

Evangelical Monasticism - Part 1 (Abbot Georgios Kapsanis of Gregoriou)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is glad tidings [Gospel= *gōd* 'good' + *spel* news], because it brings into the world not only a new teaching, but a new life to replace the old one. The old life was dominated by sin, passions, corruption and death, and ruled by the devil. Despite its 'natural' joys, it leaves a bitter taste, because it's not the real life that people were made for, but a life corrupted and diseased, which is why it's marked with the feeling of absurdity, emptiness and anxiety.



The new life is offered to people by our theanthropic Christ as a gift and a potential for everyone. The faithful are united with Jesus Christ and so they partake in His divine and immortal life, that is eternal= real life.

A prerequisite for people to be united with Christ and to be resuscitated is that they should first die, through repentance, as regards the people they formerly were. People have first to crucify and bury their former selves (i.e. egotism, passions and selfish will) on the Cross and in the Grave of Christ, so that they can arise with Him and 'walk in the newness of life' (*Rom. 6, 4*). This is the work of repentance and the acceptance of the Cross of Christ. Without repentance, that is the continuous crucifying on one's former self, it's impossible for the faithful to believe in a Gospel manner, that is to give up the whole of themselves to God and to love 'the Lord God with all their heart and with all their soul, with all their mind and with all their strength' (*Mark 12, 30*).

This is why the Lord made repentance the foundation of His Gospel message and a condition of faith. "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (*Mark 1 15*). Nor did he conceal the fact that the life of repentance is a difficult, uphill struggle. 'Narrow is the gate and full of sorrow the path that leads to life' (*Matth. 7, 14*). And that by treading it you reveal that you've taken up the Cross of repentance. Because our former selves don't retreat without violence, and the devil isn't defeated without a hard-fought battle.

A monk or nun promises to follow the narrow and sorrowful way of repentance throughout their life. They wrench themselves free of the things of the world in order to acquire the one thing they desire, to die to their former life in order to live the new life, which Christ offers them through the Church. Monastics pursue perfect repentance through continuous ascetic effort, vigils, fasting, and prayer, together with the cutting off of the will and unwavering obedience to their Elder. With all of this they force themselves to deny their own egotistical will and to love the will of God. Monastics are 'a continuous forcing of nature'. In this way they fulfil the saying of the Lord: The kingdom of heaven is taken by violence and people of violence seize it' (*Matth. 11, 12*). Through the birth-pangs of repentance, the new person who lives according to God is gradually born.

Integral to the struggle of repentance is the fight for continuous vigilance over thoughts, so that they [monastics] can cast off every wicked and diabolical thought that attempts to sully them. In this way, they keep their hearts clean, so that they may behold God, in accordance with the Beatitude that says: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'.

Victory over egotism and the passions makes monastics gentle, peaceful and humble, literally 'poor in spirit', and participators in all the virtues of the Beatitudes. It also makes them like children, such as those Christ blessed and asked all of us to imitate if we want to enter His Kingdom.

The whole life of monks and nuns is a study in repentance, their moral bearing that of penitents. Monastics are experts in the science of repentance, those who 'inscribe the life of repentance' (Canon 43, Sixth Ecumenical Synod) for the whole Church. Mourning and tears of repentance are the most eloquent sermon.

Their whole way of life [or 'habit', a play on words by the Elder] judges 'people in the world'. And unless those people who are silently judged by the monastics share in the repentance of the latter, it repels them, they scorn it, hate it, consider it foolish. But God chose what is foolish in the world, what is weak, what is low and despised, in order to shame the wise (*1 Cor. 1, 27*).

Indeed, monastics, wise in the ways of God and foolish according to the world, are strangers in the midst of the world, as was the Son of God. He came to his home and His kin didn't receive Him (*Jn. 1, 11*), didn't understand Him. Sometimes even people in the Church, the wise and active, don't either.

Their mystical and silent lives are a seven-sealed mystery for those who don't share in its spirit. The latter think that the former are socially useless and bereft of any works on the missionary front. So their lives are hidden with Christ in God and will be manifested in glory when Christ, their life, is also made manifest (*Col. 3, 4*).

(to be continued)