

“The Sweetness Of Grace”

by Constantina Palmer

Study Guide

Antiochian Women Book Club

2018

This book has eight sections, each named after one of the Beatitudes taught by Jesus and recorded in St. Matthew 5:1-10. In each section, we will find several stories which help us understand and apply that Beatitude to our life. The questions will attempt to encourage reflection, remembrance, repentance and renewal in our lives so that we may “rejoice in God our Savior.”

Section One

“Blessed are the Poor in Spirit”

Apples from Paradise

1. (pg 14) – The thought is put before us about simple tasks and our feeling that we are contributing to an important goal. The author mentions sweeping leaves from the cobblestones at the monastery. Can you think of simple tasks you can do for the well-being of your temple or at the homes of parishioners in need?
To do a simple task for someone in need brings joy to you and a thankful heart to those you help.
2. (pg 15) – The author speaks of a form of exile (living on an island, a 12-hour boat ride from the nearest point of mainland, and being the only Orthodox parish on the island).
In St. John Climacus’ (from the Greek word klimax: ladder) book “The Ladder of Divine Ascent” we read about a ladder from earth to heaven with 30 rungs. The first is Renunciation, then comes Detachment; then we come to the rung of Exile. This was written primarily to monastics, but in recent times has been applicable to all Christian life, not as strict or intense as monasticism.
In our busy lives, can we experience “exile” in a given place? Do we have a prayer corner or a special place set apart to pray and meditate? A quiet place and a time when we will not be interrupted?
3. (pg. 15) “Not only does St. John Climacus say it is the fastest route to humility, exile is a means to remember we are all foreigners and our true home is heaven.”
In one of Fr. Schmemmann’s books, “Great Lent”, he writes, “humility is learned by contemplating Christ who said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart”. (Matthew 11: 29) Can we develop a habit of going into exile and spend time contemplating Christ? Remember the book, “Becoming a Healing Presence”.
4. (pg. 15-16) - When St. Euphrosynos the Cook of Alexandria gave apples from Paradise, what blessings must have come to the receivers. Are there instances in your life in which you either gave or received such “apples”? Because of his great obedience and humility, he was blessed to visit the true Paradise.

Visitations of Grace

1. (pg. 16-17) - There are times in which God allows grace to descend upon His people. Some may be more dramatic than others, but all are precious. Some have been physically “uplifted” as the Presvytera (priest’s wife) like St. Mary of Egypt and St.

Seraphim of Sarov. Some may have experienced that inwardly. Have you or someone you've known had a visitation of grace?

2. (pg. 17) - On the subject of "indiscriminate giving", St. Paul's words come to mind: "For God loves a cheerful giver" (II Corinthians 9:7). The word "cheerful" is the Greek word "hilarion", which in English is "hilarious!" Do you find giving to be a joyful, hilarious experience of grace?
3. (pg. 19) - The sweetness of grace has been felt by many when being anointed with holy oil at Chrismation, Holy Unction or at times of illness. Can you relate experiences of God's mercy upon you in those, or other times?

A New Name Known Only by Him Who Receives It

1. (pg. 20) - Names mean something. Oftentimes, grace comes to us through our name. You remember how Joseph and Mary were instructed to give the name Jesus (God saves). Abram (Abraham), Jacob (Israel), Simon (Peter), Saul (Paul) received new names from God. Some are given biblical or saints' names at birth. Others receive patron saints' names at baptism. Would you share something about your name?

Making Use of the Mammon of Unrighteousness

1. (pgs. 21-22) - Although mammon is most often taken to mean money or riches, it also alludes to those things in everyday life which draw our attention. This can distract us from God but, as this article indicates, can be used for our spiritual benefit. Can you give some examples? Solemn words from St Seraphim of Viritsa: "There will come a time when not the persecutions but money and the goods of this world will take people far from God. Then many more souls will be lost than in the time of persecution." (From 2015 Daily Lives, Miracles and Wisdom of Saints and Fasting Calendar)
Can these words encourage us to share what God has given us with the poor or anyone in need?

Confess Thoroughly

1. (pgs. 23-25) - When we are tempted to forsake a commitment to a task or sever a meaningful relationship as this nun did, the good counsel of the abbess should be considered: "Make a thorough confession regularly and acquire humblemindedness." If the nun had been confessing regularly, as the abbess recommended, and shared her thoughts and concerns completely, might she have seen that there was no offence nor compulsion to stay in the monastery? Do you confess regularly and completely?

The Poison of False Belief

1. (pgs. 25-27) - When someone of another faith seeks to convert us to their thinking, we often fall into a debate mode. We are advised in this article to refrain from that conversation and avoid listening to their heretical teaching. St. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Give no heed to fables of endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification." (I Timothy 1:4) Have you been involved in such a situation and found it frustrating? Have you found more joy and grace in speaking with someone sincerely seeking and inquiring?

Radiating Grace from the Kliros

1. (pgs. 27-29) - Orthodox hymns are filled with the sweetness of grace when sung from the heart by those who are poor in spirit (humble). Constantina expresses this through the words of the abbess. What are your experiences in your parish through the seriousness and piety of the chanters and choir?

Contemplating the Virtue of the Theotokos

1. (pg. 30) - Are there some places for you in which you seem to feel closer to the Theotokos? Do you visit those quite often?
2. (pgs. 30-31) - The author notes that, of all her virtues, the obedience and purity of the Theotokos can teach us everything. Are these two also meaningful for you? Are there others which have helped you as well?

Humility: Our Sure Guide

1. (pgs. 32-34) - Someone wrote that humility is the mother of all the virtues. St. Dorotheos (6th century) of Gaza wrote, "Any virtue existing without humility is no virtue at all." In this section, we are reminded of the need for humility as it relates to the Church and its teachings. Can an Orthodox Christian be humble before God while being neglectful of the Church?
The author writes, "Humility is perfect acceptance of all that the Holy Spirit does through the Church. Humility is remaining faithful to the Church. For the Church functions in accordance with Christ's commands. Without the Church we do not have Christ. To follow the Church is to follow Christ. In obedience we fast. In obedience we feast. In obedience we accept everything in the Gospel, in our Orthodox Faith."

Obedience is Better than a Pure Sacrifice

1. (pg. 35ff) - Do you have a spiritual father or guide? If so, has it been a good experience? Does this section shed light on your understanding of obedience to spiritual guidance?
2. (pg. 35ff) - Our culture stands in opposition to this subject of obedience to spiritual directors. Individuality and independence are urged upon us. How would it change your life if you submit to a spiritual father?

The Virtue of Virtues

1. (pg. 39) - A hasty reading of this section may lead one to think that prayer rules, prostrations, fasting, reading God's Word are not really for us and should be avoided. Do you agree?
Do you think if we do, or try to do, the above without humility, we can grow in our faith? Should we try to acquire humility and then practice the above disciplines? Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Publican) (Luke 18:1-8). They both went to the Temple to pray. The Pharisee stood and prayed with pride and condescension, while the Publican prayed with humility and shame. Jesus teaches that they both prayed (practiced the disciplines) but the one was proud while the other was humble. The latter was justified.
2. (p 39) - How, then, does one acquire humility and the other beneficial virtues in our Christian life? How does humility become our guiding principle? Referring back to Fr. Schmemmann's book (A-3), he writes, "We become humble by contemplating Christ, the divine humility incarnate, Christ who said, "learn from Me for I am meek and lowly". We learn humility by measuring everything by Him, by referring everything to Him. Without Christ, true humility is impossible."

Where the Morning Dawns

1. (pgs. 40-42) - The author paints a verbal picture of the spiritual struggles we face in this life: darkness, cold, wind, storms, etc. So, too, do the Scriptures remind us that we pass through this world of difficulties before entering the joys of the kingdom of God. Recall a difficulty that led you into the joys of the Kingdom of God.
2. (pgs. 40-42) - As the sun rises in the East, giving light and warmth to the Earth, so do we look to the East with hope of the Son of God coming to gather us. Does this hope come to your mind often or in times of distress? You may refer to the following passages of Scripture:

Zechariah 14:4 – “And on that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the East.”

Matthew 24: 29-31 – “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Acts 1: 11-12 – “.... Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey.”

Section Two

“Blessed Are Those Who Mourn”

Hope in Eternal Life

1. (pg. 44) Since Elpida had suffered so much in her physical illness, her hope for eternal life had begun to grow dim. How did the words of Elder Paisios renew her hope?
2. (pg. 44) What was Elpida’s response to the holy elder’s gift of love to her?
3. (pg. 44) – Sometimes physical illness and infirmity can have serious effects on our mental and spiritual condition. In such times, words of hope and expressions of encouragement can be of much help. Have you been in any such situations when someone spoke words of hope and assurance to you?
4. (pg. 44) – Putting yourself in Elpida’s place, would the elder’s words and embrace have had such a positive effect on you?

Harnessing an Experience of Grace

1. (pg. 45) There are some places on this earth where the grace of God seems so strong to some people. Thus it was for Sr. Ephraimia at this monastery. Have you found that place where you can live in Paradise? Can you tell about it?
2. (pg. 45) St. Silouan beautifully writes his experience of thanksgiving and joy that God had sought him and drawn him with love. When one has such a deep longing for God and yearning to be with Him, is there anything that can hinder our seeking Him with all our heart? *“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13)*
3. (pg. 46) There seems to be something within us that is always calling us “home”. Our true home is to dwell where God is, to rest in Him, to know the joy of His presence. How did Sr. Ephraimia use this experience at the monastery to work harder in her spiritual struggle?
4. (pg. 45) – The account of Sister Ephraimia’s experience at the monastery vespers service brings to mind the grace available to all of us in the services of the Church. Is this the case in your parish? Have you sensed such grace in the services of your church?
5. (pg. 46) – What were the results in her life after that experience? Might some of those results also take place in our lives?

Balaam's Donkey: Prayer as a Means of Divine Enlightenment

1. (pg. 47) Constantina tells of her learning disability and the prayer her grandmother gave her, "Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind". How did she use this prayer during her school years?
2. (pg. 47) From her description of her "healing", is it quite clear that this was a work of God – of His grace and willingness to hear our prayers?
3. (pg. 48,49) What lessons did this experience teach Constantina about prayer and God's goodness?
4. (pg. 49) The author uses the example of Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22: 20-35) to remind us that we would lack wisdom and understanding were it not for God leading us. Can we also humbly accept God's help in our search for wisdom?
5. (pg. 47,48) – The author's account of her learning struggles may remind some of us of our own experience or that of someone we have known. Here is a powerful testimony that "the effective fervent prayers of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). Do you believe that prayer can help those with learning difficulties?
6. (pg. 49) – The story of Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22: 20-35) teaches us that God can give us valuable lessons of wisdom and understanding even through simple, uneducated people. Do we ever miss God's messages by thinking that only the intellectuals and high-minded can teach us?

On the Feast of St. Spyridon

1. (pgs. 50,51) – As the lady shared her story of a miracle attributed to St. Spyridon and how it blessed the hearers, we may reflect on the conversations that occur at our coffee hours. Do you often hear of saints and miracles and God's glory in the parish hall?
2. (pg. 52) – What characteristic or act defining St. Spyridon is most meaningful to you?

Panagia Malevi

1. (pg. 52) Besides writing the Gospel and the Book of Acts, St. Luke was also a gifted iconographer. Many of his icons were images of the Theotokos (which, indeed, she blessed). How many icons are credited to St. Luke?

2. (pg. 52, 53) In 717AD, a monastery was built on the site that is now the Holy Monastery of Panagia Malevi, but by the time monks came from the Holy Mountain (Athos) to re-establish the monastery in 1116AD, only ruins remained. They brought with them the icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos. The icon became a greater source of spiritual joy in 1964 when it began giving off streaming myrrh. Many times in our lives, we might feel that only ruins remain. Discuss what God provided that gave us hope and the will to move on.
3. (pg. 54,55) In the context of this delightful story of joy and laughter, we see again how the Theotokos hears the simple, heart-felt prayers of the faithful and proves again to be the “undisputed intercessor of Christians” (Kontakion of the Theotokos). Have you experienced this gift of God to us?
4. (pg. 53) – There have been many accounts of myrrh-streaming icons recorded throughout the world. Have you had the opportunity to venerate one of these? If so, what was your response?

To Be “of God”

1. (pg. 56) In the abbess’ words, we are reminded that to become “of God” we face our struggle and confess to God that we are His even while in the “furnace” or the “lion’s den”. St. James wrote, “count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience”. (James 1:2,3) St. Paul wrote, “We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance”. (Romans 5:3) Can you share how God has worked with you through difficult times?
2. (pg. 56) The author refers to the Three Holy Youths facing the dread fiery furnace and their absolute trust in God. Think again on their words to the king in those moments, “God will deliver us from your hand, O king, but if not we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image”. (Daniel 3: 17,18) The scripture does not say, “in the fountain of flames they were not burnt” but rather “they rejoiced in the fountain of flames as though in the waters of rest”. Can we rejoice always and pray without ceasing and in everything give thanks? (I Thessalonians 5: 16-18) Through many difficult situations, can we come nearer to this truth?
3. (pg. 56) – To face our struggle, to convince God that we are His even while “in the furnace” is, according to the author, part of our becoming “of God.” Struggles, hardships, suffering are experiences which the fathers affirm help us become spiritually stronger. Have you had such experiences? Did you sense God at work? St. Paul wrote, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*” (II Corinthians 1: 3,4).

4. (pg. 56) – This event also points to the role of faith in the work of salvation. In Daniel 3:17-18, the youths said, “God will deliver us from your hands, O King. But if not, let it be known to you that we will not serve your gods.” Might this be a phrase to encourage us in times of trouble: “but if not”?

The Subway-station Publican

1. (pg. 57,58) There are so many references in the Scriptures to the poor and destitute among us. How profound it is to hear St. Paul’s words, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you, through His poverty might become rich”. (II Corinthians 8:9) Have we not always seen how God returns a blessing to those who help the poor?
“Blessed is he who understands the poor and needy; the Lord will deliver him in an evil day.” (Psalm 40:1)
2. (pg. 57) – Would you have had the same response, as the Palmers, to the beggar in the subway station, comparing him to the publican in the Gospel?

The Light of Life

1. (pg. 59) Which three saints did Constantina’s friend find a connection with as she prayed for relief from smoking?
2. (pg. 60) What did that friend see in the pillar of light which reached into the sky from the site where the martyrs were put to death?
3. (pg. 60) Do you believe, as the author concludes, that there is no bad habit too strong for God to deliver us from?
4. (pgs. 58,59) – The Psalmist wrote, “A broken and humbled heart God will not despise.” This lady with a smoking habit was very sorrowful and sought the saint’s intercessions. The Lord heard her prayers. Does this give some hope to those with addiction?

Our Family Saint: St. John Maximovitch

1. (pg. 61,62) What elements in the story of the nurse help us to see how effective the intercession of a saint can be?
2. (pg. 61) What two cities were blessed to live under the oversight of St. John Maximovitch? In which city can one visit his incorrupt relics?

3. (pg.61) What is meant by the term “incorrupt relics”?
4. (pg. 63) While praying fervently to St. John, Constantina was plagued with impatience and discouragement when her husband didn’t seem to be changing. Do we sometime expect God to work on our schedule or the saints’ prayers to bring immediate results?
5. (pgs. 60-64) – Do you believe that the prayers and guidance of the saints really do have an effect in our lives today? Any examples?

The Holy Monastery of St. George

1. (pg. 65) – The sweetness of grace can sometime come to a person who is not seeking with all their heart. This is not to say that we should adopt a casual approach to God – not at all (remember Nathaniel in John 1). But we see what change it brought in these lives. Any comments?

Giving the Saints Something to Do

1. (pg. 66) Which saint is recognized as a great intercessor for those beset with demonic temptation and influence? Why, according to the text, is this the case?
2. (pg. 67) Who was used by God to enlighten him and show him the truth that would bring him to Christ?
3. (pg. 67) We hear of two other saints who have become special intercessors for those suffering torments in body and soul. Who are they? Have you thought of asking their help in such circumstances?
4. (pg. 68) As the author makes the point that we do not take the opportunity to ask for the prayers of the saints, will we examine our own personal experience and faithfully seek the intercessions of the holy saints?
5. (pg. 66ff) – With so much mental illness and psychotic behavior manifest in the present world, why do you think there seems to be so little prayer to the saints who could and would help?
6. (pg. 68) – A few years ago, our Bishop Basil of Wichita, reminded us that St. Raphael of Brooklyn – recently canonized – would welcome our prayers because “he doesn’t have much to do yet.”

A Miracle of St. John the Russian

1. (pg. 69) Could the man treating the paralyzed man have been St. John the Russian? Have some saints been allowed to visit among us at times?
2. (pg. 69,70) Can you give some examples, in this text, showing the humility of St. John?
3. (pg. 71) The presvytera finished her story by repeating the point that the man in the pajamas wasted no time in offering his thanksgiving for God's mercy and healing. Remember the story of the one leper (out of ten) who came back to give thanks? (Luke 17: 11-19)
4. (pg. 68) – Does the man wearing pajamas bring to mind the one leper who returned to give thanks to Jesus after being healed? When God gives that sweetness of grace, is there anything more appropriate than returning our thanksgiving to Him?
5. (pgs. 69,70) – Does St. John's humble and faithful service to this earthly master remind us that we, as Christians, should be good and diligent, respecting those over us? Our Lord came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28).

The Good Shepherd

1. (pg. 71ff) We certainly believe that our God is just and loving. Have you ever had a time when you doubted that God would not do the loving thing?
2. (pg. 72,73) Some of us might find Fr. Theodore's story difficult to accept --- that God would permit the death of a child to draw parents into the Church. Might we also think about parents giving their all to encourage and lead all their family into God's kingdom through the Church?
3. (pg. 72) – Losing a child to illness and death is so grievous for parents – we would all agree. Therefore, for the time we have them – from birth to adulthood – we must surely do all we can to lead them to know and love God. This will not avoid the pain of death, but could it make the heartbreak easier to bear?
4. (pg. 73) – Do you think that parents who lose a child to death might be moved to follow after Christ through the Church and meet that child in heaven?

Blessed Contemporary Co-strugglers

1. (pg 73ff) – This story calls to mind that familiar scripture, “Behold, how good it is to dwell together in unity.” (Psalm 133:1) The love and caring these two exhibited is a model for us to follow. Please share together this thought.
2. Keeping that thought, look at the examples in the life of St. Paul: Barnabas, Timothy, Onesimus, Philemon, Onesiphorous, Luke. Do we all need friends – those who are close to our hearts – loyal, dependable, trustworthy?
3. In the book, “Theology of Illness”, we learn that endurance and patience in the midst of pain and suffering can bring much reward of sweetness of grace.

No Distance in the Spiritual Life

1. Have you ever lost someone you love either by death or relocation on this earth? Did you have an opportunity to speak with them before the separation and if so, what did you choose to say? If not, do you regret not speaking with them before parting?
2. Did you find the separation easier to bear with those whom you share the faith, knowing we believe in the ever present and eternal communion of saints? Has that been a difficult aspect of being separated from someone with whom you do not share the faith?
3. Are there special places that you remember spending time with those you have been separated from and do those memories or visiting those places give you comfort? Have past experiences of being separated from others encouraged you to be more mindful of the time you have with those around you in the present? Do you spend your time around others in a productive, meaningful way creating memories and bonds that will survive separation?

Section Three

“Blessed Are the Meek”

Do You Want to Meet a Holy Elder

1. (pg. 77ff) - Clearly, the person and presence of Elder Gabriel gave a greater benefit on the group than did his words (although they were inspired as well). Have you ever met or spoken with a holy elder? Do you sense the sweetness of grace when you are with a holy person?

A Saint Not Bound by Space

1. (pg. 81) - The subject of incorrupt relics is often met with disbelief by many in these modern times. Further, the veneration of relics may be frowned upon as well. Do you find the existence of holy relics and testimonies of miracles from them to bring hope and strength in your spiritual experience?
2. Are the stories of relic-related miracles believable to you? Does the Church offer sufficient guidance and teaching on this?

Be Angry and Sin Not

1. (pg. 83-84) - Most would agree that anger is common to all people, although more evident in some than in others. The author indicates that this is a passion given to all to be used for good. Do you agree? Why?
2. If anger is “there in us” might we then examine two things:
 - a. The causes or sources of my angry responses
 - b. How and toward whom I express my anger

“Be angry and do not sin” (Psalm 4:4) From St. John Chrysostom: “.....Be angry with the devil and not your own member. This is why God has armed us with anger. Not that we should thrust the sword against our own bodies, but that we should baptize the whole blade in the devil’s breast”. (Footnote on Ephesians 4:26 in the Orthodox Study Bible)

Clothing the Lilies of the Field

1. (pg. 84-85) - Jesus spoke about worry in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6: 25-34). Therein, He asks several questions for us to consider:

- a. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?
- b. Are you not of more value than they?
- c. Which of you, by worrying, can add one cubit to his stature?
- d. Will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?
- e. Seek first the kingdom of God ... and all these things shall be added to you.

The Apple Doesn't Fall Far From the Tree

1. (pg. 85-87) - Our Orthodox Church is often criticized for “giving no place to women” or putting only men in places of authority. We can certainly answer those incorrect charges. However, within the Church family, we are so grateful for the sweetness of grace that comes through our mothers Tears, smiles, tenderness, laughter, emotion, embarrassment! Have you had some of those blessed times?
2. Fr. Andrew's mother, Mary, became Orthodox at age 80. One day, she asked Bishop Antoun, “What should I call him?” With a smile and that deep voice, Saidna replied, “Mary, you call him anything you want to!”

Rejoice, You Through Whom Creation is Renewed

1. (pg. 87-88) - Sometimes, we may become so accustomed to the icons in our temples and homes that we give them little, or no, attention. Meanwhile, they continue to be sources of grace in our midst. Do we need to renew our appreciation for these “windows into heaven”?

Fool, Your Soul is Demanded of You

1. (pg. 90) - Our Orthodox Church does teach that the soul is immortal (not dying). Another translation for soul (psuche) is “life”. We read, “God breathed in his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Genesis 2:7) Let us be as mindful for the health of our soul as well as our body. Discuss ways the Church has prescribed for us to develop and maintain a healthy soul.

A Few Good Stories

1. (pg.92) - We are indeed cautioned about accepting our dreams as reality or as coming from God. However, there are occasions in Holy Scripture when God did speak through a dream (Jacob -ladder; Joseph – sheaves; Peter – sheet; etc.). If there appears something in your dream that rings true, would you ask your priest or bishop?
2. (pg. 93) - “His good work was rewarded” said the nun. As we pray in the Divine Liturgy, “Be mindful of those who do good works in Your Holy Church”. Have you, or

someone you know, been blessed/rewarded for doing some good work in the Church? St. Paul wrote, "We were created in Christ Jesus for good works." (Ephesians 2:10)

3. (pg. 94) - It is sad that there are those who reject the practice of baptizing infants and children. Giving young children the opportunity of meeting Christ in the waters is one beautiful way of fulfilling our Lord's command: "Let the little children come to Me; do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven". (Matthew 19:14) Can you share a specific example of God blessing a child in baptism in your parish?
4. (pg. 94,95) - Several times in the Gospels we read that Jesus said, "your faith has made you well". While we do not presume upon God, we are taught by our Lord and the Holy Church to exercise our faith. Likewise, we can also rely on the faith of our fathers and fellow Christians. How did this young man exemplify that kind of faith? Is this also available to us?
5. (pg. 95) - As in (3) above, we can gladly accept the wonder of a young child recognizing and responding to holy things and holy persons. Have you begun early in the lives of your children and grandchildren bringing them into the services and acquainting them with holy things (icons, crosses, incense, etc.)? The following is a quote from St. Tikon of Zadonsk: "Many parents teach their children the arts that serve the temporal life and spend no small sum on it, but they neglect the Christian teaching and are remiss in teaching their children to live as Christians. Such parents beget their children unto the temporal life but close the door to the eternal".
6. (pg. 96) - Many Orthodox Christians have felt the threats and deceitful acts of the evil one during times of spiritual intensity (such as Great Lent, Holy Advent, pilgrimages, etc.) and even divine services and personal prayers. Can you find guidance from the example of Jesus in His temptations (Matthew 4: 1-11) and from St. James: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).
7. (pg. 96) - The Theotokos was chosen by God, not only to give birth to Christ, but also to care for Him as He grew to manhood. The Church has, from the beginning, looked to her for protection through her intercessions. Have you prayed for her protection in your life?

A Holy Monastery: A Silent Teacher

1. (pg. 99ff) - The author was able to hear many spiritual lessons as she observed the life of the monastery. Can you note those in the few paragraphs in this sub-section? Look for: inspired to chant, silence, listening and reading, beauty in creation, glory of God.

Like This Little Child

1. (pg. 100) - "Children are so naturally guileless and pure that introducing them to an environment of prayer and good works.....impresses on their hearts a genuine example of what it is to serve Christ." Every parent (and parish) wants the best for their children. Is there really any doubt as to whether the Orthodox Christian life is better than the alternative being pushed by the world around us?
2. (pg. 101,102) - When children are presented with fasting from scripture and the Church's teaching, they will gladly participate because they want to please God and do the right thing. Do you agree?
3. (pg. 102,103) - In those formative years of discovery, learning and achieving, children seem to cherish a challenge. Shouldn't we encourage them to learn the Bible, the services, the faith, etc. before their minds become seedbeds for secularism, worldly values, etc.?

He Condescended

1. (pg. 104) - In a sense, the act of the elder in coming down to meet the abbess speaks of what Christ did for us. The ultimate act of humility and love in all history is the Son of God emptying Himself of the glory of Heaven and becoming a mortal human being even to serve and die for us. Are we so mindful of this that we are willing to humble ourselves for others as the elder did?

Conforming to Christ

1. (pg. 106) - While the act of turning the diskos (plate for the communion (bread/lamb) toward himself may seem trivial, it does remind us that we are called to conform our lives – minds, thoughts, speech, manners – to that of Christ Himself. Isn't that what we mean by repentance and submission?
2. (pg. 106) - Furthermore, Fr. John rightly understood that this led to a wider application. As obedient Orthodox Christians, do we understand that we are not free to change the services, the prayers, the calendar, the Creed, etc. for our convenience nor to please ourselves? Where would we be if everyone practiced the worship and daily life by doing it "my way"?

Section Four

“Blessed are Those Who Hunger and Thirst After Righteousness”

A Prayer Request for Archangel Michael

1. (pg 107) – In this story, we are presented with two miraculous happenings – the spring of holy water attributed to Archangel Michael and the arrival of bottles from many places requesting his prayers. Does this confirm for you that God extends His heavenly grace and power into this earthly realm?

Attending the Services in Mind and Spirit

1. (pg 109ff) – What fasting period and major feast does the Church remember during the month of August? Is this kept faithfully in your parish?
2. (pg 109) – What are some of the acceptable reasons why some monastics are excused from attending the services? Does this mean that just any excuse is permissible for absence?
Luke 14:16-24 – Parable of the Great Supper
3. (pg 111) – Can you attend a church service in body but be absent in your mind? How important is it to us, as Orthodox Christians, to participate in the divine services with our whole person?

Freedom from Cares

1. (pg 113, 114) – This story reveals how disappointments and adverse circumstances can strain our emotions in the wrong direction. What kept Constantina from giving in to anxiety or despondency?
I Peter 5:7 – “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”
2. (pg 114) – She felt a sense of freedom in this situation and expressed it in the verses. What two things (last line in each verse) gave this freedom?
John 8:36 – “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

An Unassuming Vision of an Unassuming Saint

1. (pg 115) – This friend of Constantina’s felt that the Christ he had been taught was not the true Christ. Do you agree that through the Creed, the Fathers, the Councils, the divine services, etc. that the Orthodox Church does, in fact, teach the true Lord Jesus Christ?

2. (pg 115) – How is it that, by seeing the figure of Elder Joseph, this man was assured that he had found a spiritual guide? Can one find the true Christ also through holy people?

Not to Send Them Away Hungry

1. (pg 118) – Truly, this multiplication of icons in the box must have been the hand of God. Does this remind you of the time when Jesus fed the 5000 with five loaves and two fish (Matthew 14: 13ff)? Do you remember the widow and the jar of oil (4 Kingdoms 4:1ff)? Are there other such acts of God you can discuss?

Unending Podvig

1. (pg 119) – Have you felt, as Constantina did, that you had not kept the Lenten fast well and, therefore, felt unworthy to rejoice in the feast of Pascha?
2. (pg 120) – Our spiritual struggle in prayer, fasting, etc. is quite pronounced during a season of fasting. However, can we also see that the battle against temptation, sin and the passions does not end with a feast?
Ephesians 6:18 – “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”
I Thessalonians 5:17 – “Pray without ceasing.”

Open to Me the Door of Repentance

1. (pg 120ff) – The author concludes from this story that people may sometimes be denied blessings of grace due to a lacking in their spiritual condition. Might we recall that an angel was appointed to guard the gate to the Garden of Eden after the fall of Adam and Eve as detailed in the book of Genesis?
This also brings to mind the experience of Mary of Egypt. She was barred from entering the church to venerate the Holy Cross until she repented. Can you take time to reflect on this in your life?

Miraculous Leaven

1. (pg 123-124) – On which two special days does the “prozimi” (blessed bread dough) rise on its own accord? Would you consider this miraculous?
2. (pg 123) – According to Elder Isidoros, how is this to be made? Have you, or someone in your parish, done this?

The Miracle-working Icon of St. Seraphim

1. (pg 126) – According to the people of St. Nicholas Cathedral, what was special about the icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov? By what means did this happen?
2. (pg 127) – How long did St. Seraphim pray while kneeling on a rock?

Out of Love

1. (pg 127 footnote) – What are the basic foods from which we fast in the Orthodox Church?
2. (pg 128) – As the professor stated, the motivation for our fasting is our love for God, not to punish ourselves. Have you found that fasting and prayer, rooted in love for God, does bring us a sense of joy and strength?
3. (pg 128) – Reflecting on the life of St. Anthony in the desert, do you find it also surprising that he took some time for enjoyment with the brethren?

It's in the Little Things

1. (pg 130) – Is it possible, as the author concludes, to live an authentic spiritual life in the “everyday world”? What does the Church offer us to help us in that journey?
2. (pg 130) – St. Porphyrios believed that we can become saints in the middle of the city IF WE WANT TO. In other words, it is a matter of our will, isn't it? Can we ask ourselves, as Jesus asked the paralytic by the pool, “Do you want to be healed?”
3. (pg 131) – Although we may not be able to structure our life as a monastic can, we can exercise discipline and self-control over our senses, such as eating, speaking, listening, etc. List some of the ways you can begin this in your life.

Witnessing

1. (pg. 132) – As the author recounts a number of saints whose lives attracted people to them and to their God, can we reflect how this was so evident in the life of Jesus? Crowds gathered about Him, listened to His teaching and brought their lives to Him. Has your heart been warmed and drawn to a holy person? Have you also found this true in the Divine Liturgy and reading Scripture?

Having Only Made a Beginning

1. (pg 134) – What was it about Sr. Seraphima that had such an impact on Constantina? Was it her strength? Her endurance? Her knowledge? Her love?

2. (pg 134) – She notes, “True love is firmly rooted in humility”. Read I Corinthians 13 again. How many of the attributes of love, as listed by St. Paul, are connected to humility?

O Beloved Orthodoxy

1. (pg 136) – Can you confirm the nun’s concern about being a minority as an Orthodox Christian? Has this happened to you...at work, in your neighborhood, among relatives? Have you heard this from your children in their schools? How can we build the confidence we need to stand strong? Has your priest been helpful?
2. (pg 137) – Does the piece written by Joseph Vriennios inspire you? Does it strengthen your resolve to live an Orthodox life?

Drink of This, All of You: Keeping a Prayer Rule

1. (pg 137) – Customarily, a person’s prayer rule is given by that ones’ priest or spiritual father. Have you asked for or been given a prayer rule? Do you keep it regularly? If so, has it been effective in your life?
2. (pg 138-139) – Sometimes, our prayer rule may involve both spiritual (inner) and physical (outer) dimensions. Do you see how these can affect one another? Think about how mental stress can take its toll on your bodily strength and energy.
3. (pg 139-140) – Must we avoid two major enemies to our fruitful prayer, procrastination and pride? Are there other factors that have harmed your prayer life?

Section Five

“Blessed are the Merciful”

Blessed are the merciful

1. (pg 143) – The elder’s advice, “Just don’t you do”, was helpful for the author. We are faced here with understanding the difference between condemnation and reproof.

Bp. Theophylact wrote on Matthew 7:1 – “He (Christ) forbids condemning others, but not reproofing others. A reproof is for another’s benefit, but condemnation expresses only derision and scorn.” (The Explanation of the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew by Blessed Theophylact – pg. 63)

St. Paul, in most of his epistles, gave instruction about right living and corrected their errors. He wrote that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction for instruction in righteousness”. (II Timothy 3:16). His aim was to build them up, not to destroy them.

“Let all that you do be done with love”. (I Corinthians 16:14)

Should we condone improper behavior or practices; or should we give guidance to improve the behavior and practice rather than condemning someone?

Can accepting reproof from someone, as well as giving reproof to others close to us, be an aid in our spiritual growth?

In nurturing and raising children, are we concerned with their behavior? Can we reprove, correct and have mercy on them while bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?

“Godly parents know how to train their children to find pleasure in the good and pain in what is wrong, mistaken and sinful.”

The Promise of Mercy

1. (pg 147) – Even though Constantina could not verbalize her request in specific terms, did the elder understand her need? Did he give her an answer to her request?
You might refer to Romans 8:26....”the Holy Spirit helps us.”

More Blessed to Give Than to Receive

1. (pg 147ff) – We usually think of almsgiving today as giving our tithes and offerings of money to the Church through our local parish. While that is good and right, what are some other means of giving to others?
2. Do you, or someone you know, look for ways to contribute to the needs of your parish family and the house of God?

Leaving Home and Going to the Land God Showed Us

1. (pg 150ff) – The author candidly writes of her disappointment in the level of spirituality she found in Greece...expecting much more. Have you sensed that there is sometimes a gap among Orthodox people, between what we say, what we believe, and how we live?

Let Him Call for the Elders of the Church

1. (pg 153) – Why did Constantina’s friend make a visit to Elder Isidoros? Does it seem to you that the elder was aware of the pain in her neck?
2. Do you believe that God’s grace for healing is still available in the Church today?

Following the Path of St. Paul

1. (pg 155) – The author obviously found a great deal of inspiration in visiting some of the places where St. Paul was. Have you visited any Biblical sites? Did you have the same response?
2. (pg 155) – What message did Paul bring at the Acropolis (Acts 17:27, 28)? Is that message still important today in our country?
3. (pg 157) – The words of St. John Chrysostom summarize St. Paul’s mindset using two of his quotes, “I forget what is behind me and push on to what lies ahead”, and later when nearing his death, “Rejoice and be glad with me”. Can we also take these positive words with us each day as we live our lives in Christ?
4. (pg 158) – For the Apostle Paul, the most important thing of all to him was that he knew himself to be loved by Christ. Is there anything more precious than being loved by God and having our lives guided by that love?

The Quickest Way to Lose Grace

1. (pg 158) – According to the hiermonk, “One of the quickest ways to lose grace is to judge your fellow human being”. Based on earlier discussion (pg. 143), should we conclude that this would apply to condemning but not reproof? Some judgements are good and right. “And He (Jesus) said to him, “You have rightly judged”.” (Luke 7:43)
2. (pg 159) – Elder Ephraim reminds us also that the act of judging others is not only outward (with our speech) but also in our mind. He suggests that we fight back against these thoughts with confession, humility and self-condemnation. Have you found that these “weapons” not only push such thoughts out, but also bring back grace to your aid?

Discarding the Thorns

1. (pg 159ff) – The author is giving a strong word of caution to those who visit monasteries and our expectations. Acknowledging that there are both good and bad aspects within monastic communities and individual monastics, she suggests that we find the “roses” (good) and discard the “thorns” (bad). What Christian virtues can we put forth in our minds so that we can perceive the “wealth of grace contained in a monastery”?

Orthodox Christians are so Watchful

1. (pg 162ff) – The author asserts, several times in this story, that God will “repay” us in like manner when we judge (condemn) someone. While we cannot say what God will or will not do, does this seem to view God as vengeful or vindictive?
(pg 163, 164) – “Orthodox Christians are so watchful.” This phrase, in the context of the story, is used as a rebuke to those Orthodox Christians who become complacent and prideful in our Orthodoxy. However, this does not mean that we should let our guard down. We must always remain watchful each day. What temptations, thoughts, sights, sounds, etc. have lurked by your path of life to distract your spiritual journey?
II Timothy 4:5 – “But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”
I Peter 4:7 – “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore, be serious and watchful in your prayers.”

St. Nektarios: A Flowering Spring of Divine Grace

1. (pg 164) – From what city was St. Nektarios exiled; on what island did he retire? For what reason is he called “wonder-worker”?
2. (pg 165) – What other saints are mentioned who are busy helping people? Are we here reminded that those who have departed from us are yet not far from us? Do they not also still love us, pray for us, and help us? Can we rejoice that “we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) who intercede for the salvation of our souls?
3. (pg 166) – What is the significance, for Constantina, of the jasmine tree and flower as expressed in the Paraklesis to St. Nektarios Ode 5?

Skin-deep Judgements

1. (pg 167-169) – The word “judge” often raises negative connotations. Does this mean that one should just ignore misbehavior or inappropriate conduct for those around? Is there a distinction between reproofing a person and condemning a person?
2. (pg 167-169) – The monk cared enough to question the lady about her make-up. Was he doing so in order to harm her or to help her? When one “judges” another, is it important to realize the motive – help or harm?
3. (pg 167-169) – This story raises again the relationship between the outward behavior/appearance and inner thought/belief. The Church teaches clearly that the outer (body) and inner (soul) affect each other – either positively or negatively. The inward (soul) should guide and influence the outward (body) when all is right with us. Can we see that conforming to the “ways of the world” in our appearance and conduct can damage our closeness to God in our hearts?

Simplicity in Christ’s Name

1. (pg 169 -170) – The elder’s answer, “I know (the Jesus’ Prayer)”, showed her a deep simplicity but also a profound depth of understanding Orthodox belief. As we learn and pray this prayer, can we also appreciate the great truth about the Incarnation?
2. (pg 169) - Her professor also expressed another truth from this prayer. We ask for God’s mercy – His compassion. What is the other term He uses to define God’s compassion? How is that important in our lives?

An Unknown Ascetic in the World

1. (pg 170, 171) – Can you, together, share in shaping a mental picture of Evgenia? As you do, do you begin to see the image of Christ coming forth?
2. (pg 171, 172) – As Evgenia tugged at Constantina’s tie she accepted it as an act of loving rebuke. Would you have had the same reaction if that happened to you in your parish?
3. (pg 172) – Given what he said to Father, how did the doctor measure the genuineness of a Christian? How does that compare with our Lord’s words in Matthew 25:31-46, “For I was hungry....”?
4. (pg 174) – Do you agree with, and will you discuss, the statement of Abba Arsensios that suffering and hardship in this life makes us more worthy to rejoice in the next? Romans 8:18 – “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Section Six

“Blessed are the Pure in Heart”

The Pure in Heart Watch and Pray

1. (pg 175-177) – As we have been taught, the soul is the inward, spiritual part of a human person; the nous is the eye of the soul, according to St. John of Damascus; the heart is the deepest part of the soul, where a person communes with God. While these terms can be distinguished and defined, they should not be separated. What a person receives through his senses enters his nous and, unless rejected, will enter the heart.
Can we see how this young man’s heart could remain pure when he lived in a “pure” environment? What happened when he was exposed to sights and sounds of an impure environment?
2. (pg 177) – What can we do; what steps can we take to protect our senses/nous/heart from stimuli that would cause impurity within us? Discuss this in terms of watchfulness and prayer.

Visiting the Monastery Founded by St. Porphyrios

1. (pg 178) – Which book gives an account of the life and words of St. Porphyrios? Can those who have read it share your thoughts?
2. (pg 179-181) – In this story, the author makes the point that, even after a saint falls asleep in the Lord, the places where he was, the objects he touched and the “presence” he left behind, all put forth that sweetness of grace. Have you had such an occasion? Can that also be true in the church temple? Discuss.

For They Shall See

1. (pg 182) – In the monasteries (but also in the parishes) the virtue of obedience is so important. The scripture reminds us: “Hearing is better than a good sacrifice and obedience than the fat of rams” (I Kingdoms 15:22). Do we sometimes fail to obey when we do not see the reason? Does this indicate also that we do not trust those who are leading us (parents, teachers, priests, bishops, etc.)?
A personal note: Before visiting a certain monastery, we received a special letter. The instructions for me were to wear a head covering, no makeup and a long skirt. This was not a problem for me and the rules were followed. Another monastery we visited did not give instructions. It could have been the difference between the men’s monastery and the women’s monastery. This example is not the depth of obedience, but for me it was meaningful.

Personal Life and Theological Views

1. (pg 182-183) – The professor clearly believed that how one lives in his/her personal life will affect the soundness of what he/she believes in the spiritual life. Can we see, then, that we can better trust the theological teachings of one who is morally upright rather than a morally questionable person?
Psalm 1:1 – “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the troublesome.”
2. (pg 183) – How did this principle hold true in the example of Elder Joseph the Hesychast? In the zealot who spoke out against him?

She Who is Full of Grace

1. (pg 184, 185) – The details of this story certainly infer that the “praying nun” was the most holy Theotokos. Over the years there have been numerous accounts of her blessed appearances in many places. Can you recall reading or hearing of her presence, giving comfort and encouragement to someone?
2. (pg 185) – Does the testimony of St. John Chrysostom give you even more confidence and assurance of her care for us?

Faith That Moves Mountains

1. (pg 186) – Time and again, Jesus healed the sick and afflicted while reminding them, “Your faith has made you well”. There was nothing about distance, disease, etc. Is it any wonder that this woman was healed at home while watching television?
2. (pg 186) – Just as our Lord gave His disciples power to heal and cast out demons, the Church teaches that His mother, the Theotokos, received that same power through the Holy Spirit. When we honor her, do we not also honor Christ and receive these blessings?

Out of the Darkness I Called You

1. (pg 186-189) – This story of Fr. John’s conversion to Christ and to the Orthodox Church seems to have taken several paths. While one can be awakened by some philosophers, the truth that “sets us free” is to be found in the teaching of Jesus (John 8:32) and in Christ Himself. Do we not find that most clearly in the Holy Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers?
John 14:6 – “Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
John 1:17 – “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”
Romans 10:17 – “So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”

A Consoling Gift: A Gift of Prayer

1. (pg 189ff) – This story, in two parts, refers to the prayer of the heart as a gift. Each seem to be connected with a special event (need/blessing) in these women's life. Have you or someone you know been entrusted with such a gift? If they spoke about it at all, was it with humility and unworthiness? If so, it was more likely genuine. James 1:17 – "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights...."
Ephesians 2:8 – "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

She Thought He was the Gardener

1. (pg 193) – Constantina did not recognize the nun standing behind her in the Divine Liturgy despite several glances. She then realized that it was the abbess whom she knew very well. This led her to think on the change which takes place in the human person, created in the image of God, who is becoming in the likeness of God. It is what the Church refers to as **theosis**. Theosis is an inward working of God in one's soul, spirit, mind, and body.
Theosis is a new being, living not self-centeredly but for God and in God.
Theosis is a personal sharing in the life of God through faith, prayer and the sacraments of the Church.
Theosis is the rich potential God has placed in each baptized person.
Theosis is our service and love for our fellow human beings and for God's created world.
Theosis is to become all that God wants us to become by His grace; to grow to the fullest potential that God intends for us.
Theosis is the transfiguration of our lifestyle, implying concern for our neighbor, mutual sharing and love, as Fr. Stanley Harakas states so well in his book, "Toward a Transfigured Life".
(Excerpts from "Basic Orthodoxy: Key Words of the Faith" by Fr. Anthony Coniaris)

Can you testify to what gifts and helps the Church has offered you for your theosis?
Which have been most helpful?

Holy Icons as Vehicles of Grace

1. (pg 194, 195) – This story illustrates the fact that "seeing" is not only a matter of light passing through the eye. "Seeing" also has to do with perception, understanding, comprehension, etc. related to the mind and even the soul. Can you discuss examples or instances of people seeing something beyond the visible?

II Corinthians 4:18 – “...We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Matthew 13:13 – “Therefore, I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”

2. (pg 195) – Do you suppose the blind monk, through his prayer and pure heart, was given a gift to discern the grace of particular saints in their icons?

Not All That Glitters is Gold

1. (pg 196ff) – The woman in this story is one of so many troubled, disturbed people in this world. Great numbers of them seem to graduate to some spiritual environment and/or take on some spiritual identity. Much of this may well be the wiles of the devil himself who disguises himself as an angel of light (II Corinthians 11:14). Have you or your parish had such experiences? Is it then wise for the priest and people to be watchful?
2. (pg 197) – According to St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, where and how do we turn for help from spiritual deception?

A Miracle of Elder Joseph of Vatopedi

1. (pg 198-199) – This miracle story reminds us again that God’s grace and power is not bound by time, space, or death. Isn’t God gracious to us in allowing the departed to encourage those who are still here?
Hebrews 11:4 – “By faith Abel offered to God...and through it he being dead still speaks...”.

Spiritual Vision

1. (pg 199, 200) – What two lessons were learned from the elder? Have you found this counsel to be important in your spiritual experience?

Our Neighborhood “Slipper Lady”

1. (pg 200-203) – One of the reasons that someone may take on the role of a “fool for Christ” is to acquire and maintain the virtue of humility. From this story, can you detect signs in the “slipper lady” that she was a “fool for Christ”?
You may remember that St. Xenia of St. Petersburg in Russia is known as a fool for Christ’s sake. There are books to read about her life:
 - From Holy Trinity Monastery – Printshop of St. Job of Pochaev, Jordanville, NY
“The Life and Miracles of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg”
 - From St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood P.O. Box 70 Platina, CA 96076
and St. Xenia Skete P.O. Box 260 Wildwood, CA 96076-0260
“Akathist to St. Xenia of St. Petersburg”

“We’ve Been Expecting You”

1. (pg 203) – How did Dionysia’s neighbor’s spiritual life get its start? Can you relate to that in your own life?
2. (pg 204) – Which saint, named in the story, actually appeared to visit that neighbor?

Words Without Disdain

1. (pg 204) – How did Gerontissa’s word to Constantina affect her, at first and then later?
2. (pg 205) – When we are rebuked, corrected, or criticized by someone who loves us, we are truly blessed. Can we acknowledge that the Scriptures, bishops, priests, family or friends may be used as instruments of God to prompt us to repentance? Proverbs 9:8,9 – “Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.....Instruct a righteous man, and he shall continue to receive it.”

Section Seven

“Blessed are the Peacemakers”

Perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God

1. (pg 209) - What is meant by the phrase “No one claims to be the stupid one” and later “No one claims to be the sinful one”? How does this relate to our approach to our own sinful natures?

I John 1: 8,9 – “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Inspirational Words on the Feast of St. Basil

1. (pg 211) - In what ways can the “bad” things of our lives (unemployment, loss, illness, etc.) be considered as blessings?

Romans 8:18 – “For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Our Foundation Is Jesus Christ

1. (pg 212) - In the story of the Athosite monk, why was he unwilling to divulge his past, where he came from, etc.? How does this relate to our own journey of salvation?
2. (pg 213-214) - What is meant by the idea that there is only “Orthodox Christianity”? What about jurisdictions, converts, etc.?

In Praise of Thessaloniki

1. (pg 214-215) - In Thessaloniki, what aspects of the city transport you into the spiritual world?

An Orthodox Moment

1. (pg 216-218) - What is an “Orthodox moment”? How does this differ from an experience?

The Counsel of the Godly

1. (pg 221) - What is meant by “If you struggle, you are blessed”? What are some of the struggles you experience? How are those blessings in your life?
Psalm 1: 1,2 – “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly ... but his delight is in the law of the Lord.”

Reunion with a Holy Elder

1. (pg 223-224) - Why did all those who visited Elder Isidoros leave with happiness and joy?

2. (pg 225-226) - Elder Isidoros received great joy from chanting "Christ Is Risen," even in the middle of November. Why might that be his favorite hymn?

He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord

1. (pg 226-228) - What is the importance of having a spiritual father?

I Corinthians 4: 15 – For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel."

Catching Possession

1. (pg 229-230) - What does it mean to be a "House of God"? What are some actions we can take to mold ourselves into temples of the Holy Spirit?

I Corinthians 3:16, 17 – Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him."

The Love of the Father

1. (pg 231) - How does this father's love reflect the love Christ has for us?

I John 3: 1 – "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"

Twilight in the Monastery, Midnight in the World

1. (pg 232-233) - Why does the author use the word "twilight" to describe the monastery and "midnight" to describe the world?

I Peter 2:9 – "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Forgive Me, Teacher

1. (pg 235-236) - Why does the phrase "Forgive me" hold so much weight? Why do the monastics constantly interject this phrase into their speech?

Set a Watch Before My Mouth

1. (pg 237-238) - In what ways is venting more harmful than therapeutic?
2. (pg 238) - What is the prescription for when we feel the need to vent? How does this better serve our spiritual wellbeing?

Psalms 141:3 – Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.

A Life of Perfect Love

1. (pg 239-240) - What was the Gerontissa's advice to couples? What does she advise when anger and arguments arise?

Ephesians 4: 26,32 – “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you”

Edified by Silence:

1. (pg 242-243) - When can silence be a more effective tool than speech?
Psalm 46:10 – “Be still and know that I am God”.
Psalm 62:1 – “Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation.”

Section Eight

“Blessed are Those Who are Persecuted for Righteousness’ Sake”

Feeling the Heavens Breathing Near

1. (pg 246-247) - What impacts do relics have in the Orthodox tradition? Why do we preserve relics?

I Corinthians 6:19 – “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”

The Yoke of Monasticism

1. (pg 247) - Just as monastics may face obstacles on their journeys to monastic life, we sometimes face obstacles on our spiritual journeys. What are some obstacles that prevent us from attending services, partaking in the sacraments, and reading the Holy Scriptures?

The Glory of the Saints Contemplated in a Cellar

1. (pg 250) - How did St. Tryphon’s life become a testament to the omnipotent and merciful Lord?
2. (pg 250-251) - The nuns celebrated the Paraklesis to St. Tryphon in a cellar, a unique and primitive location for a service. What does this tell us about where we should worship the Lord? Does true worship have any physical confines?
John 4: 23 – “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”

Spiritual Warfare Is Not Won with Marshmallows

1. (pg 252-253) - Why is it important to receive a blessing before starting any ascetic practices?

A Holy Fool for Christ

1. (pg 254-256) - What does it mean to be a fool for Christ? What benefits can this have on one’s spiritual journey?

The Theotokos, the One Who Saves

1. (pg 258-260) - How does the Holy Theotokos offer us protection? Have there been instances in your life when the Theotokos has protected you?
“Most Holy Theotokos, save us.” – Dismissal at Great Vespers

St. Ephraim of Nea Makri

1. (pg 260) - St. Ephraim of Nea Makri died asking God to forgive his enemies of their sins. How strong does one's love have to be to forgive one's enemies? Have there been moments in your life where you have felt called to forgive in the face of persecution?

Acts 7:60 – "Then he (Stephen) knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Remaining Faithful to the End

1. (pg 263-264) - What does it mean to remain faithful in your life? What obstacles do you face that try to prevent you from being faithful?

Luke 18:8 – "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Matthew 10:22 – "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."

The Power of Your Cross, O Lord

1. (pg 265ff) - Why do monastics make the sign of the cross over all things?

I Corinthians 1: 18 – For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Confessing Our Faith in Spirit and in Truth

1. (pg 270-272) - What advice is given to us when we face heretical or blasphemous comments about the Lord?

Ephesians 6:10,11 – "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

Interior Martyrdom

1. (pg 273-274) - How does the monk's story of the fire represent surrender to God's will?

Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

1. (pg 276) – "To become a saint, to seek virtue, even in the midst of persecution." How do the saints encourage us to accept suffering? And while accepting suffering, we seek righteousness also. What is gained by following this example?

Philippians 1:29 – "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."