

KALLISTOS THE GREAT PATRIARCH

On Prayer: Fourteen Texts

1. If you want to take possession of the truth, imitate the example of the cithara player. He holds his head down, and giving his ear to the song, he plucks the strings with the plectrum. At the same time as the strings are picked, one after another with skill, the cithara lets loose the melody, and the player ascends with the sweet honey of the sound.

2. O worker of the vineyard, you who love to do careful work, let the meaning of this example be clear to you, and believe. Because watchful and in attentive like the cithara player, you will easily find, down in the depth of the heart, what you search for. And the soul, enraptured and enfolded in divine intense love, will not readily fall back. As the divine David says: 'My soul follows hard after you' (Ps. 63 : 8. LXX).

3. Beloved, I think that the cithara is the heart. The strings, these are the senses. The plectrum, that is the reasoning of the intellect. The intellect, by means of reasoning, animates the plectrum continually, which is to say: it thinks of God, from which an ineffable pleasure arises in the soul. The purified intellect reflects the fire of the divine light.

4. If we do not close the senses of the body, the well spring of water will be able to flow in us, the water which the Lord gave to the Samaritan woman. She sought out physical water, but she found the water of life which pours out from another source (John 4 : 14). As the earth by its nature hides and covers encloses water, so the ground of the heart has by its nature this water which springs and flows from its source, and such the light of the Father which by his disobedience Adam lost us.

5. Just as the water flows from an inexhaustible source, in the same way the water of life, springing water, flows from the soul. It is this water which dwelt in the soul of Ignatius Theophoros and which prompted him to say: 'There is in me no fire desiring to be fed, but a water which lives and speaks.'¹

6. This blessed, or better, this thrice-blessed watchfulness, and I would myself call it the intellectual watchful stillness of the soul, is like water which springs and flows from the depth of the heart. The water which runs out from the source overflows the source. That which springs from the heart and so to speak is continually animated by the Spirit, surrounds the

inner man with divine dew and the Spirit, and enflames the external man.

7. The purified intellect of external things, which has utterly mastered the senses with the activity of virtue, remains fixed like the axis of heaven. It contemplates the centre: the depth of the heart. It guides the head and looks beyond. Its rays are like flashes of lightning of the mind which shoots divine thoughts from the depth. And it has mastery of all the senses of the body.

8. But let no one who hears talk of these things who has not been initiated or who still has need of milk (cf. 1 Cor. 3 : 2), touch these forbidden things before his time. The divine fathers, when they saw such men searching before the right time for things which come in their own time, forcing themselves through the door of dispassion with having means, considered that they were involved in activity without purpose, and nothing more. For it is impossible to study a book if you do not know how to read.

9. What the Spirit sets in motion in the soul, after it has been engaged in combat, surrounds the heart with peace, making it cry: 'Abba, Father!' (cf. Gal. 4 : 6). That movement has no image or form. But it transforms the soul with the splendour of the divine light, and gives it form by the burning of the Spirit of God. It changes us, it makes us other, in a way only God in his power understands.

10. The intellect which has been purified by watchfulness and stillness will fall easily into darkness, unless in the continual recollection of Jesus it does not turn totally from external things. But he who practices contemplation to guard the intellect does not need to reject external noise, whether in the form of voices, or other sorts of noise; he need not take any notice. For the soul blessed with the intense longing of love which contemplation brings follows Christ like His beloved disciple.

11. Those who live in the world will discover how to immobilise the passions and the impulsions of the flesh, or likewise control themselves by means of reasoning, as Scripture says: 'Be still and know' (Ps. 46 : 11. LXX). But they will never be able to wipe them out or make them disappear. Only the life of solitude knows clearly how to root them out.

12. As for the springing water, its movement is sometimes move lively, and sometimes it becomes calm and slow. In the

¹ St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans* §7; P.G., Vol. v, p. 694A.

first case, the water cannot easily become cloudy, for it runs quickly. So, if it becomes a little dirty, its flow is such that it is easily purified entirely. But when the current of the water loses its force, when it becomes too slow, not only does it become dirty, but it becomes stagnant. In that case it is necessary to cleanse itself, and rediscover movement in this renewal.

13. Among beginners, those who live by activity and ethical rules, the demons enter by means of external noise, whether in the form of language, or other sounds. On the other hand, in those who are involved in contemplation they inspire fantasies: the air appears to them as if it is affected by the divine light. Sometimes they increase these fantasies to the point where fire appears, in order to fool, and lead him in the wrong direction, who had thought he was fighting for Christ.

14. If you want to learn how you should pray, consider the aim of prayer and attention, and do not delude yourself. That aim, beloved, is continual compunction, contrition of heart, love of neighbour. And the contrary is obvious: it is envious thought, bad feeling, hatred of others, and similar things.