

SYMEON ARCHBISHOP OF THESSALONIKA

On the Holy Deifying Prayer

CHAPTER 296¹

This divine prayer, the invocation of our Saviour – ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me’ – , is an appeal, an invocation and a confession of faith. It arouses the Holy Spirit, it dispenses the gifts of God, it purifies the heart, it puts demons to flight, it is the home of Jesus Christ, it is the source of the spiritual mind and of divine thought, it delivers from sin, it shows concern for the soul and the body, it gives divine illumination, it flows with the mercy of God, it accords the revelations and divine initiations in humility, it carries in itself the only way of salvation: the salvific name of our God, that is the unique name of Jesus Christ, son of God invoked in us, and we have salvation by no other name (Acts 4 : 12), as the Apostle says.

Prayer is appeal, then, for we solicit by this means the mercy of God. It is invocation, for by invoking him we offer ourselves to Christ. It is confession, for having confessed the divine name, Peter was said to have been blessed (cf. Matt. 16 : 17). It arouses the Spirit, for nobody can say ‘Lord Jesus’ unless in the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12 : 30). It dispenses the gifts of God, for through it I will give you, Christ told Peter, the keys to the Kingdom of heaven (cf. Matt. 16 : 19). It purifies the heart, for it sees and calls to God, and it purifies the one who sees. It puts demons to flight, for all demons were chased away and are chased away by the name of Jesus Christ. It is the home of Christ, for Christ is in us when we think of him, he lives in us through memory and he fills us with joy. It is said, in fact: ‘I remembered God and I rejoiced’ (Ps. 77 : 3. LXX). It is the source of spiritual mind and of divine thoughts, for Christ is the treasure of all wisdom and of all spiritual knowledge (cf. Col. 2 : 3), and he gives these things to those who in whom he lives. He is deliverance from sins, for it is said: ‘Whatever you release on earth will be released in heaven’ (Matt. 16 : 19). It has concern for the soul and the body, for it is said: ‘In the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk’ (Acts 3 : 3), and ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you’ (Acts 9 : 34). It gives divine illumination, for Christ is the true light (John 1 : 9), and he transmits his splendour and grace to those who invoke him. It is said: ‘May the splendour of the Lord our God be on us’ (Ps. 90 : 17. LXX), and: ‘Whoever follows me will have the light of life’ (John 8 : 12). It flows with the mercy of God, for we demand mercy and: ‘The Lord is compassionate, he has compassion for all those

who invoke him’ (Ps. 86 : 6. LXX), and: ‘He quickly gives justice to those who call on him’ (Luke 18 : 7). It accords revelations and divine initiations to the humble, for it was given to the fisherman Peter by a revelation of the Father in the heavens (cf. Matt. 16 : 17), and Paul heard revelations when ravished by Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 12 : 2).

These effects are always the same. And it is the only way for salvation, for ‘there is salvation by no other’ (Acts 4 : 12), says the Apostle, and: ‘He who is the Saviour of the world, Christ’ (John 4 : 42). That is why on the last day all language, whether it wants to or not, will confess and will sing that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2 : 11). Such is the sign of our faith, for we are Christians and bear his name. And it bears witness that we are from God. For we have already recalled it, it is said: ‘All spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is the Lord come in the flesh is of God. And he who does not confess it is not part of God’ (1 John 4 : 2). But ‘it is the spirit of the Antichrist, which does not confess Jesus Christ’ (1 John 4 : 3).

It must be the case therefore that all the faithful never stop confessing his name, for the proclamation of their faith and for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ from whom nothing should ever separate us (cf. Rom. 8 : 35), and for the grace which spreads his name, and for absolution, redemption, healing, sanctification, illumination, and above all for salvation. For it is by this divine name that the apostles have done marvels and have been instructed. The divine Evangelist says: ‘These things have been written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God’ (John 20 : 31): such is the faith. ‘And so that believing you will have life in his name’ (ibid.). Such is the salvation and the life.

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All the faithful should therefore continually say this prayer of the name of Jesus in his intellect and with his tongue. Whether stood still or walking, sitting or lying (cf. Deut. 6 : 7), whatever he says or does, he should not cease from applying himself to the prayer. And he will find a very great peacefulness, a very great joy, as they know by experience those who practice it. This work exceeds men who are absorbed by the things of life, and even monks, when they are in the middle of the troubles of the world. Nevertheless the work should be shared with all, and all, priests, monks and laymen, should have in front of them the ideal of this prayer,

¹ Symeon of Thessalonika, *De Precatione* 296-7; P.G., vol. clv, p. 547 ff. Section 297 was not published complete by Nikodemos and Makarios.

so that they can practice it as much as they can. Monks first of all must do this, because it is demanded by their order, and because they are duty bound to pray. Even when they are involved in the comings and goings of the jobs they are called to do, they should also always force themselves to devote themselves to the invocation, for prayer is their duty, so they should pray continually to the Lord (1 Thess. 5 : 17), if they are troubled or distracted, or if their intellect is captive to something else, as they say, and they will not be negligent, not be captured by the enemy, but rather they ought to return to prayer, and rejoice in returning to it. Priests also must pray, because they are consecrated to that apostolic work which divine preaching and the acts of God achieve, and they reveal the love of Christ. Finally, those who are in the world practice it as much as they can, for it is a seal for them and a sign of their faith, it protects them, sanctifies them, it drives away all temptation.

So all people must do this, priests, laymen, and monks, as soon as they rise from sleep, and be in the spirit of Christ, and remind themselves of Christ. It is necessary for them to offer the prayer to Christ as the first fruits and the sacrifice of all thought. They must before any other thought remind themselves of Christ who has saved us and loved us so much. For we are Christians. We bear the name of Christ. We have dressed ourselves in him by divine baptism (Gal. 3 : 27). We have received from him the sign through the oil. And we have communed and communicated in his holy Body and his Blood. We are his limbs (1 Cor. 12 : 27). We are his Temple (cf. 2 Cor. 6 : 16). We have dressed in him and he lives in us. That is why we ought to love him and always to remember him. So that each must make it a duty to consecrate, as much as possible to each, a certain amount of time to the prayer, and to say this prayer a certain number of times.

But we have said enough. Those who will enquire about prayer will find benefit in what we have been taught.