and so speaks to God. We too are able to have such experiences. If someone says that he cannot have such experiences, what he is really saying is that he does not want to have them. But those who love God are filled with—that is, they know and experience—God's divine power and grace. Here we think of the many hymns that praise God for His active presence in the saints: «Glory to Him Who gave you strength; glory to Him Who crowned you; glory to Him Who through you works miracles». It is God Who strengthens us, crowns us, fills our lives with miracles, and glorifies us. And since it is God Who works miracles (cf. Pss 77:14;

86:10), we can all draw upon His strength in order to acquire experiences of God. These are personal, inner experiences, available to all, for God does not favor some more than others (cf. Rom 2:11; Gal 2:6; Eph 6:9). And in the shelter of Your wings I will rejoice. ^My God, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings (cf. Lk 13:34), gather me up and cover me in Your love, in Your tenderness, and in Your compassion (cf. Dt 32:11). Why should I be distressed? Why should I be anxious? Why should I be troubled by negative thoughts? It is enough for me to have a heart that feels Your presence and loves You. And then I will rejoice then my entire life will be a continual rejoicing». Previously the psalmist had joyful lips, O but now he rejoices. Joy is the refrain of the true Christian, He revels in it, for the recollection of the past reminds him that God has never abandoned him. And here we find a valuable lesson. We too should mind God's mercies, which are without number, and equally and abundantly on all, and not least on the sick, suffering, the poor, and those that seem insignificant in the eyes of the world. The recollection of God's mercy is a strength. THEODORET: Now, one would be right to call both Old and New Testament wings, being sheltered and nourished and delighted in them, and raised through the rebirth of the washing to maturity, to the measure of development of the full stature of Christ. (Cf. Eph 4:13)

### **9 My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand takes hold of me.**

Aimilianos: Now the mutual feelings of tenderness and love, along with the power of union, reach their culmination in a sweetness and a delicacy that is like the gentle breath of a mild breeze or the fragrance of perfume. My soul clings closely behind You. «I am attached to You, my God. I follow You. I never want to be separated or apart from You». This is the expression of a common life lived together over a long period of time, an expression of unity, identity, and mutual assimilation «You and I, together forever, so closely united that we could never live apart from each other, for we are one. My «I» has been submerged and lost in the boundless depths of You. And this is because Your right hand has upheld me. Your power and Your grace continually help me». For our spiritual lives to bear fruit, two things are necessary: the exercise of our free will, which is expressed in the first part of this verse, and divine grace, which is expressed in the second.

Think of a small child who with great tenderness and affection loves his father. He takes hold of his hand, embraces him, clings to him, just as the father loves and holds the child. Let us also call to mind the icon of the Glykophilousa ("sweet-kissing" or "loving kindness"), in which the Theotokos is depicted holding the child Jesus with infinite tenderness. The two of them are caught up in a reciprocal embrace so that their bodies appear to merge and form a single body; their cheeks pressed against each other as if to form a single face, a single person. That, my beloved, is the exercise of free will.



David says nothing here about the need for strength or human struggle. His inner disposition is simple, namely, not to be separated from God: my soul clings closely behind You. The strength necessary for such a union comes directly from

God, which is why he says Your right hand has upheld me, which means «Your grace upholds me: working together, my free will and Your grace can accomplish all things». Saint Athanasios of Alexandria understands this verse as follows: «Not even for a moment, my God, can my spirit be separated from You, for I am afire with ardent love, and, as if my mind were a mass of glue, I adhere to You in desire». It is the movement of our free will, of our desire, which attracts and draws down divine grace.

THEODORET: Not even for a moment, he is saying, can I steal my thoughts away from remembering you; rather, inflamed by burning potion, I am attached to your memory by desire for you as though by a kind of glue. Then he shows the fruit of desire...Seeing me so disposed, you judge me worthy of your providence.

REARDON: Most men seem not to know it, but a longing for union with God is native to the human soul. Using images of both adherence and pursuit, our present psalm expresses this quality of the soul.... This natural, in-built longing which Saint Augustine spoke in the famous line in the beginning of his Confessions: "You move us to delight in praising You, for You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You....And those who seek the Lord will praise Him. For those who seek will find Him, and those who find Him shall praise Him. Let me seek You, Lord, in calling upon You, and call upon You in believing in You."

This psalm's aspirations after God, nonetheless express a more than human longing, for the desire of our hearts is itself transformed by the Holy Spirit. The inner activity of the Holy Spirit, in fact, is not something merely added to a human amorphous yearning. Only the Holy Spirit can turn the soul's thirst into a prayer pleasing God; "Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves....Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Romans 8:23, 26).... Just as the Holy Spirit is the source of the Church's faith (cf. Rom 8:14; 1Cor 12:3; Gal 4:6) and her charity (cf. Rom 5:5), so is He the fountain of her hope. This is truly the Spirit of longing, for He causes us to yearn for God well beyond even our own ability to aspire. The Spirit's prayer is the one that the Father reads: "Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is" (Rom 8:27). As one of the Bible's most intense prayers of yearning, the words of psalm open the mind to what the Holy Spirit prays to God within our souls.

**10 But they seek for my soul in vain; They shall go into the lowest parts of the earth.**

THEODORET: They were anxious to do away with me, though I had done no wrong...I am aware, however, that they shall be dispatched to death. Then he prophesies the manner of their passion:

REARDON: At the same time, the soul's spiritual enemies are ever present, and they, too, are referenced when our psalm speaks of "those who vainly seek my soul," those destined to be "delivered to the hands of the sword" and to become "the portion of foxes."

**11 They shall be given over to the edge of the sword; They shall be a portion for foxes.**

THEODORET: They will suffer at the right hand of the enemy... This fate will come to them, he is saying not from some powerful foe but from foreign neighbors, who sometimes attack like foxes but often, if driven off repeatedly, take to their heels. Now the immediate interpretation is that most of those who fall in battle will not be thought worthy even of burial, but will end up as carrion [decaying flesh of dead animals] for the wild beasts.

**12 But the king shall be glad in God;**

THEODORET: I on the contrary, he is saying, having received kingship from you, shall take satisfaction not from their death but from your providence, thanks to which I escaped the various schemes of the enemy.

**All who swear by Him shall be praised, For the mouth that speaks unrighteous things is stopped.**

THEODORET: In the future everyone will speak of the king with confidence and swear by his salvation, no longer afraid of slanderers, whose mouth has been stopped in death. While Saul was alive, they were afraid to use that language of David; but after his death everyone then fearlessly accorded him [i.e. David] also of the prerogative due the king and used the king's salvation as an oath, citing it as an honor and a basis of favor.

**A Summary:**

AIMILIANOS: Here you have a brief interpretation of Psalm 63. The psalm's primary message is communion with God, which is to be valued more than "life itself" (v 3). Do we see God? Do we long for God?

How does one draw near to the mystery of God? By means of the following steps and stages that are described in the psalm. The first is nocturnal prayer and the ardent search for God, which we saw in the first verse. When I realize that, without God, I am truly a barren desert; when I feel my inner desolation and the suffering of my flesh, then I will seek God "in the night". We cannot say that we have a spiritual life if we do not rise at night to pray.

The second stage, which appears in the second verse, involves the separation of the heart and the mind from all that is within us and around us. For us there exists only one center of gravity, only one point on the horizon; one object alone is within our view, and this is God. Yet how many thoughts are crowded together in our minds and hearts! Upon how many objects do our eyes fasten! Perhaps we're afraid that our life will become narrow and suffocating if our few Is restricted to one thing alone, and so we rush around desperately looking for something to satisfy us. We desire many things. We accumulate things compulsively; we spend our life collecting and hoarding things, as if we were the proprietors of a cheap junk shop, When I see people whose hearts and minds are distracted by worldly things - and I see this within myself as well - I think: small time proprietors! We have become like petty, small-time proprietors! We waste our time gathering second-hand, discarded objects; we amass things with absolutely no value whatsoever. And so I will renounce everything, become a stranger to all things in heaven and on earth, for what have I in heaven? And besides You, O God, what have I desired upon the earth? (Ps 73:25). In order for my heart to be pure, it must be completely liberated from all earthly attachments, and then I shall know what Christ means when he says, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Mt 5:8).

The third stage emerges from the fourth verse. To the extent that we separate ourselves from the world - so that God becomes the focus of our life and the meaning of our existence - all our strength and all our energies will be placed in His service.

The fourth- stage, described in the sixth verse, is particularly important, involving, as it does, the ceaseless recollection of God and all His benefits. I remembered You on my bed. If we do not continually remember God, even upon our beds, there can be no union with Him. I remembered God and was gladdened (Ps 77:3). And let us also call to mind the words: Do this in remembrance of me (Lk 22:19), which the Lord said when he established the Mystical Supper, the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, which is both a memorial of, and communion with, Christ. Remembrance is thus a form of union, and there can be no union without remembrance. It is therefore essential to remember God, to hold God within memory, for memory fuels desire, and it is by means of desire that God becomes our possession. And thus we become «Words» of God, just as the Word of God became man. The memory of God should be constant, perpetual, ceaseless.

The fifth stage flows from the seventh verse. In light of the comments we made above, we understand how necessary it is for us to have experiences of God's grace and His presence.

The sixth stage, which is the grace of God, appears in the eighth verse. We must realize the following truth: in order to begin to live a spiritual life, I must be vividly conscious of the fact that I am nothing, that I can do nothing, and that I am completely incapable and unworthy. It is only the right hand of the Most High, only God's grace and power that can produce fruit in my spiritual life. Here we think of the words of Saint Symeon the New Theologian: «It is only when I lament and despair that He shows Himself and He looks at me, He who contemplates all creatures». When I have accepted the fact that I can do nothing, when all seems lost, then God visits me, and it is then that I see Him. And what is the result? Life becomes a vision, a delight, and a fulfillment. In the words of the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil: «We have been filled with Your life that knows no end. We have feasted gladly on your inexhaustible nourishment». We are filled with life eternal. We feast on the food of heaven. But this food is not available to people who think that they are something, or that they can accomplish things without God. God cannot commune with people who think like that. Why? Because communion with God is contemplation, a vision of God, given to us by God himself. It is with this in mind that Saint John Chrysostom prays in his Divine Liturgy: «Fill our hearts which joy and gladness, O You Who fulfilled the entire plan of the Father». And Sacred Scripture says rejoice in your youth (Ecc 11:9); and gladness of the heart is the life of man (Sir 30:22). But the world understands these things differently.

God is the one who gives us joy, and we should ascribe all our joy to Him. But what about those times when my life is not joyful? In a word, I am miserable. We should pity the man who does not feel this joy and this celebration. He loves only the earth. He is in love with rubbish and dung (cf. Phil 3:8). He gives God his debris, and when our heart produces only rubbish, it receives very much the same in return from God. The soul that thirsts for God, on the other hand, is continually bathed in divine light. The face of such a person becomes divinely luminous. You see him and you ask yourself, could this man be Christ? Thus the Christian becomes a strange spectacle: a Christ-bearer, a God-bearer, and a Spirit-bearer. He or she reveals the unsurpassable beauty of Christ. And when Christ suddenly appears, resplendent in all His beauty, He fills me with joy, gladness, and sweetness: «Sudden is the change, and strange the transformation, for that which is accomplished within me can not be expressed in words», according to Saint Symeon. Something strange takes place within us, something which cannot be grasped by human thought. And how could it be otherwise? For our «desire for God transcends our desire for the world, and thus it cannot be satisfied by anything in the world».

My desire is for Christ; my longing is for Christ. It is for Him that my life is being transformed. «It is on account of Him that my heart has been wounded (cf. Song 2:5). It is because of Him that my mind has been set afire and groans: I wander and am on fire, searching here and there for You». My path is one of constantly seeking after the Lord. «And I strain my eyes to catch a glimpse of the One I desire, but He is invisible, and evades my sight». But eventually He

rewards my efforts, and, as Saint Symeon says, "I am amazed at the beauty of His form... From every direction He shines upon me the light of His immortal splendor. All of my members are shining with light; I am entirely caught up in His glory, and He embraces me totally. He gives Himself to me, the unworthy one, and I am filled with His love and His beauty. I am sated with divine delight and sweetness. I share in His light, I participate also in His glory, and my face shines just like the face of my beloved Christ, and my entire body becomes luminous. Then finally I become more beautiful than those who are beautiful, wealthier than those who are wealthy, more powerful than mighty kings, and more precious than anything on earth or in heaven, for I possess the Creator of the universe, to Whom belongs all glory and honor now and forever. Amen".

This is how a man of God lives. He seeks God, just like that man who, ordained to linger amid shadows, concentrated all his attention within himself, and with his heart on fire cried "My God, my God, let me see You just this once, in return for which I will give You one of my eyes". And at that moment heaven opened, and the Lord appeared in all His brilliance, all His majesty, all His glory, and all His love. What a breathtaking and brilliant sight! Nothing could possibly be more beautiful. The man was stunned, entranced, ravished. He could desire nothing greater than this. In desperation he cried out: "Take my other eye and let me see You one more time!" He sees Him again. He exults in the vision. He is filled. But he has lost his sight, like the Apostle Paul after the Lord appeared to him in a blinding light (Acts-9:3-9). Yet the eyes of his soul are wide open and they see with brilliant clarity. His heart is trembling with anticipation and desire, and again he cries out: "O my Christ, let me see You just once more, and then You can take me. Just one more time, and then let me die".