

Response by John

If you know that they would gladly receive the word of God, then speak from the *Lives of the Fathers*, and transfer the topic of conversation to the salvation of the soul.

Conversation and temptation

709. *Question.* So is it good to invoke the name of God when in conversation with someone?

Response by John

It is necessary to invoke the name of God both during conversation with someone and before such conversation, as well as after the conversation, and indeed at every time and in every place. For, it is written: "Pray unceasingly" (1 Thess 5.17). This is how every temptation is abolished.

On praying without ceasing

710. *Question.* And how is it possible for someone to pray unceasingly?

Response by John

When one is alone, one should recite the Psalms and pray with one's mouth and one's heart. However, when one is in the marketplace, or with other people, it is not necessary to recite the Psalms with one's mouth, but only with one's mind. It is also necessary to guard one's eyes and to lower them, on account of the distraction and snares of the enemies.

The power of prayer

711. *Question.* When I pray or recite the Psalms, I do not understand the meaning of the words on account of the hardness of my heart. Of what benefit are they to me?

Response by John

Even if you do not understand the meaning of the words, yet the demons understand it and hear it and tremble at it. Therefore, do not cease reciting the Psalms and praying; and gradually, God will soften the hardness.

On praying at meal-times

715. *Question.* If I am sharing a meal with some of the fathers, and one of them has already blessed the food at the table, should I first say: "Bless me!" before eating, and wait for him to bless me again, or should I be satisfied with the first blessing? Because, sometimes his mind happens to be elsewhere and he delays in responding, and I am always grieved. Or is it perhaps good enough for me to make the sign of the Cross over the food that I am about to eat?

Response by John

He has blessed the food once, and this is more than enough. As far as making the sign of the Cross, this too is not necessary. For the blessing is a seal in itself. In fact, you would be giving occasion for the one who blessed the food or, indeed, for any other person present, to think that you do not trust his blessing; and this will cause a scandal.

three times and many times. Therefore, do not be ridiculed, brother, but pay attention to yourself.

Unceasing prayer

425. *Question.* When it seems that the thought is calm and not being afflicted, is it not a good thing at that time to refrain from invoking the name of the Master Christ? For the thought suggests to me that since we are now calm, there is no need for it.

Response by Barsanuphius

We should not have such peace, if we consider ourselves as being sinners. For it is said: "There is no peace for the wicked, says the Lord" (Is 48.22). If, then, there is no peace for the wicked, then what sort of peace are you experiencing? We should be afraid, because it has been written: "When they speak of peace and security, then all of a sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape" (1 Thess 5.3).

There are also times when the enemy craftily makes the heart find a little rest, in order that it may not invoke the name of God. For, the demons are not ignorant of the fact that they are annoyed by the invocation of God's name. Therefore, knowing this, let us not cease invoking the name of God for our assistance; for, this is the best prayer. It is also said: "Pray unceasingly" (1 Thess 5.17), and unceasingly implies without end or limit.

On thoughts during prayer

427. *Question.* If, while I am reciting the Psalms or praying or reading, an inappropriate thought arises, should I pay attention to it and interrupt my psalmody or prayer or reading in order to oppose it with appropriate thoughts?

Discerning good from evil

406. *Question.* Once the supposed good of the demons is exposed, explain to me how one can escape the danger that comes from it?

Response by Barsanuphius

We are always obliged to regard the good as being good. However, if the good is tested in the act and found to be evil, it is necessary to reject it in the same way as someone who finds something to drink and thinks that it is good, but on tasting it finds it to be bitter. Then, immediately, one spits it from one's mouth, even while one's mouth becomes numb through the bitterness. The same happens with chestnuts, almonds, and the like. Of course, that person is not to blame for the taste. However, if the same person learns about its bitterness and persists in consuming it, filling his stomach with the bitterness, then one can only blame oneself.

The same also applies here. Therefore, if a person is deceived but afterward learns and says: "I have been deceived, Lord Master, forgive me," God will forgive that person, for he is merciful. Learn this, too, beloved one; God does not allow us to be tempted beyond our capacity (cf. 1 Cor 10.13). So in all things, let us offer supplication to him, and he will distinguish for us the good from the supposed good. To him be the glory to the ages. Amen.

On dreams

418. *Question.* I have heard that if a dream appears three times, then it is true. Father, is this so?

Response by Barsanuphius

This is not true. Nor should you believe in any such dream. For the one who appears to us once in the form of a lie, can also do the same