

When, as the Gospels tell us, three wise men came to seek the child, the new-born king, they came from the East. They came in order to see the child, that they might pay homage to him, give him gifts. Now, 2,000 years later, it may be time for us to turn once again toward the East, to listen to the wisdom of the East, and be instructed by that wisdom, if we would search for the face of Christ, to see him and know him. The Second Vatican Council wrote: "Catholics, therefore, are earnestly recommended to avail themselves of the spiritual riches of the Eastern Fathers which lift up the whole man to the contemplation of the divine. The very rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches should be known, venerated, preserved and cherished by all. They must recognize that this is of supreme importance for the faithful preservation of the fullness of Christian tradition." Likewise, the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, continually tells us: "The Church must breathe with two lungs, Eastern and Western." And Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has written: "The special path trod by the West as opposed to the East would lead to the breaking up of the foundations of Christian identity if the fundamental intuitions of the early Church were abandoned."

The wise men found the child, and gazed upon his face, and in doing so, saw their king and lord. Can we do as they did? If we would begin this journey, let us return to "the fundamental intuitions of the early Church" and to the spiritual insights of the Eastern Fathers that we may prepare to commemorate the birth of the Lord at Christmas in the year 2002.

Before we begin our journey, let us reflect on the one we are seeking, the anointed one, the messiah of God. We know that he may be sought as a babe, the infant Jesus in swaddling clothes.

We know that he may be sought as a young man, a teacher, rabbi, healer, leader, savior.

We know that he may be sought as a suffering servant, bleeding, humiliated, dying.

We know that he may be sought as a risen Lord, hardly recognizable even to those who had known him best, yet still the same Jesus.

We know that his face may be glimpsed in the faces of children, in the faces of the poor, in the faces of prisoners, in the faces of the hungry and thirsty.

We know that he may be found in the breaking of the bread, as he was found by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, in the liturgy, in the Eucharist.

But we also know that he often seems to be hidden. For a long time, the disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize him. For a long time, we may not recognize him.

What may lift the scales from our eyes?

What may lift the scales from our hearts?

How may our eyes and hearts be cleansed, that we might see him whom we long to see? The beginning, the wise saints of the East tell us, is with prayer – a prayer for sight.

"As a pilot calls on winds and a storm-tossed mariner looks homeward, so the times call on you to win your way to God," writes St. Ignatius the God-bearer. "As God's athlete, be sober; the stake is immortality and eternal life."

The Holy Spirit gives man the power to resist the delusions of the world so that although he makes use of earthly good, yet he uses them as a temporary visitor, without attaching his heart to them. But a man who has not got the Holy Spirit, despite all his learning and prudence, is always more or less a slave and worshipper of the world. –St. Innocent of Irkutsk

The wicked one, on the watch, carried me off as booty as I lazily slept. He led my mind into error; he plundered my spirit and snatched away The wealth of Thy grace, this arch robber. So raise me up, as I am fallen, and summon me, Savior, Thou who wills that all men be saved. –Kontakia of St. Romanos

Repentance is the renewal of baptism.

Repentance is a contract with God for a second life.

A penitent is a buyer of humility.

Repentance is constant distrust of bodily comfort.

Repentance is self-condemning reflection, and carefree self-care.

Repentance is the daughter of hope and the renunciation of despair.

A penitent is an undisgraced convict.

Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of good deeds contrary to the sins.

Repentance is purification of conscience.

Repentance is the voluntary endurance of all afflictions.

A penitent is the source of his own punishments.

Repentance is a mighty persecution of the stomach, and a striking, of the soul into vigorous awareness.

–St. John Climacus

Go and have pity on all, for through pity, one finds freedom of speech before God. –Abba Pambo

Hail, gladdening Light of His pure glory shining forth,  
Who is the immortal Father, heavenly, blessed,  
Holiest of Holies, Jesus Christ, our Lord!  
Now that we have come to the sun's hour of rest,  
We sing to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine.  
Worthiest art Thou to be sung at all times  
With tongue of praise,  
Son of our God, the giver of life alone.  
We pray, let all the world Thy glory sing. –Eastern Orthodox Vespers

Today is the crown of our salvation and the manifestation of the mystery that is from all eternity. The son of God becomes Son of the Virgin and Gabriel announces the good tidings of grace. Therefore let us also join him and cry aloud to the Mother of God: Hail, thou full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

–Orthodox Hymn for the Annunciation

Remember, O my soul, the terrible and frightful wonder: that your Creator for your sake became Man, and deigned to suffer for the sake of your salvation. His angels tremble, the Cherubim are terrified, the Seraphim are in fear, and all the heavenly powers ceaselessly give praise; and you, unfortunate soul, remain in laziness. At least from this time forth arise and do not put off, my beloved soul, holy repentance, contrition of heart and penance for your sins. –St. Paisius Velichkovsky

Make glad, O Jerusalem, and all you who love Sion, keep feast. Today the ancient bond of the condemnation of Adam is loosed. Paradise is opened to us: the serpent is laid low~ for of old he deceived the woman in Paradise, but now he sees a woman become the Mother of the Creator.

O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! The instrument of sin that brought death upon all flesh has become the first fruits of salvation for the whole world through the Theotokos.

For God the All-perfect is born a babe of her, and by His birth He doth set a seal upon her virginity. By His swaddling bands He looses the bands of sin, and by becoming a child He heals Eve's pangs in travail.

Wherefore, let all creation sing and dance for joy, Christ has come to restore save our souls.

–Gloria of the Feast of Aposticha

Let us charge into the good fight with joy and love without being afraid of our enemies. Though unseen themselves, they can look at the face of our soul, and if they see it altered by fear, they take up arms against us all the more fiercely. For the cunning creatures have observed that we are scared. So let us take up arms against them courageously. No one will fight with a resolute fighter. –St. John Climacus

God is a fire that warms and kindles the heart and inward parts. Hence, if we feel in our hearts the cold which comes from the devil –for the devil is cold – let us call on the Lord. He will come to warm our hearts with perfect love, not only for Him but also for our neighbor, and the cold of him who hates the good will flee before the heat of His countenance. –St. Seraphim of Sarov

Be strong in Me; and you, too, Andrew; just as you were the first to find Me, you were found by me; so find the one who has wandered; Do not forget your first skill; from it I shall educate you for this new art. Formerly, naked into the deep sea, now naked into life; Formerly, hunting with a fishing-rod, now taught to fish with the cross; Formerly, you used a worm as bait; now I order you to hunt with My flesh. I alone know what is in the heart. –Kontakia of St. Romanos

Why do you trouble yourself in a house that is not your own? Let the sight of a dead person be a teacher for you concerning your departure from hence. –St. Isaac the Syrian

This is the mark of Christianity: however much a man toils, and however many good deeds he performs, to feel that he has done nothing, and in fasting to say, "This is not fasting," and in praying, "This is not prayer," and in perseverance at prayer, I have shown no perseverance; I am only just beginning to practice and to take pains"; & even if he is righteous before God, he should say, I am not righteous, not I; I do not take pains, but only make a beginning every day." –St. Macarius the Great

The Lord of all gave to His apostles the power of the Gospel, and by them we also have learned the truth, that is, the teaching of the Son of God. As the Lord said to them, 'He who hears you hears Me, and he who despises you despises Me, and Him Who sent Me' (Lk. 10: 16). For we learned the plan of our salvation from no other than from those through whom the gospel came to us. The first preached it abroad, and then later by the will of God handed it down to us in Scriptures, to be the foundation and pillar of our faith. For it is not right to say that they preached before they had come to perfect knowledge, as some dare to say, boasting that they are the correctors of the apostles. For after our Lord had risen from the dead, and they were clothed with the power from on high when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they were filled with all things and had perfect knowledge. They went out to the ends of the earth, preaching the good things that come to us from God, and proclaiming peace from heaven to all men, all and each of them equally being in possession of the Gospel of God.     –St. Irenaeus

O surpassing loving-kindness! Christ received the nails in His undefiled hands and feet, and endured anguish; while to me without suffering or toil, by the fellowship of His pain, He vouchsafed salvation.  
    –St. Cyril of Jerusalem, On the Christian Sacraments

It all depends on us – on whether we wish to be saved.                     –Apophthegmata Patrum

It was said about John the Little that one day he said to his older brother: "I want to be free from care and not to work but to worship God without interruption." And he took his robe off, and went into the desert. After staying there one week, he returned to his brother. And when he knocked at the door, his brother asked without opening it: "Who is it?" He replied: "It's John, your brother." The brother said: "John has become an angel and is not among people anymore." Then he begged and said: "It's me!" But his brother did not open the door and left him there in distress until the next morning. And he finally opened the door and said: "If you are a human being, you have to work again in order to live." Then John repented, saying: "Forgive me, brother, for I was wrong."     –Sayings of the Desert Fathers

When the blessed Eulogius saw an angel distributing gifts to the monks who toiled at all-night vigils, to one he gave a gold piece with the image of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to another a silver piece with a cross, to another a copper piece, to another a bronze piece, and to another nothing. The others who had remained in the church, left the church empty-handed. It was revealed to him that the ones who had obtained the gifts are those who toil at vigils and are diligent in prayers, supplications, psalms, chants, and readings. Those who received nothing or who left the church empty-handed are those who are heedless of their salvation, are enslaved to vainglory and the clamors of life, and stand feebly and lazily at vigils and whisper and jest.     –St. Joseph of Volokalamsk

Those who seek humility should bear in mind the three following things: that they are the worst of sinners, that they are the most despicable of all creatures since their state is an unnatural one, and that they are even more pitiable than the demons, since they are slaves to the demons. You will also profit if you say this to yourself: how do I know what or how many other people's sins are, or whether they are greater than or equal to my own? In our ignorance you and I, my soul, are worse than all men, we are dust and ashes under their feet. How can I not regard myself as more despicable than all other creatures, for they act in accordance with the nature they have been given, while I, owing to my innumerable sins, am in a state contrary to nature.     –St. Gregory of Sinai, Philokalia

We see the water of a river flowing uninterruptedly and passing away, and all that floats on its surface, rubbish or beams of trees, all pass by. Christian! So does our life...I was an infant, and that time has gone. I was an adolescent, and that too has passed. I was a young man, and that too these commandments is laid down like foundations through is far behind me. The strong and mature man that I was is no more. My hair turns white, I succumb to age, but that too passes; I approach the end and will go the way of all flesh. Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom!     –St. Tikhon of Voronezh

The Lord's Day is a mystery of the knowledge of the truth that is not received by flesh and blood, and it transcends speculations. In this age there is no eighth day, nor is there a true Sabbath. For he who said that 'God rested on the seventh day,' signified the rest (of our nature) from the course of this life, since the grave is also of a bodily nature and belongs to this world. Six days are accomplished in the husbandry of life by means of keeping the commandments; the seventh is spent entirely in the grave; and the eighth is the departure from it.     –St. Isaac of Syria

It is better to eat meat and drink wine and not to eat the flesh of one's brethren through slander.

–Abba Hyperechius

When a man walks in the fear of God he knows no fear, even if he were to be surrounded by wicked men. He has the fear of God within him and wears the invincible armor of faith. This makes him strong and able to take on anything, even things which seem difficult or impossible to most people.

Such a man is like a giant surrounded by monkeys, or a roaring lion among dogs and foxes. He goes forward trusting in the Lord and the constancy of his will to strike and paralyze his foes. He wields the blazing club of the Word in wisdom. –St. Symeon the New Theologian

When we lay bare the hidden meaning of history, scripture's seen to teach that the birth which distresses the tyrant is the beginning of the virtuous life. I am speaking of the kind of birth in which free will serves as the midwife, delivering the child amid great pain. For no one causes grief to his antagonist unless he exhibits in himself those marks which give proof of his victory over the other. –St. Gregory of Nyssa

The demons are sleepless and immaterial, death is at hand, and I am weak. Lord, help me; do not let Thy creature perish, for Thou carest for me in my misery. –St. Peter of Damascus

The roof of any house stands upon the foundations and the rest of the structure. The foundations themselves are laid in order to carry the roof. This is both useful and necessary, for the roof cannot stand without the foundations and the foundations are absolutely useless without the roof – no help to any living creature. In the same way the grace of God is preserved by the practice of the commandments, and the observance of –St. Symeon the New Theologian

I shall speak first about control of the stomach, the opposite to gluttony, and about how to fast and what and how much to eat. I shall say nothing on my own account, but only what I have received from the Holy Fathers. They have not given us only a single rule for fasting or a single standard and measure for eating, because not everyone has the same strength; age, illness or delicacy of body create differences. But they have given us all a single goal: to avoid over-eating and the filling of our bellies... A clear rule for self-control handed down by the Fathers is this: stop eating while still hungry and do not continue until you are satisfied. –St. John Cassian

In the matter of piety, poverty serves us better than wealth, and work better than idleness, especially since wealth becomes an obstacle even for those who do not devote themselves to it. Yet, when we must put aside our wrath, quench our envy, soften our anger, offer our prayers, and show a disposition which is reasonable, mild, kindly, and loving, how could poverty stand in our way? For we accomplish these things not by spending money but by making the correct choice. Almsgiving above all else requires money, but even this shines with a brighter luster when the alms are given from our poverty. The widow who paid in the two mites was poorer than any human, but she outdid them all.

–St. John Chrysostom

Every day you provide your bodies with good to keep them from failing. In the same way your good works should be the daily nourishment of your hearts. Your bodies are fed with food and your spirits with good works. You aren't to deny your soul, which is going to live forever, what you grant to your body, which is going to die. –St. Gregory the Great

Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly, the angel who guards you will honor your patience. –St. John of the Ladder

Beguiling and deceptive is the life of the world, fruitless its labor, perilous its delight, poor its riches, delusive its honors, inconstant, insignificant-, and woe to those who hope in its seeming goods: because of this many die without repentance. Blessed and most blessed are those who depart from the world and its desires. – Nazarius the Elder

The soul that really loves God and Christ, though it may do ten thousand good deeds, esteems itself as having wrought nothing, by reason of its insatiable aspiration after God. Though it should exhaust the body with fastings, with watchings, its attitude towards the virtues is as if it had not yet even begun to labor for them. –St. Macarius the Great

Souls that love truth and God, that long with much hope and faith to put on Christ completely, do not need so much to be put in remembrance by others, nor do they endure, even for a while, to be deprived of the heavenly desire and of passionate affection to the Lord; but being wholly and entirely nailed to the cross of Christ, they perceive in themselves day by day a sense of spiritual advance towards the spiritual Bridegroom. –St. Macarius the Great

The hour of death will come upon us, it will come, and we shall not escape it. May the prince of this world and of the air (cf. John 14:30; Eph. 2:2) find our misdeeds few and petty when he comes, so that he will not have good grounds for convicting us. Otherwise we shall weep in vain. "For that servant who knew his lord's will and did not do it as a servant, shall be beaten with many stripes" (cf. Luke 12:47). –St. Hesychius the Priest

Do not seek the perfection of the law in human virtues, for it is not found perfect in them. Its perfection is hidden in the Cross of Christ. –St. Mark the Ascetic

Behold, this is the true and the Christian humility, In this you will be able to achieve victory over every vice, by attributing to God rather than to yourself the fact that you have won. –St. Martin of Braga

Humility is the only thing we need; one can still fall having virtues other than humility – but with humility one does not fall. –Elder Herman of Mt. Athos

When you are praying alone, and your spirit is dejected, and you are wearied and oppressed by your loneliness, remember then, as always, that God the Trinity looks upon you with eyes brighter than the sun; also all the angels, your own Guardian Angel, and all the Saints of God. Truly they do, for they are all one in God, and where God is, there are they also. Where the sun is, thither also are directed all its rays. Try to understand what this means. –St. John of Kronstadt

God descends to the humble as waters flow down from the hills into the valleys. – St. Tikhon of Voronezh

Our holy fathers have renounced all other spiritual work and concentrated wholly on this one doing, that is, on guarding the heart, convinced that, through this practice, they would easily attain every other virtue, whereas without it not a single virtue can be firmly established. –St. Symeon the New Theologian

If you are praised, be silent. If you are scolded, be silent. If you incur losses, be silent. If you receive profit, be silent. If you are satiated, be silent. If you are hungry, also be silent. And do not be afraid that there will be no fruit when all dies down; there will be! Not everything will die down. Energy will appear; and what energy! –St. Feofil, the Fool for Christ

There is nothing impossible unto those who believe; lively and unshaken faith can accomplish great miracles in the twinkling of an eye. Besides, even without our sincere and firm faith, miracles are accomplished, such as the miracles of the sacraments; for God's Mystery is always accomplished, even though we were incredulous or unbelieving at the time of its celebration. "Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" (Rom. 3:3). Our wickedness shall not overpower the unspeakable goodness and mercy of God; our dullness shall not overpower God's wisdom, nor our infirmity God's omnipotence. –St. John of Kronstadt

When anyone is disturbed or saddened under the pretext of a good and soul-profiting matter, and is angered against his neighbor, it is evident that this is not according to God: for everything that is of God is peaceful and useful and leads a man to humility and to judging himself. –St. Barsanuphius the Great

What toil we must endure, what fatigue, while we are attempting to climb hills and the summits of mountains! What, that we may ascend to heaven! If you consider the promised reward, what you endure is less. Immortality is given to the one who perseveres; everlasting–, life is offered; the Lord promises His Kingdom. –St. Cyprian

Even if an angel should indeed appear to you, do not receive him but humiliate yourself, saying, "I am not worthy to see an angel, for I am a sinner," –Apophthegmata Patrum

We should zealously cultivate watchfulness, my brethren; and when, our mind purified in Christ Jesus, we are exalted by the vision it confers, we should review our sins and our former life, so that shattered and humbled at the thought of them, we may never lose the help of Jesus Christ our God in the invisible battle. –St. Hesychius the Presbyter

What purposelessness, oh the deceit of life; truly in vain does each man vex himself, and truly blessed and thrice blessed are those who have left everything for the Lord, that they may attain the good things announced in the Gospels. For what profit will it be for a man to enjoy the whole world, but lose his soul, to which the whole universe is not equivalent? All the splendor of man is like the blossom of grass. For the grass departs and the blossom dies, but the word of the Lord abides for ever. –St. Nicon

The body is a slave, the soul a sovereign, and therefore it is due to Divine mercy when the body is worn out by illness: for thereby the passions are weakened, and a man comes to himself; indeed, bodily illness itself is sometimes caused by the passions. –St. Seraphim of Sarov

Prove your love and zeal for wisdom in actual deeds. –St. Callistas Xanthopoulos

Chastise your soul with the thought of death, and through remembrance of Jesus Christ concentrate your scattered intellect. –St. Philotheus of Sinai

You cannot destroy the passions on your own, but ask God, and He will destroy them, if this is profitable for you. –St. Anatoly of Optina

Do we forgive our neighbors their trespasses? God also forgives us in His mercy. Do we refuse to forgive? God, too, will refuse to forgive us. As we treat our neighbors, so also does God treat us. The forgiveness, then, of your sins or unforgiveness, and hence also your salvation or destruction, depend on you yourself. For without forgiveness of sins there is no salvation. You can see for yourself how terrible it is. –St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, Journey to Heaven.

A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable. –Abba Pimen

The way of humility is this: self-control, prayer, and thinking yourself inferior to all creatures. –Abba Tithoes

Christ is Risen! O the marvel! the forbearance! the immeasurable meekness! The Untouched is felt; the Master is held by a servant, and He reveals His wounds to one of His inner circle. Seeing these wounds, the whole Creation was shaken at the time. Thomas, when he was considered worthy of such gifts, Lifted up a prayer to the One Who deemed him worthy, saying, "Bear my rashness with patience, have pity on my unworthiness and lighten the burden of my lack of faith, so that I may sing and cry, 'Thou art our Lord and God.'" –Kontakia of Romanos

The knowledge of the Cross is concealed in the sufferings of the Cross. –St. Isaac the Syrian

First of all it must be understood that it is the duty of all Christians – especially of those whose calling dedicates them to the spiritual life – to strive always and in every way to be united with God, their creator, lover, benefactor, and their supreme good, by Whom and for Whom they were created. This is because the center and the final purpose of the soul, which God created, must be God Himself alone, and nothing else – God whom Whom the soul has received its life and its nature, and for Whom it must eternally live. –St. Dimitry of Rostov

Those who have truly decided to serve the Lord God should practice the remembrance of God and uninterrupted prayer to Jesus Christ, mentally saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." –St. Seraphim of Sarov

Let us go forward with the heart completely attentive and the soul fully conscious. For if attentiveness and prayer are daily joined together, they become like Elias' fire-bearing chariot, raising us to heaven. What do I mean? A spiritual heaven, with sun, moon and stars, is formed in the blessed heart of one who has reached a state of watchfulness, or who strives to attain it. –St. Philotheus of Sinai

My poor soul! Sigh, pray and strive to take upon you the blessed yoke of Christ, and you will live on earth in a heavenly manner. Lord, grant that I may carry the light and goodly yoke, and I shall be always at rest, peaceful, glad and joyous; and I shall taste on earth of the crumbs which fall from the celestial feast, like a dog that feeds upon the crumbs which fall from the master's table. –St. Tikhon of Voronezh

When despondency seizes us, let us not give in to it. Rather, fortified and protected by the light of faith, let us with great courage say to the spirit of evil: "What are you to us, you who are cut off from God, a fugitive for Heaven, and a slave of evil? You dare not do anything to us: Christ, the Son of God, has dominion over us and over all. Leave us, you thing of bane. We are made steadfast by the uprightness of His Cross. Serpent, we trample on your head." –St. Seraphim of Sarov

Even a pious person is not immune to spiritual sickness if he does not have a wise guide – either a living person or a spiritual writer. This sickness is called prelest, or spiritual delusion, imagining oneself to be near to God and to the realm of the divine and supernatural. Even zealous ascetics in monasteries are sometimes subject to this delusion, but of course, laymen who are zealous in external struggles (podvigi) undergo it much more frequently. Surpassing their acquaintances in struggles of prayer and fasting, they imagine that they are seers of divine visions, or at least of dreams inspired by grace. In every event of their lives, they see special intentional directions from God or their guardian angel. And then they start imagining that they are God's elect, and often try to foretell the future. The Holy Fathers armed themselves against nothing so fiercely as against this sickness – prelest. –Metro. Anthony Khrapovitsky

"Wine makes glad the heart of man" (Ps. 104:15). But you who have professed sorrow and grief should turn away from such gladness and rejoice in spiritual gifts. If you rejoice in wine, you will live with shameful thoughts and distress will overwhelm you. –St. Theodore of Edessa

Acts of charity, almsgiving and all the external good works do not suppress the arrogance of the heart; but noetic meditation, the labor of repentance, contrition and humility – these humble the proud mind. –Elder Joseph the Hesychast

Oh, what great happiness and bliss, what exaltation it is to address oneself to the Eternal Father. Always, without fail, value this joy which has been accorded to you by God's infinite grace and do not forget it during your prayers; God, the angels and God's holy men listen to you. –St. John Kronstadt

What we need is a little labor. Let us endure this labor that we may obtain mercy. –St. Dorotheus of Gaza

For Christians above all men are forbidden to correct the stumblings of sinners by force... it is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority granted us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were, should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice. –St. John Chrysostom

They went down to Egypt and provided food when famine reigned; they came to the obstinate sea, and taught it wisdom with a rod; they went out into the hostile desert and adorned it with a pillar; they entered the furnace, fiercely heated, and sprinkled it with their dew; into the pit where they had been thrown an angel entered and taught its wild beasts to fast. –St. Ephrem

While the Bridegroom tarried, they slumbered and slept: Give ear, you prudent, to our Lord's parable, for it is all light. All of them slept, both the foolish and the wise – which signifies that the good and the wicked die until the resurrection. The same sleep comes upon the ten of them, which is as much as to say, that death is the same for all creation without distinction. One was the sleep of the wise and of the foolish, for one is death, both of the righteous and of sinners. The good die, as the wise virgins slept; and the bad die, as the foolish also slept. Behold, all creation looks for the coming of the Bridegroom, Christ, who comes at the end with His angels. But since He has tarried, all generations slumber and sleep with the sleep of death, while looking for when He comes. –Mar Jacob, Bishop of Serugh

Do all in your power not to fall, for the strong athlete should not fall. But if you do fall, get up again at once and continue the contest. Even if you fall a thousand times because of the withdrawal of God's grace, rise up again each time, and keep on doing this until the day of your death. For it is written, "If a righteous man falls down seven times" – that is, repeatedly throughout his life – "seven times shall he rise again" (Prov. 24:16). –John of Karpathos

No one on this earth can avoid affliction; and although the afflictions which the Lord sends are not great, men imagine them beyond their strength and are crushed by them. This is because they will not humble their souls and commit themselves to the will of God. But the Lord Himself guides with His grace those who are given over to God's will, and they bear all things with fortitude for the sake of God Whom they have so loved and with Whom they are glorified for ever. It is impossible to escape tribulation in this world but the man who is given over to the will of God bears tribulation easily, seeing it but putting his trust in the Lord, and so his tribulations pass.       –Archimandrite Sophrony

The evil one cannot comprehend the joy we receive from the spiritual life; for this reason he is jealous of us, he envies us and sets traps for us, and we become grieved and fall. We must struggle, because without struggles we do not obtain virtues.       –Elder Ieronymos of Aegina

Self-accusation before God is something that is very necessary for us; and humility of heart is extremely advantageous in our lives, above all at the time of prayer. For prayer requires great attention and needs a proper awareness, otherwise it will turn out to be unacceptable and rejected, and "it will be turned back empty" to our bosom.   –Martyrius of Edessa

The enemy of our salvation especially strives to draw our heart and mind away from God when we are about to serve Him, and endeavors to adulterously attach our heart to something irrelevant. Be always, every moment, with God, especially when you pray to Him. If you are inconstant, you will fall away from life, and will cast yourself into sorrow and straitness.       –St. John of Kronstadt

For to despise the present age, not to love transitory things, unreservedly to stretch out the mind in humility to God and our neighbor, to preserve patience against offered insults and, with patience guarded, to repel the pain of malice from the heart, to give one's property to the poor, not to covet that of others, to esteem the friend in God, on God's account to love even those who are hostile, to mourn at the affliction of a neighbor, not to exult in the death of one who is an enemy, this is the new creature whom the Master of the nations seeks with watchful eye amid the other disciples, saying: "If, then, any be in Christ a new creature, the old things are passed away. Behold all things are made new" (2 Cor. 5:17).   –St. Gregory the Great

There was a man who ate a lot and was still hungry, and another who ate little and was satisfied. The one who ate a lot and was still hungry received a greater reward than he who ate little and was satisfied.       –Apophthegmata Patruin

The work of prayer belongs to the angels, and is, therefore, the special concern of the Church. Every other work, i.e., charity, nursing the brethren, visiting the sick, caring for prisoners, releasing captives, and other similar things, is done by the brethren in love and offered by them to God. Similarly, poverty, fasting, sleeping on the ground, prostrations, vigils, etc., are good and like a sacrifice to God, because they aim to subdue and humble the body so that we may be purified and approach God and become friends of God – yet these things do not present us directly to God, whereas prayer does so and unites us with Him. A person praying acts towards God like a friend – conversing, confiding, requesting – and through this becomes one with our Maker Himself.   –St. Symeon of Thessalonica

He who really keeps account of his actions considers as lost every day in which he does not mourn, whatever good he may have done in it.   –St. John of the Ladder

When an archer desires to shoot his arrows successfully, he first takes great pains over his posture and aligns himself accurately with his mark. It should be the same for you who are about to shoot the head of the wicked devil. Let us be concerned first for the good order of sensations and then for the good posture of inner thoughts.   –St. John Chrysostom

Take hold of your life before your light grows dark and you seek help and do not find it. This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits.   –St. Isaac the Syrian

Have unfeigned love among yourselves, keep the tradition, and may the God of peace be with you and confirm you in love.       –St. Paul of Obnora