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The Enduring Truth of the Lord's Commandments

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"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Mathew 24:35).

We often hear the view that God is not relevant, that God does not give the contemporary world a way to be happy and enjoy life. It is also said that other worldviews and ideologies can offer such benefits. Such temptations are not specific to modern times, however. In the parable of the prodigal son, we see how someone can turn his back to God and only remember the Heavenly Father once his condition has become completely hopeless. As such, the prodigal passes from death to a new life, a life which is freely given only by turning towards God and accepting His love.

In today's technologically-driven world, with the widespread availability of instant communications and where air travel has made the world feel smaller, how can we not question the continued relevance of the Gospel? While our constant interaction with technology may distract us, the truth remains that the modern world has not provided an answer to the most timeless of humanity's preoccupations, namely how to overcome death and achieve immortality. The only one who has provided an answer to that fundamental question is the God-Man Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ. Only in Him, can we uncover the immensity of human splendor and start to savor the Divine Glory. And only then can we pretend to have truly progressed beyond all ages. This is exactly what has occurred to the Saints of the Church and why they are so revered among the faithful. The Saints followed God's Wisdom and became illumined.

In order to illustrate God's Wisdom as it relates to spiritual life, two particular commandments of the Lord will be mentioned. The first relates to relations between the two sexes. Man was created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). From that first moment, man is given the possibility to participate in the life of the Trinity, communicate with God, glorify Him, and receive His grace. In this attempt to transform our entire life into a continuous doxology of God, the union between a man and woman has its natural place. God is love (1 John 4:16). Our relation to God must be based on love. And the conjugal relation must be completely focused on love, not only in the narrow carnal sense, but with respect to the much broader horizon of human personhood.

Marriage is therefore an important sacrament for the Church. In marriage, God blesses the union of two persons and helps them undertake the process of mutually sacrificing themselves for the benefit of the other, in order to find complete fulfillment in one another. Only by sustainably enveloping this union with Christ's love can our immense human potential be fully realized. Marriage is only one path towards God. The other path is the total and complete devotion to God, as embodied in the monastic calling. As the Apostle Paul states, "For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one

has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that” (1 Cor. 7:7). As a result, celibacy should always remain a question of free will, to be chosen with the grace of God.

Prayer is the second virtue which we will mention. Every prayer of the Church constitutes a spiritual labour of the human mind. Through the use of a great many expressions, we glorify, thank, ask and implore the Lord. An especially noetic type of prayer is the Jesus prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*. The Jesus prayer is addressed to the Lord, who created us in His image and continues to give us life. To Him we ascribe all glory. We also confess that this Lord is also the historic God-Man Jesus Christ, who was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man, in order to save us. As the Son of God, we proclaim that Jesus Christ is the second person of the Holy Trinity and that it is through Him that we encounter the Father through who the grace of the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost and remains with us until now in the Church, the Lord’s Body.

With humility, we therefore ask of the Savior, this most perfect God and most perfect man, to have mercy on us. The humble person feels within the depths of his heart the tragic condition which sin has created. He feels the extent of the distance between himself and his Creator. With the Jesus prayer, we ask the Physician of our soul and body to heal us from our afflictions. With love and goodness, the Lord waits for each one of us, in order to provide us with the singular experience of the therapy of our illness and the inexpressible joy that results from our personal encounter with Him. Our prayer leads to the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is like standing in the middle of an Orthodox Church, sheltered by the *Pantocrator* on the dome, who rules and sustains the Church as well as our own existence. Just like the Church is the place where we prepare to approach the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and receive the Lord Himself, the Jesus Prayer prepares us to accept and maintain the Lord within us.

The healing of the blind near Jericho can serve to illustrate our own struggle with the prayer. In the world, we are often blind, living in darkness and in ignorance of the mystery of God. As we sense the True Light approaching, we call out like the blind man: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” At that precise moment, many temptations and syllogisms will arise to distract us from receiving the True Light. But like the blind man, we must insist and continue to cry out to Him by name. When Jesus asked the blind man: “What do you want Me to do for you?” The blind man answered that he would like to receive sight. Then Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, glorifying Him.

When we persevere in the prayer with faith and patience, we feel the Lord standing affectionately beside us, like a true father who removes the darkness and brings forth the light which fills us with life. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). The Lord offers us the opportunity to follow Him, just like the blind man did, and to glorify Him continuously. At the Transfiguration, when the Lord appeared before the Apostles in His Divine Glory, Peter said: “Master, it is good for us to be here” (Luke 9:33). The Apostle’s spontaneous response underlines humanity’s ultimate destiny, which is to partake in the Glory of the Son and to receive His Kingdom.

It goes without saying that the Jesus Prayer should be practiced in conjunction with an active participation in the Sacraments of the Church and under the direction of one’s spiritual father.