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On the World and Family by Elder Ephraim of Arizona

Ξένες γλώσσες / In English / Γέρ. Εφραίμ Φιλοθείτης-Αριζονίτης





1. May an angel of God, my child, follow you and show you the path of God and of your salvation. Amen; so be it. I pray that God gives you health of soul, for this is a special gift of sonship which is bestowed only upon those souls that have been completely devoted to the worship and love of God.

The world attracts the youth like a magnet; worldly things have great power over the newly enlightened soul that just started to find its bearings and see its purpose in life and the duty calling him. “Friendship with the world is enmity with God. Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” **[1]** God has stored up pleausres for eternity, for both He and our soul are eternal. There is no comparison between the pleasures of the world and the pure pleasures of God.

The pleasures of the world are obtained with toil and expenses, and after their momentary enjoyment, they are followed by various consequences, so that they are incorrectly called pleasures. The pleasures of God, however, do not have such consequences, because spiritual pleasures down here on earth are the firstfruits of an eternal series of pleasures and delights in the kingdom of God. Whereas on the contrary, one who has been corrupted by the pleasures of the world is compelled to

undergo eternal damnation along with the first instigator of corruption, the devil.

The time of our life, my child, has been given to us as a sum of money so that each of us may trade for his salvation, and depending on the trade we deal in, we shall become either rich or poor. If we take advantage of the “money” of time by trading to increase our spiritual wealth, then we shall truly be skilled traders, and we shall hear the blessed voice: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.” **[2]**

At the end of our life, an exact account will be demanded of each one of us: how and where we spent the money of time, and woe to us if we have squandered it in movie theaters, in entertainments, in debauchery, in futile dreams, in carnal pleasures. Then what defense will our tied tongue be able to utter, and how will we be able to lift up our eyes and see our Christ, when He enumerates the countless benefactions which His boundless love profusely poured upon us?

Now that we have time, now that the money of time has not yet been spent completely and we still have it at our disposal, let us reflect sensibly on the vagrant world which seeks to rob us. Let us push it away like a putrid dead dog, and with that money let us run to buy precious works which, when tried by fire, will become very brightgifts worthy of our Holy God, fit to be used as a decoration in the holy Jerusalem of Heaven. We should not purchase chaff, that is, punishable works of darkness, for we shall go down with them into the eternal fire of damnation, where the multitude of people who embezzled God’s gifts will reap whatever they sowed! Sow good works with tears, and then in a time of visitation you will reap the sheaves of enjoying eternal life!

2. It is from God that you are being tested, because He is training you for battle; He is drilling you, just like the soldiers who are trained through severe labors in their drills. There, first they learn the theory of warfare, and then at the sound of the trumpet in the real war, since they have already been trained, they rush into the battle with the inner assurance that they know how to fight, and they are ready to sacrifice themselves for their cause and ideology.

You are also in a similar situation: since you have been called to become soldiers of Christ and to fight against His enemy, He trains you in order to ascertain your love towards Him: “Who is it that loves me, but he who keeps my commandments?” **[3]** Take courage, my children; remain loyal and dedicated to Him Who has loved you

with perfect love.

Before a battle begins, the generals boost the soldiers' spirits by singing various battle hymns and relating various stories of heroic deeds to kindle their sense of self-sacrifice. This tactic gives them great strength and bravery in the battle about to be fought.

Likewise, we too should contemplate, as the Saints did, the struggles of the martyrs and of the holy monks: how they lived ascetically, how they renounced the world and everyone, and how nothing prevented them from following the path that leads to Jesus. This contemplation will greatly strengthen your good disposition and intention, for there have been many who were unaware of the concealed traps, with the result that their souls succumbed to temptation and thus they fell from the hope of eternal life.

Contemplate the love of our Jesus; the love of Jesus will overpower every other natural love. The more we renounce, the more love of God we shall enjoy.

Let us attend on high, where Jesus sits at the right hand of God. Let our eyes look on high, for the eternal and everlasting things are above, not below; for everything here is dust and ashes. Reflect on the luxuriousness of heaven: the infinite wisdom of God is there; inconceivable beauty is there; the angelic melodies are there; the riches of divine love are there; the life free from pain is there; the tears and sighs will be taken away there; only joy, love, peace, an eternal Pascha, and an unending festival are there, "Oh, the depth of the riches and knowledge of God!" **[4]** "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." **[5]**

Attend to the prayer; persevere in prayer, and it will put everything in order. Do not yield at all; remain firm in your holy goal. Remain beside Jesus to live with spiritual happiness. There is no happiness anywhere except in Christ. So-called "happiness" outside of Christ is incorrectly called happiness, since it is obtained with reprehensible means and since it ends quickly and leads man to the eternal unhappiness.

Struggle, my children; the angels are weaving crowns with flowers of paradise. Our Christ regards the struggle as a martyrdomwhat is more excellent than to be a martyr for Christ!

3. I received your letter, my child, and we all rejoiced at your firm desire and wonderful aspiration for monasticism. "I have chosen to be an outcast in the house of my God rather than to dwell in the tents of sinners." **[6]** May no other love

separate you from the love of Christ; consider everything rubbish so that you may gain Christ. The sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the future glory which will be given to those who struggle. **[7]** Now is the time for struggles, afflictions, and labors for God; whereas the future is the time for crowns of eternal glory, rewards, praises, and dwelling together with the holy angels beside the supreme throne of God.

Youth passes by silently; the years roll by quietly, imperceptibly, like the water in a creek; hours disappear like smoke in the wind. This is how the present life passes and vanishes. God's strugglers advance toward eternal prizes of glory, whereas the indolent and lovers of the world proceed towards an eternal damnation with the demons.

The allurements of the world and its pleasures will transform into eternal affliction and pain for those who delight in them, if they do not repent. While on the contrary, for the people of God a little deprivation will be recompensed by an eternal felicity and blessedness of God.

Do not let familial affection hinder you; reflect that you will be alone in the hour of death, and then you will need to have God as a helper. So if you love Him more than them, you will have Him. But if you succumb, you will reap the crops of bitter remorse all on your own. So for the love of our Christ, make the decision and begin your new life.

4. (To a spiritual daughter)

Everything depends on your will. Entreat our Panagia very fervently to warm your holy desire, so that you decide with self-denial to renounce the vain world along with that dream which is called life, and to follow Christ the Bridegroom, Who will give you Himself and His sweetest love, and will count you worthy to become an heir of His kingdom. Entreat the Panagia to help you make the holy decision, and when she does, make the sign of the cross and follow the salvific voice of Jesus, saying: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." **[8]**

In the dreadful hour of death, no one will help us; only the good works that we have done for God and our soul will help us. Therefore, since the monastic life in general consists of Works of God which are very conducive to our soul's salvation, why shouldn't we sacrifice everything to live such a life which will make us rich in the kingdom of God? "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and

loses his own soul?” **[9]**

The life of man hangs by a hair; at every step, our life hangs in the balance. How many millions of people woke up in the morning, never to see the evening? How many millions of people fell asleep, never to wake up? Indeed, the life of man is a dream. In a dream, one sees things that do not exist: he might see that he is crowned a king, but when he wakes up, he sees that in reality he is just a pauper.

In this life that we live, man labors to become rich, to become educated, to have an easy life, to become great; but unfortunately, death comes and foils everything. Then what he labored for all his life is taken by others, while he leaves life with a guilty conscience and a soiled soul. Who is wise and will understand these things and will renounce them and follow Christ the Bridegroom, so that all the works he will do will be recompensed infinitely in His kingdom?

Always, my daughter, remember death and the judgment of God which we will unavoidably undergo. Bear them in mind to have more fear of God, and weep for your sins, because tears console the soul of him who weeps.

5. My spiritual daughter, I pray that peace and divine joy may accompany your life. Amen.

I received your letter and saw your joy. I pray that this joy will be the firstfruits of a continual spiritual harvest, of a new life totally dedicated to the unrivaled love of God. Now you have experienced the fruits of the Spirit. If you were so invigorated by experiencing a little, how much more will you be invigorated when you find yourself in a completely spiritual environment!

Everywhere and until the end of our life we shall undergo temptations: even in a monastery, even in the wilderness, if we happen to be there. However, if we are far from the world we shall have the freedom to fight the battle in an open place, where we shall be able to gather spiritual reinforcements to help us, with high hopes of eternally winning the prize for which we have been called heavenward. **[10]** Here we have no continuing city, but we seek a future, eternal, glorious one! **[11]** The form of this world is passing away, **[12]** whereas he who does good works abides unto the ages.

Struggle, my child, with all your strength. Do not give joy to Satan by neglecting your duties, but give him bitterness by performing them with precision and eagerness. Satan will not stop shooting poisoned arrows at you with various

thoughts, and especially with filthy thoughts. But prepare yourself to battle valiantly to obtain the unfading crown. As soon as a bad thought appears, immediately destroy the fantasy and say the prayer at once, and behold, your deliverance will come!

Do not be afraid when you see the battle, lest you lose your morale; but invoke the Almighty God and humble yourself very much. Rebuke yourself with the worst names and convince yourself that this is how you really are. And then from this point begin the battle with the prayer. Be careful, for the battle we conduct is not slight; we have to fight with principalities and powers, and it takes prudence and caution to fight well, for something good is not good if it is not done properly.

I pray that you have a good fight, and be careful with the people you keep company with….

With many prayers and blessings,

Your lowly Elder

Endnotes

1. Jas. 4:4
2. *Mt. 25:23. Webmaster note: One is reminded of very similar "economic" analogies in St. Seraphim of Sarov's conversation* with Nicholas Motovilov: "What do you mean by acquiring [the Spirit of God]?" I asked Father Seraphim. "Somehow I don't understand that." "Acquiring is the same as obtaining," he replied. "You understand, of course, what acquiring money means? Acquiring the Spirit of God is exactly the same. You know well enough what it means in a worldly sense, your Godliness, to acquire. The aim in life of ordinary worldly people is to acquire or make money, and for the nobility it is in addition to receive honours, distinctions and other rewards for their services to the government. The acquisition of God's Spirit is also capital, but grace-giving and eternal, and it is obtained in very similar ways, almost the same ways as monetary, social and temporal capital. "God the Word, the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, compares our life with a market, and the work of our life on earth He calls trading, and says to us all: Trade till I come (Lk. 19:13), redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16). That is to say, make the most of your time for getting heavenly blessings through earthly goods. Earthly goods are good works done for Christ's sake and conferring on us the grace of the All-Holy Spirit. "In the parable of the wise and foolish

virgins, when the foolish ones lacked oil, it was said: ‘Go and buy in the market.’…

3. cf. Jn. 14:21
4. cf. Rom. 11:33
5. 1 Cor 2:9
6. Ps. 83:11
7. cf. Rom. 8:18
8. Mt. 16:24
9. Mk. 8:36
10. cf. Phil. 3:14
11. cf. Heb. 13:14
12. 1 Cor. 7:31

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