

Step 20 on Bodily Vigil and How to Use It to Attain Spiritual Vigil and How to Practise It.

by St. John Climacus

The sermon teaches that vigil, or spiritual activity, is essential for the purification of the mind and the avoidance of lust, and that it is a reward for those who practice it.

Scripture: Proverbs 20:13, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Spiritual Vigilance", "Christian Prayer"

Description

St. John Climacus emphasizes the importance of vigilance and prayer in the life of a monk, highlighting the various ways monks stand before God in prayer, with each offering valued by God according to their intention and power. He warns against the dangers of sleep and laziness, urging monks to engage in spiritual activities during the evenings and night hours to gather wealth and knowledge. St. John Climacus encourages monks to be vigilant against the temptations of the devil, especially in the form of sleep, and to remain steadfast in prayer and meditation on the word of the Lord.

Transcript

1. Some stand before earthly kings without weapons and without armour, others hold staffs of office, and some have shields, and some swords. The former are vastly superior to the latter, for they are usually personal relations of the king and members of the royal household. So it is with earthly kings.
2. Now let us see how we stand before God our King, when we stand at our prayers in the evening, or during the day and night. For some at their evening all-night vigil lift up their hands in prayer as if they were incorporeal and stripped of all care. Others stand at that time singing psalms. Others are more occupied in reading. And some out of weakness courageously resist sleep by working with their hands. Others try to feel the horror of the thought of death, hoping thus to obtain contrition. And of all these, the first and last are in all-night vigil for the love of God; the second do what befits a monk; while the third go the lowest way. Yet God accepts and values the offerings of each according to their intention and power.
3. A vigilant eye makes the mind pure; but much sleep binds the soul.
4. A vigilant monk is a foe to fornication but a sleepy one mates with it.
5. Vigil is a quenching of lust, deliverance from dream phantoms, a tearful eye, a softened heart, the

guarding of thoughts, the dissolving of food, the subduing of passions, the taming of spirits, the bridling of the tongue, the banishment of phantasies.

6. A monk who denies himself sleep is a fisher of thoughts, and in the stillness of the night he can easily observe and catch them.

7. The God-loving monk, when the bell rings for prayer, says: 'Good, good!' The lazy one says: 'What a nuisance!'

8. The preparing of the table exposes gluttons, but the work of prayer exposes lovers of God. The former dance on seeing the table, but the latter scowl.

9. Long sleep produces forgetfulness, but vigil purifies the memory.

10. The farmer's wealth is gathered on the threshing floor and in the wine-press, but the wealth and knowledge of monks is gathered during the evenings and the night hours while standing at prayer and engaged in spiritual activity.

11. Long sleep is an unjust comrade; it robs the lazy of half their life, and even more.

12. The inexperienced monk is wide awake in friendly conversation; but his eyes become heavy when the hour of prayer is upon him.

13. The lazy monk is famous and skilled at talking; but when reading is about to begin, he cannot keep his eyes open. At the sound of the trumpet the dead will rise, and when idle talk is afoot those who were asleep come to themselves.

14. The tyrant sleep is a crafty friend; when we are full of food it often leaves us; but in hunger and thirst it attacks us vigorously.

15. It suggests that we should do handwork during our prayers; for it cannot otherwise foil the prayers of the vigilant.

16. It first enters into conflict with beginners in order to make them negligent from the very outset or to prepare the way for the demon of fornication.

17. Not until we are freed from this should we beg to be excused common worship, for often shame keeps us from dozing. The hound is the enemy of the hares, and the demon of vainglory is the enemy of sleep.

18. When the day is over, the vendor sits down and counts his profits, but the ascetic does so when the psalm-singing is over.

19. When prayer is finished wait soberly, and you will see that swarms of demons, as if challenged by us, try to invade us after prayer with absurd phantasies. Sit and watch; you will see those who are in the habit of snatching away the first fruits of the soul.

20. It may happen that continuous meditation on passages of the Psalms is prolonged into the hour of sleep. And it may happen that the demons put these passages into our mind in order to lead us to pride. I would not have mentioned the third case, had not someone forced me to do so. The soul which has spent all day unceasingly engaged with the word of the Lord will love to be occupied with it in sleep too. For this

second grace is in a special sense a reward for the first and helps us to avoid falls and phantasies.

This is the twentieth step. He who has mounted it has received light in his heart.

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