

THE LENTEN PRAYER OF ST. EPHRAIM

The special Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim is very brief and concise, but in the words of this prayer the meaning and purpose of Great Lent are revealed to us in great depth. This is **the** prayer of repentance. We call upon the 'Lord and Master' of our lives – Jesus Christ – to take away from us the soul-destroying passions of 'sloth, despair, lust of power and idle talk.' We further beseech Him to fill our cleansed hearts with those gifts of the Spirit that are transforming and 'resurrectional' – chastity, humility, patience and love.'

Repentance and Resurrection – 'the springtime of the soul' – are given to us through this unique prayer as we keep the 'soul-saving forty days' of the Fast. This prayer is meant to be used **in our homes** just as much as we use it in the church; and if we offer up this prayer with sincerity and regularity in our everyday lives, then we will create that peculiar atmosphere in our homes which makes this season so unique and beautiful for us as Orthodox Christians.

**O Lord and Master of my life,
take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power
and idle talk; (PROSTRATION)**

**But grant rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience
and love to thy servant. (PROSTRATION)**

**Yea, O Lord and King,
grant me to see my own transgressions
and not to judge my brother,
for blessed art Thou, unto the ages of ages. Amen.
(PROSTRATION)**

In the longer form of the Prayer we would then say, 'O God, cleanse me a sinner' twelve times together with a **bow** each time. The Prayer is then repeated in its entirety followed by a final prostration.

A **prostration** is made when we fall forward onto our hands and knees and touch the ground with our forehead. A **bow** is made by bending at the waist and touching the ground with our right hand. Prostrations and bows are usually preceded by making the **Sign of the Cross**.

The prostrations and bows which punctuate this Prayer are meant to **outwardly** symbolize the grace of God working **inwardly** in our hearts: a prostration is a sign of falling before God (as the Prodigal Son fell before his father) in a spirit of repentance, while standing up again is a sign of our spiritual resurrection in Christ. The whole person - **body and soul** - participates in prayer, because the whole person has been created and redeemed in Christ; and we await in hope the resurrection of the dead so as to be clothed in the incorruptible and spiritual bodies of the Kingdom.

"Pray without ceasing." (St. Paul; I THESS. 5:17)

"If you are not successful in prayer, you will not be successful in anything, for prayer is the root of everything." (St. Theophan the Recluse)

"Great is the power of prayer. More than anything else, it brings with it the Spirit of God, and its practice is available to everyone.... When the mind and the heart are united in prayer and the soul's thoughts are not dispersed, the heart is warmed by spiritual warmth in which the light of Christ shines, making the whole inner man peaceful and joyous." (St. Seraphim of Sarov)