27/02/2020

About sickness, demons and fasting



The disciple’s question

Father, I suffer terribly from rheumatism, and I am afraid that it is from demons. Tell me if this is so. What is it, then, that I see in dreams, on the wall, some wild beasts? I am very upset because I cannot fast and I am forced to eat a lot. What should I do?

The answer of the Elder

Don’t be sad, my beloved brother. Your physical illness is not from demons, as you think, but it is a rheumatism allowed by God’s pedagogical will for our improvement, if we receive it with gratitude. Wasn’t Job a true friend of God? And the end of his patience led him to an unthinkable glory. So, be patient, too, and you will see the glory of God.

About fasting though, don’t be sad. As I have told you before, God does not ask for anything more than we are able. But what is fasting—other than a teaching of the

body, for the submission of the healthy body and for the weakening of its beginning toward passions?

For Saint Paul says, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” And, so, your disease is above pedagogical strife—and he, who endures it patiently and thanks God, is counted ahead of asceticism or even more, and gathers through patience the fruit of salvation.

So, you should not weaken your body in fasting when it is weak in itself. Thank God that you have been delivered from the toil of the restraint. Ten times, I say to you: do not grieve. If you will eat, you will not be damned. This does not come from the work of demons, or from the flutter of thought, but comes to test ourselves for the benefit of the soul.

And dreams with wild beasts are delusions from devils who want to trick you into believing that your illness is theirs. But the Lord will drain their power with the word of His mouth through the prayers of the saints. Amen.

Don’t be sad. “For whom the Lord loves, He corrects. Just as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.” I believe that God will have mercy on you and your bodily disease as He pleases. May the Lord give you power and strength to support yourself. Amen.

Based on Saint John the Prophet from Gaza

A moment in the courtyard of the Vatopedi monastery, Mount Athos.

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