GUARDING OF THE HEART
OR
"WARFARE AGAINST THE PASSIONS"

Part of the "active" spiritual life (**praktiki**) is to "guard the heart" – ***"Guard your heart with all diligence"*** (PROV. 4:23) – and to struggle against the "passions" (often referred to as "evil thoughts" or simply "thoughts") (Bishop Kallistos Ware). Together with the grace of God, this is part of the effort to acquire "purity of heart". Purity of heart is in turn the key to genuine "prayer of the heart," which is according to Bishop Ware: "….prayer offered by the whole person, involving intellect, will, affections, and also the physical body."

It is absolutely essential to grasp what is meant by the "heart" biblically, and in the writings of the saints. Once again, in succinct form, Bishop Ware gives an excellent definition:

> **HEART (kardia):** not simply the physical organ but the spiritual center of man's being, man as made in the image of God, his deepest and truest self, or the inner shrine, to be entered only through sacrifice and death, in which the mystery of the union between the divine and the human is consummated. '"I called with my whole heart," says the psalmist – that is, with body, soul and spirit." (St. John Klimakos, THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT, Step 28). Heart has thus an all-embracing significance….

The usual, and enduring, list of eight "evil thoughts" or"passions" come from Evagrius of Pontus (+399). They are:

gluttony	anger
lust	despondency (acedia)
avarice	vainglory
dejection	pride

"The first of all the evil thoughts is that of self-love; the eight others derive from it." (Evagrius) This is related to "self-will."

There is a conscious attempt to describe the stages along the life of spiritual ascent in this list. The beginner must struggle against the "grosser" or more "materialistic" of the passions; **gluttony, lust, avarice**. After some progress, the middle of the ascent will present such inward temptations as **dejection, anger, despondency**. Those who already taste of contemplation must overcome the most subtle and "spiritual" of the passions – **vainglory** and **pride**. Passions of the body are purified by fasting, abstinence and frequent prostrations during prayer. Passions of the soul are purified through Confession and Communion, the reading the Scriptures, and practical acts of loving service to others. This purification leads to the condition of **"dispassion" (apatheia).** Being free from uncontrolled desires allows one to love, which is the fruit of "purity of heart."

In a more technical discussion, we learn that the passions, in turn, reflect the threefold division of the soul: the **appetitive (desiring)**; the **incensive (strong feeling)**; and the **intelligent (contemplative).** Gluttony, lust and avarice are linked with appetitive; dejection, anger and despondency with the incensive; vainglory and pride with the intelligent.

Other approaches from other great spiritual writers and directors have been made. One very well-known example is that of St. Gregory, Pope of Rome (+604). His list has seven (hence our "seven deadly sins") for he considers pride in a class of its own as the source and "mother' of all the other passions/vices. St. Gregory's list is as follows:

lust	anger
gluttony	envy
avarice	vainglory
dejection (apathy)	

THE PROCESS OF TEMPTATION

The process of temptation involves demonic provocation and human assent. The spiritual writers use certain technical terms in order to describe this process:

1. **Provocation** – initial incitement to evil; image-free. These incite the person independent of the will and so we are not morally responsible for them. They must be rejected. This rejection terminates the process of temptation.

2. **Momentary disturbance** – this is a step further than the "first appearance" or provocation described above, because the spiritual writings tell us that one can be freed from this experience but not from provocation itself.

3. **Communion** – "entertaining" the thought pleasurably, yet hesitating from acting upon it. This is now a "thought" with an accompanying image. A person is morally responsible for allowing this to happen.

4. **Assent** – a person now resolves to act upon this thought. Even if unable to carry this out, the intention of the heart has been clearly manifested and known to God.

5. **Prepossession** – repeated acts of sin predispose a person to yield to particular temptations. Although one still has free will, the force of habit makes it difficult to resist.

6. **Passion** – a prepossession, if not struggled against, will develop into an evil passion.