

Homily on Admonition and Repentance

St. Ephraim

1. Not of compulsion is the doctrine; of free-will is the word of life. Whoever is willing to hear the doctrine, let him cleanse the field of his will that the good seed fall not among the thorns of vain enquirings. If you would heed the word of life, cut yourself off from evil things; the hearing of the word profits nothing to the man that is busied with sins. If you will to be good, love not dissolute customs. First of all, trust in God, and then hearken to His law.

2. You can not hear His words, while you do not know yourself; and if you keep His judgments while your understanding is aloof from Him, who will give you your reward? Who will keep for you your recompense? You were Holy Spirit, three Names and Persons, these three shall be a wall to you, against divisions and wranglings. Doubt not of the truth, lest you perish through the truth. You were good and gracious.

3. If you are angry against your neighbour, you are angry against God; and if you bear anger in your heart, against your Lord is your boldness uplifted. If in envy you rebuke, wicked is all your reproof. But if charity dwell in you, you have on earth no enemy. And if you are a true son of peace, you will stir up wrath in no man. If you are just and upright, you will not do wrong to your fellow. And if you love to be angry, be angry with the wicked and it will become you; if to wage war you seek, lo! Satan is your adversary; if you desire to revile, against the demons display your curses. If you should insult the King's image, you shall pay the penalty of murder; and if you revile a man, you revile the image of God. Do honour to your neighbour, and lo! You have honoured God. But if you would dishonour Him, in wrath assail your neighbour!

4. This is the first Commandment — You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul, and with your might according as you are able. The sign that you love God, is this, that you love your fellow; and if you hate your fellow, your hatred is towards God. For it is blasphemy if you pray before God while you are angry. For your heart also convicts you, that in vain you multiply words: your conscience rightly judges that in your prayers you profit nought. Christ as He hung on the height of the tree, interceded for His murderers; and you (who art) dust, son of the clay, rage fills you at its will. You keep anger against your brother; and do you yet dare to pray? Even he that stands on your side, though he be not neighbour to your sins, the taint of iniquity reaches unto him, and his petition is not heard. Leave off rage and then pray; and unless you would further provoke, restrain anger and so shall you supplicate. And if he (the other) is not to encounter you in fury, banish rage from that body, because it is holden with lusts.

5. You have a spiritual nature; the soul is the image of the Creator; honour the image of God, by being in agreement with all men. Remember death, and be not angry, that your peace be not of constraint. As long as your life remains to you, cleanse your soul from wrath; for if it should go to Sheol with you, your road will be straight to Gehenna. Keep not anger in your heart; hold not fury in your soul; you have not

power over your soul, save to do that which is good. You are bought with the blood of God; you are redeemed by the passion of Christ; for your sake He suffered death, that you might die to your sins. His face endured spitting, that you might not shrink from scorn. Vinegar and gall did He drink, that you might be set apart from wrath. He received stripes on His body, that you might not fear suffering. If you are in truth His servant, fear your holy Lord; if you are His true disciple, walk in your Master's footsteps. Endure scorn from your brother, that you may be the companion of Christ. Display not anger against man, that you be not set apart from your Redeemer.

6. You are a man, the dust of the earth, clay, kinsman of the clod; you are the son of the race of beasts. If you know not your honour; separate your soul from animals, by works and not by words. If you love derision, you are altogether as Satan; and if you mock at your fellow, you are the mouth of the Devil; if against defects and flaws, in (injurious) names you delight, Satan is not in creation but his place you have seized by force. Get you far, O man, from this; for it is altogether hurtful; and if you desire to live well, sit not with the scorner, lest you become the partner of his sin and of his punishment. Hate mockery which is altogether (the cause of weeping), and mirth which is (the cause of) cleansing. And if you should hear a mocker by chance, when you are not desiring it, sign yourself with the cross of light, and hasten from thence like an antelope. Where Satan lodges, Christ will in nowise dwell; a spacious dwelling for Satan is the man that mocks at his neighbour; a palace of the Enemy is the heart of the mocker. Satan does not desire to add any other evil to it. Mockery is sufficient for him to supply the place of all. Neither his belly nor yet his purse can (the sinner) fill with that sin of his. By his laughter is the wretch despoiled, and he knows not nor does he perceive it. For his wound, there is no cure; for his sickness, there is no healing; his pain, admits no remedy; and his sore, endures no medicine. I desire not with such a one to put forth my tongue to reprove him: enough for him is his own shame; sufficient for him is his boldness. Blessed is he that has not heard him; and blessed is he that has not known him. Be it far from you, O Church, that he should enter you, that evil leaven of Satan!

7. Narrow is the way of life, and broad the way of torment; prayer is able to bring a man to the house of the kingdom. This is the perfect work; prayer that is pure from iniquity. The righteousness of man is as nothing accounted. The work of men, what is it? His labour is altogether vanity. Of You, O Lord, of Your grace it is that in our nature we should become good. Of You is righteousness, that we from men should become righteous. Of You is the mercy and favour, that we from the dust should become Your image. Give power to our will, that we be not sunk in sin! Pour into our heart memory, that at every hour we may know Your honour! Plant truth in our minds, that we perish not among doubts! Occupy our understanding with Your law, that it wander not in vain thoughts! Order the motions of our members, that they bring no hurt upon us! Draw near to God, that Satan may flee from you. Cast out passions from your heart, and lo! You have put to flight the enemy. Hate sins and wickedness, and Satan at once will have fled. Whatsoever sins you serve, you are worshipping secret idols. Whatsoever transgressions you love, you are serving demons in your soul. Whenever you strive with your brother, Satan abides in peace. Whenever you envy your fellow, you give rest to Devils. Whenever you tell the shortcoming of others who are not present, your tongue has made a harp for the music of the devil. Whenever hatred is in your soul, great is the peace of the Deceiver. Whenever you love incantations, your labour is

altogether of the left hand. If you love unseemly discourse, you prepare a feast for demons. For this is the worship of idols, the working of the lusts (of the flesh).

8. If so be you give a gift in pride, this is not of God. If you are lifted up by reason of your knowledge, you have denied the grace of God. If you are poor and proud, lo! Your end is in your torment. If you are haughty and needy, lo! Your need is toward your destruction. If you are sick and cry out, lo! Your trouble is full of harm. If you are in need of food, yet your mind longs for riches; your distress is with the poor, but your torment with the rich. If you shall look unchastely, and shall desire your neighbour's wife, lo! Your portion shall be with the adulterers, and your hell with the fornicators. Let your own fountain be for yourself, and drink waters from your well. Let your fountains be for yourself alone, and let not another drink with you. Require purity of your body as you require of your yoke-fellow. You would not have her commit lewdness, the wife of your youth, with another man; commit not lewdness with another woman, the wife of a different husband. Let the defilement of her be hateful in your eyes; keep aloof from it altogether. Chastity beseems the wife; purity is as her adornment; law becomes the husband; justice is the crown for his head. Desire not the bed of your neighbour lest another desire your bed. Preserve purity in your marriage, that your marriage may be holy. His conscience reproves the man, who corrupts the wife of his neighbour. He fears, and deceives through terror, whoever has engaged in fornication. Darkness is dearer to him than light, whose manner of life is not pure. Every hour he stands in dread, who commits adultery secretly. The adulterer is also a thief who breaks into houses in darkness. The very place reproves him, where he does the evil and wickedness. He enters the chamber and sins; in the darkness he does his will. The time will come when it shall be disclosed, when his secret deeds shall be manifested. With what eyes do you look towards God in prayer? What hands do you raise when you ask pardon? Be ashamed and dismayed for yourself, that you are void of understanding. If when your neighbour see you, you are ashamed and dismayed, how much more should you be ashamed before God Who sees all? You are like the sow, your companion, that wallows altogether in mire. Even in seeing, you may sin, if your mind is not watchful; and in hearing you may transgress, if you do not guard your hearing. The fornicator's heart waxes wanton through speech that is full of uncleanness. The passion hidden in the mind, sight and hearing awaken it.

9. He puts on garments of shame who desires to commit fornication, that from the lust of raiment, lewdness may enter and dwell in his heart. Make not snares of your garments for that which is openly wanton. Speak not a word in craftiness, nor dig your neighbour's well. Look not after the harlot; be not snared by the beauty of her face. She is even as the dog that is mad, yea, much more bold than it. Modesty is removed from her face, she knows not what shame is. With spitting accept her person; with reviling meet herself; with a rod pursue her like a dog, for she is like one, and to be compared with such. Reject the sweetness of her words lest you fall into her net. She empties purses and wallets, and her gains are without number. Flee from her, for she is the daughter of vipers, that she tear not in pieces your whole body.

10. You shall not slander any man, lest they call you Satan. If you hate the name, go not near to the act; but if you love the act, be not angry at the name. Count yourself rebuked first of all by the beasts and birds, how that every kind cleaves to its kind; and so agree with your yokefellow. Rejoice not in men's

dishonour, that you become not a Satan yourself. If evil should happen to him that hates you, see that you rejoice not, lest you sin. If your adversary should fall, be in pain and mourning. Keep your heart with all diligence, that it sin not in secret; for there is to be a laying bare of thoughts and of actions. Employ your hands in labour, and let your heart meditate in prayer. Love not vain discourse, for discourse that shall be profitable alike to the soul and the body lightens the burden of your labour.

11. Does the poor man cry at your door? Arise and open for him gladly: refresh him when he is wearied; sustain his heart, for it is sad. You know by experience the affliction of poverty: receive not others in your house, and drive not out the beggar. Have you also a law, a comely law for your household. Establish an order that is wise, that the objects laugh not at you. Be careful in all your doings, that you be not a sport for fools; be upright and prudent, and both simple and wise. Let your body be quiet and cheerful, your greeting seemly and simple; your discourse without fault, your speech brief and savoury; your words few and sound, full of savour and understanding. Speak not overmuch, not even words that are wise; for all things that are over many, though they be wise are wearisome.— To them of your household be as a father. Amongst your brethren esteem yourself least, and inferior among your fellows, and of little account with all men. With your friend keep a secret; to those that love you be true. See that there be no wrangling; the secrets of your friends reveal not, lest all that hear you hate you and esteem you a mischiefmaker. With those that hate you wrangle not, neither face to face nor yet in your heart. No enemy shall you have but Satan his very self. Give counsel to the wife you have wedded; give heed to her doings; as stronger you are answerable that you should sustain her weakness. For weak is womankind, and very ready to fall. Be as a hawk, when kindled (to anger), but when wrath departs from you, be gladsome and also firm, in the blending of diverse qualities. Keep silence among the aged; to the elders give due honour. Honour the priests with diligence, as good stewards of the household. Give due honour to their degree, and search not out their doings. In his degree the priest is an angel, but in his doings a man. By mercy he is made a mediator, between God and mankind.

12. Search not out the faults of men; reveal not the sin of your fellow; the shortcomings of your neighbours, in speech of the mouth repeat not. You are not judge in creation, you have not dominion over the earth. If you love righteousness, reprove your soul and yourself. Be judge unto your own sins, and chastener of your own transgressions. Make not inquiry maliciously, into the misdeeds of men. For if you do this, injuries will not be lacking to you. Trust not the hearing of the ear, for many are the deceivers. Vain reports believe not, for false rumours are not few.

13. Regard not spells and divinations, for that is communion with Satan. Love not idle prating, not even in behalf of righteousness. Discourse concerning yourself begin not, even on behalf of what is becoming. Flee and hide yourself from wrangling, as from a violent robber. See that you be not a surety in a loan, lest you sin. According as you have, assist him, (even) the man that is poorer than you. Mock not the foolish man; pray that you be not even as he. Him that sins blame not, lest you also be put to confusion. To him that repents of his sins be a helper and counsellor, and encourage him that is able to rise. Let him hold fast hope in God, and his sin shall be burned as stubble. Visit the sick and be not wearied, that you may be beloved of men. Be familiar with the house of mourning, but a stranger to the house of feasting. Be not constant in drinking wine, lest your shortcomings multiply. Cast a wall round your lips,

and set a guard upon your mouth; endure suffering with your neighbour and share also in his tribulation. A good friend in tribulation is made known to him that loves him. In charity follow the deceased, with sorrow and with offerings, and pray that he may have rest in the hidden place whither he is going.

14. When you stand in prayer, cry in your soul: Have mercy on me, I am a sinner and weak; be gracious, O God, to my weakness, and grant strength to me to pray a prayer that shall be pleasing to Your Will. Punish not mine enemies, take not vengeance on them that hate me; but grant them in Your grace that they may become doers of Your Will. At the time of prayer and petition, continue in contemplations such as these continue. Bow your head before the Mighty One.

15. Do not resist evil, for he is evil from the Evil One, whoever resists evil. Keep not back anything from any man, that if he perishes you may not be blamed. Change not your respect for a man's person, according to goods and possessions. Make all things as though they were not and God alone were in being. If you shall ask of your neighbour and he shall not give you according to your wish, see that you say not in anger a word that is full of bitterness. Oppose not [fit] seasons, for many are the changes. Put sorrow far from your flesh, and sadness from your thoughts; save only that for your sins you should be constant in sadness. Cease not from labour, not even though you be rich, for the slothful man gains manifold guilt by his idleness.

16. Be a lover of poverty, and be desirous of neediness. If you have them both for your portion, you are an inheritor on high. Despise not the voice of the poor and give him not cause to curse you. For if he curse whose palate is bitter, the Lord will hear his petition. If his garments are foul, wash them in water, which freely is bought. Has a poor man entered into your house? God has entered into your house; God dwells within your abode. He, whom you have refreshed from his troubles, from troubles will deliver you. Have you washed the feet of the stranger? You have washed away the filth of your sins. Have you prepared a table before him? Behold God eating [at it], and Christ likewise drinking [at it], and the Holy Spirit resting [on it]: Is the poor satisfied at your table and refreshed? You have satisfied Christ your Lord. He is ready to be your rewarder; in presence of angels and men He will confess you have fed His hunger; He will give thanks unto you that you gave Him drink, and quenched His thirst.

17. O how gracious is the Lord! O how measureless are His mercies! Happy the race of mortals when God confesses it! Woe to the soul which He denies! Fire is stored up for its punishment. Be of good cheer, my son, in hope; sow good [seed] and faint not. The husbandman sows in hope, and the merchant journeys in hope, you also love good [seed]; in the hope look for the reward. Do nothing at all without the beginning of prayer. With the sign of the living cross, seal all your doings, my son. Go not forth from the door of your house till you have signed the cross. Whether in eating or in drinking, whether in sleeping or in waking, whether in your house or on the road, or again in the season of leisure, neglect not this sign; for there is no guardian like it. It shall be unto you as a wall, in the forefront of all your doings. And teach this to your children, that heedfully they be conformed to it.

18. Yoke yourself under the law, that you may be a freeman in very truth. Work not the desire of your soul apart from the law of God. How many commandments must I write, and how many laws must I engrave; which, if you desire your freedom, you can learn all from yourself? And if you love purity, you will teach it to others also. Let nature be your book, and all creation your tables; and learn from them the laws, and meditate things unwritten. The sun in his course teaches you that you rest from labour. The night in her silence cries to you that a limit is set to your works. The earth and the fruit of the tree cry that there is a season for all things. The seed you sow in the winter, in the summer you gather its harvest. Thus in the world sow seeds of righteousness, and in the Resurrection gather them in. The bird in its daily gleaning reproves the covetous and his greed, and rebukes the extortion that grasps the store of others. Death, the limit of all things, is itself the reprover of all things.

19. Take refuge in God Who passes not away nor is changed. Restrain laughter by suffering, and mirthfulness by sorrow. Console suffering by hope, and sadness by expectation. Believe and trust, you that are wise, for God is He Who guides you; and if His care leaves you not, there is nothing that can harm you. If one man by another man, the lowly by the great, can be saved, how much more shall the refuge of God preserve the man that believes? Fear not because of adversaries who with violence come upon you. He will watchfully guard your soul, and hurtful things become profitable. No one shall lead you by compulsion, save only where there is freedom. No one falls into temptation, that passes the measure of his strength. There is no evil in chastisement, if so be that freedom is willing. The doings are not perverse of freedom, its will is perverted.

20. To men that are just and upright, temptations become helps. Job, a man of discernment, was victorious in temptations. Sickness came upon him, and he complained not; disease afflicted him and he murmured not; his body failed and his strength departed, but his will was not weakened. He proved perfect in all by sufferings, for as much as temptations crushed him not. Abraham was a stranger, from his place, his race [and his kindred]. But by this he was not harmed; nay rather he triumphed greatly. So Joseph from the house of bondage was made to rule as king of Egypt. They of the company of Ananias and Daniel delivered others from bondage. See then, O you that are wise, the power that freedom possesses; that nothing can injure it unless the will is weakened. Israel with sumptuous living waxed fat, and kicked, and forgot his covenant. He worshipped vain gods, and forgot the nature of his creation. The bondage that was in Egypt he forgot in the repose of the desert. As often as he was afflicted, he acknowledged the Lord alone; but when he was dwelling in repose, he forgot God his Redeemer. Seek not here repose, for this is a world of toil. And if you can wisely discern, change not time for time; that which abides for that which abides not; that which ceases not for that which ceases; nor truth for lying; nor body for shadow; nor watching for slumber; nor that which is in season for that which is out of season; nor the Time for the times. Collect your mind, let it not wander among varieties which profit not.

21. No one in creation is rich but he that fears God; no one is truly poor but he that lacks the truth. How needy is he, and not rich, whose need witnesses against him that even from the abject and the beggars he needs to receive a gift. He is truly a bondman, and many are his masters: he renders service to money, to riches, and possessions. His lords are void of mercy, for they grant him no repose. Flee, and

live in poverty; (as) a mother she pities her beloved. Seek refuge in indigence, who nourishes her children with choice things; her yoke is light and pleasant, and sweet to the palate her memory. The sick in conscience alone abhors the draught of poverty; the fainthearted dreads the yoke of indigence that is honourable. Who has granted to You, Son of man, in the world to find repose? Who has granted to you, thing of dust, to be rich amidst poverty? Be not through desires needy and looking to others. Sufficient for you is your daily bread, that comes of the sweat of your face. Let this be (the measure of your need, that which the day gives you; and if you find for yourself a feast, take of it that which you need. You shall not take in a day (the provision) of days, for the belly keeps no treasure. Praise and give thanks when you are satisfied, that therein you provoke not the Giver to anger. In purity strengthen yourself, that you may gain from it profit. In everything give thanks and praise unto God as the Redeemer, that He may grant you by His grace, that we may hear and do His Will.

You to whom I have given the counsel of life, be not negligent in it. From that which is other men's (doctrine) have I written to you; see that you despise not their words. And if I depart before you, in your prayer make mention of me. In every season pray and beseech that our love may continue true. But as for us, on behalf of these things let us offer up praise and honour to Father, to Son, and to Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.