

“Thank God for everything that happens” (Elder Aimilianos Simonopetritis)

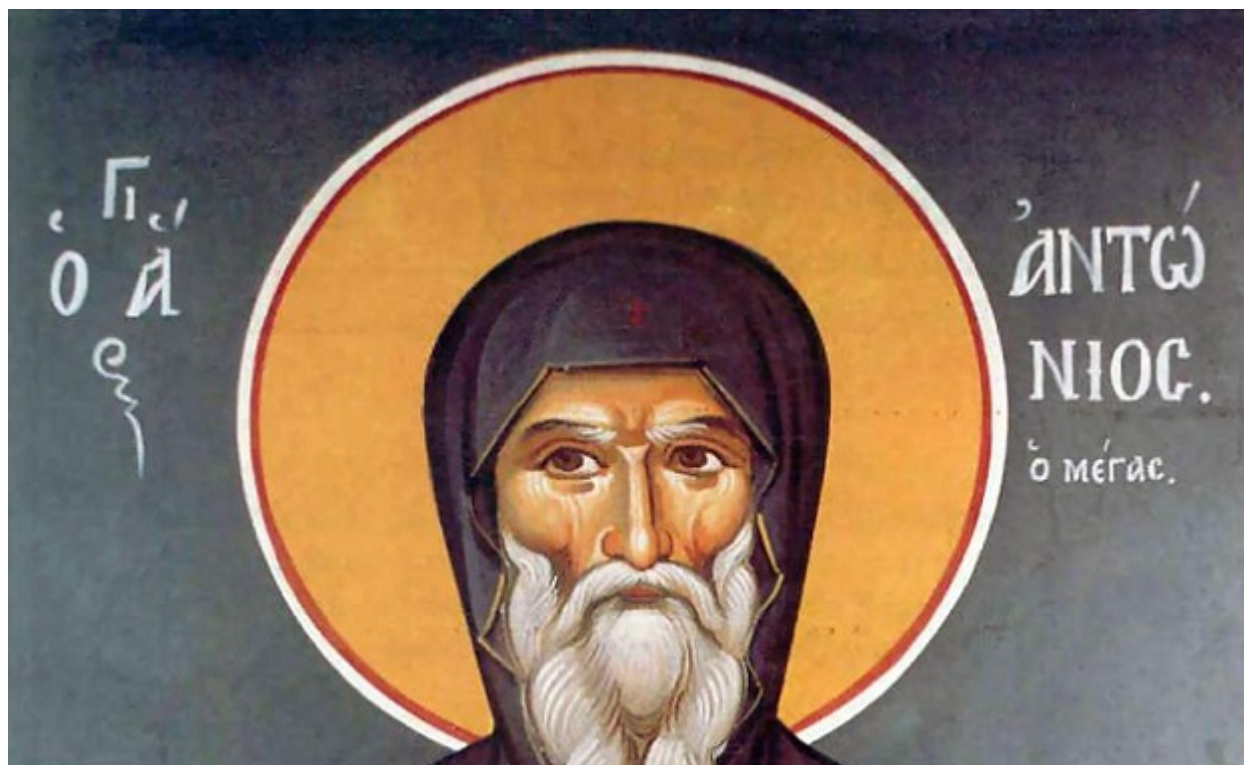
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Above all pray without ceasing and thank God for everything that happens to you

(Rule of Anthony the Great)

Anthony the Great is a realist. His rules or canons aren't some formula he's found and thrown to us. Each of them has something unique concerning the life of the monk and, if one is broken, everything comes crashing down. He says we have to pray without ceasing but at the same time thank God for everything that happens to us. He uses a coordinating conjunction because these two things can't be separated, they go together. We thank God for pleasant things, but even more for something else: in life, matters don't always turn out as we would want them to. We pray, for instance, and it seems that God doesn't listen. We ask for our health, and our illness worsens. We ask God to grant us certain things and He gives us nothing. Everything's back to front.



People who don't learn to thank God for everything, especially for adversity, will never advance even an inch beyond where they were when their mothers bore them. They'll make no progress. And, of course, when their mothers bore them, such people were innocent babes, they had a natural sanctity, whereas we have cruelty, and knowledge that makes us guilty. So we have to learn to thank God. When we have bad thoughts, when our brother says something and we feel hatred within us, we must, at that very time, thank God and smile at our brother. Unless we do so, it's impossible to advance a step, because everything will seem perverse to us. And then, in particular, others and our circumstances will cause us to have bad thoughts, temptations, passions and contrariness.

Ceaseless prayer and gratitude to God for all that happens to us are the necessary conditions for a natural life. If people don't thank God for everything, they can't even pray, nor live in the monastic state. People have to be grateful for whatever happens to them in the monastery, whether that comes from their inner world or from the brotherhood, from enemies or from demons. For instance, a monk has bad thoughts which torment him. He shouldn't be worried, but should rejoice and thank God. He should say to the demon: "Get behind me, Satan" and send him on his way, or, if he refuses to leave, the monk should be able to say: "The bed's big enough for the two of us. Sleep with me. Just turn over onto the other side so that I don't have to put up with your foul breath". The demon will then leave like lightning.

Unceasing prayer and gratitude for everything are directly connected to our

personal rule. In other words, anyone can perform his rule when he learns to pray ceaselessly. And anyone who performs his rule can have unceasing prayer. If he wants to separate his rule from unceasing prayer, both will come tumbling down. This is basic and we must remember it. Miss your rule for two days and you'll see that you'll forget to say "Glory to you, our God" even once a day. That's a law.

Archim. Aimilianos of Simonopetra, Νηπτική ζωή και Ασκητικοί κανόνες (Neptical life and ascetic rules), Indiktos Eds, Athens 2011, pp. 5-6.