

What is Noetic Prayer of the Heart? (Archimandrite Georgios Kapsanis, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Gregoriou †)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The remembrance of God in a person reveals communion with God and is therefore like a prayer. The effort of constantly calling upon of the holy name of Christ using the prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, sinner that I am', continually renews the remembrance of God and communion with God. It's because of this, that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: 'Pray unceasingly'.

With the remembrance of God and prayer, people reveal the true nobility of their nature, which is the border between the visible and invisible world and 'deification in Christ'. They overcome physical necessity, and extend their existence to God, feeling free from anything which holds them captive on earth.

However, for prayer to be real, it must be prayer of the whole person and not solely of the lips, the mind or of the heart.



Perfect prayer is noetic and at the same time of the heart. The mind prays within the heart, which is the centre of our existence. Thus the whole person, from their innermost self and their centre, prays, fulfilling the injunction of God: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbour as yourself'. The whole person is offered to God.

For this prayer, the 'prayer of a single thought' ('Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, sinner that I am') is used, which with its concise invocation helps in the concentration of the intellect and immersion of the mind into the heart.

From their experience, the holy- Niptic- Fathers wrote about the way and method of this prayer. There is a collection of these works by these holy Fathers called the Philokalia. And the word philokalia (which means love of the beautiful) is very much to the point. With the noetic prayer of the heart, believers are united with God, see God, Who is all that's most beautiful in the world, supreme beauty.

Because there's a risk of some confusion between prayer of the heart and the various modes of meditation and prayer, as is the case with the Eastern religions, perhaps I should clarify some issues:

1. Not only the 'prayer of a single thought' ('Lord Jesus Christ...'), but every prayer

of the Church, such as the absolute basic, God-given, Lord's prayer, the "Our Father", must be noetic and of the heart, that is, it must come from our deepest innermost being.

2. The acquisition of the gift of unceasing noetic prayer of the heart for us Orthodox, isn't so much a question of method and technique, but one of a contrite heart, meaning a heart which repents, feels pain for its sins and is humbled. Without this type of heart, no method or technique of prayer, such as the use of inhaling and exhaling, will be able to bring true prayer.

3. The noetic prayer of the heart presupposes our participation in the life of the Church, in its sacraments, the observance of the commandments of God and obedience to a spiritual guide. In other words, it isn't an individualistic-private approach to God. Within the Church, humble Christians receive the Grace of God and, of course, along with their own co-operation and will, it activates true prayer within them.

In concluding the theme of prayer, I would like to say that people today have an extraordinary need for prayer in order for them to be able to withstand being absorbed by the contemporary, profoundly materialistic way of life where they're forgetful of their godlikeness, that is, their divine origin and their divine destination. And also for them to be able to maintain their internal unity, balance and peace within the immense distraction, imbalance and extraversion of the modern world. For them to be able, with the feeling of the presence and providence of God always in their life, to refrain from becoming 'anxious', from falling into despair and experiencing the world as an empty and meaningless place.

Through the continuous invocation of the most sweet and holy name of Christ they will feel Christ in their heart, they will avoid sin, they will cultivate feelings of love for God and their fellow human beings, they will themselves become peaceful and in turn provide peace to those in their surrounding environment.

Allow me, if I may, to provide a brotherly piece of advice from the spiritual tradition of Mount Athos: the more times a day we say, with desire, the prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ...', the closer to God we'll be and the more Grace and strength we'll receive so as to be able to deal with the various difficulties and temptations of life.