

Prayer Group of



Saint Ephraim
the Syrian

PROLOGUE

When God created man, He designed him to be a praying creature. Prayer is the divine language planted inside man's heart as means of communing with God. When man fell from the divine grace and came under the tyranny of sin, his means of communing with God— his natural inclination to pray— became distorted and diminished, though it was never fully lost. Therefore, after his fall from grace, it became harder for man to pray. Instead of being intrinsically drawn toward prayer, man now needed to exert a concerted effort in order to learn how to speak that divine language all over again.

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE ST. EPHRAIM PRAYER GROUP



The Prayer Group of St. Ephraim the Syrian strives to abide by the beautiful instruction of the Apostle Paul to “pray ceaselessly” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), to keep the life of vigilant prayer uninterrupted within the St. Demetrios parish. Besides attending the divine services at the church, the members of the St. Ephraim Prayer Group take turns praying in their homes for the strengthening and progress of all the parish ministries, leaders, volunteers, parishioners of the St. Demetrios parish, their friends and their extended families, our priests and hierarchy everywhere, the holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, all those who are in need of God's mercy, and all those who have no one else to bring their remembrance in front of the divine throne of God.

EXPECTATIONS

The prayer warriors of the St. Ephraim prayer group are a gathering of Orthodox Christian believers and those who love the Lord Jesus Christ as the true God and Savior of the world. The leaders of the group will meet once a month for a common prayer gathering and study of the holy word of God. The group leaders, along with the rest of the group, will keep prayer constant throughout the month by ensuring that each person exercises his prayer role diligently according to the prayer schedule.

PREPARING TO PRAY

When preparing to pray individually, each person may endeavor to have a special corner or place within their home set aside for such a purpose. The prayer corner should be designed to face east if possible. The corner should be centered around one or several icons; consider perhaps an icon of Jesus Christ, one of the Mother of God, and one of your patron saint (and certainly additional ones, if desired).

During prayer time, you may wish to light a candle or burn some incense, in which case, please make sure that you do so safely. Place your candle or incense burner on a flat, stable, and hard surface, away from drafts.

All those who desire to submit names to the prayer list may do so by contacting the prayer group leaders. Those who may wish to share their experience about God's work within their lives and His response to the prayers offered to Him on their behalf for the benefit of others are welcome to do so.

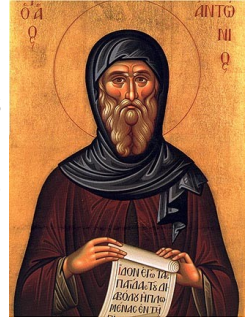


THE LIFE OF OUR RIGHTEOUS FATHER EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN

Text courtesy of www.oca.org

Saint Ephraim the Syrian, a teacher of repentance, was born at the beginning of the fourth century in the city of Nisibis (Mesopotamia) into the family of impoverished toilers of the soil. His parents raised their son in piety, but from his childhood he was known for his quick temper and impetuous character. He often had fights, acted thoughtlessly, and even doubted God's Providence. He finally recovered his senses by the grace of God, and embarked on the path of repentance and salvation.

Once, he was unjustly accused of stealing a sheep and was thrown into prison. He heard a voice in a dream calling him to repent and correct his life. After this, he was acquitted of the charges and set free. The young man ran off to the mountains to join the hermits. This form of Christian asceticism had been introduced by a disciple of St Anthony the Great, the Egyptian desert dweller Eugenius. St. James of Nisibis (January 13) was a noted ascetic, a preacher of Christianity and denouncer of the Arians. St Ephraim became one of his disciples. Under the direction of the holy hierarch, St. Ephraim attained Christian meekness, humility, submission to God's will, and the strength to undergo various temptations without complaint.



St. James transformed the wayward youth into a humble and contrite monk. Realizing the great worth of his disciple, he made use of his talents. He trusted him to preach sermons, to instruct children in school, and he took Ephraim with him to the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea (in the year 325). St. Ephraim was in obedience to St. James for fourteen years, until the bishop's death in 338.

After the capture of Nisibis by the Persians in 363, St. Ephraim went to a monastery near the city of Edessa. Here he saw many great ascetics, passing their lives in prayer and psalmody. Their caves were solitary shelters, and they fed themselves with a certain plant.

He became especially close to the ascetic Julian (October 18), who was of one mind with him. St. Ephraim combined asceticism with a ceaseless study of the Word of God, taking from it both solace and wisdom for his soul. The Lord gave him a gift of teaching, and people began to come to him, wanting to hear his counsel, which produced compunction in the soul, since he began with self-accusation. Both verbally and in writing, St. Ephraim instructed everyone in repentance, faith and piety, and he denounced the Arian heresy, which at that time was causing great turmoil. Pagans who heard the preaching of the saint were converted to Christianity.

He also wrote the first Syriac commentary on the Pentateuch (i.e. "Five Books") of Moses. He wrote many prayers and hymns, thereby enriching the Church's liturgical services. Famous prayers of St. Ephraim are to the Most Holy Trinity, to the Son of God, and to the Most Holy Theotokos. He composed hymns for the Twelve Great Feasts of the Lord (the Nativity of Christ, the Baptism, the Resurrection), and funeral hymns. St. Ephraim's Prayer of Repentance, "O Lord and Master of my life...", is recited during Great Lent, and it summons Christians to spiritual renewal.

From ancient times the Church has valued the works of St Ephraim. His works were read publicly in certain churches after the Holy Scripture, as St. Jerome tells us. At present, the Church Typikon prescribes certain of his instructions to be read on the days of Lent. Among the prophets, St. David is the preeminent psalmist; among the Fathers of the Church, St. Ephraim the Syrian is the preeminent man of prayer. His spiritual experience made him a guide for monastics and a help to the pastors of Edessa. St. Ephraim wrote in Syriac, but his works were very early translated into Greek and Armenian. Translations into Latin and Slavonic were made from the Greek text.

In many of St. Ephraim's works we catch glimpses of the life of the Syrian ascetics, which was centered on prayer and working in various obediences for the common good of the brethren. The outlook of all the Syrian ascetics was the same. The monks believed that the goal of their efforts was communion with God and the acquisition of divine grace. For them, the present life was a time of tears, fasting and toil.

"If the Son of God is within you, then His Kingdom is also within you. Thus, the Kingdom of God is within you, a sinner. Enter into yourself, search diligently and without toil you shall find it. Outside of you is death, and the door to it is sin. Enter into yourself, dwell within your heart, for God is there."

Constant spiritual sobriety, the developing of good within man's soul gives him the possibility to take upon himself a task like blessedness, and a self-constraint like sanctity. The requital is presupposed in the earthly life of man, it is an undertaking of spiritual perfection by degrees. Whoever grows himself wings upon the earth, says St. Ephraim, is one who soars up into the heights; whoever purifies his mind here below, there glimpses the Glory of God. In whatever measure each one loves God, he is, by God's love, satiated to fullness according to that measure.

Man, cleansing himself and attaining the grace of the Holy Spirit while still here on earth, has a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven. To attain to life eternal, in the teachings of St. Ephraim, does not mean to pass over from one realm of being into another, but rather to discover "the heavenly," spiritual condition of being. Eternal life is not bestowed on man through God's one-sided efforts, but rather, it constantly grows like a seed within him by his efforts, toils and struggles.



The pledge within us of "theosis" (or "deification") is the Baptism of Christ, and the main force that drives the Christian life is repentance. St. Ephraim was a great teacher of repentance. The forgiveness of sins in the Mystery of Repentance, according to his teaching, is not an external exoneration, not a forgetting of the sins, but rather their complete undoing, their annihilation. The tears of repentance wash away and burn away the sin. Moreover, they (i.e. the tears) enliven, they transfigure sinful nature, they give the strength "to walk in the way of the Lord's commandments," encouraging hope in God. In the fiery font of repentance, the saint wrote, "you sail yourself across, O sinner, you resurrect yourself from the dead."

St. Ephraim, accounting himself as the least and worst of all, went to Egypt at the end of his life to see the efforts of the great ascetics. He was accepted there as a welcome guest and received great solace from conversing with them. On his return journey he visited at Caesarea in Cappadocia with St. Basil the Great (January 1), who wanted to ordain him a priest, but he considered himself unworthy of the priesthood. At the insistence of St. Basil, he consented only to be ordained as a deacon, in which rank he remained until his death. Later on, St. Basil invited St. Ephraim to accept a bishop's throne, but the saint feigned madness in order to avoid this honor, humbly regarding himself as unworthy of it.

After his return to his own Edessa wilderness, St. Ephraim hoped to spend the rest of his life in solitude, but divine Providence again summoned him to serve his neighbor. The inhabitants of Edessa were suffering from a devastating famine. By the influence of his word, the saint persuaded the wealthy to render aid to those in need. From the offerings of believers he built a poor-house for the poor and sick. St. Ephraim then withdrew to a cave near Edessa, where he remained to the end of his days.

St. Ephraim is commemorated on January 28.

Opening Prayers

Glory to You, O God; our hope, O Lord, glory to You.

Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of truth, present in all places and filling all things, treasury of good things and giver of life, come and dwell in us, cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O Good One.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (3 times)

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

All Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, pardon our sins. Master, forgive our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for Your Name's sake.

Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

(At this point, please read the list of names on the prayer list)



Prayer to Our Lord Jesus Christ

O Lord God, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living Father, You came into the world for its salvation and accepted to be sacrificed on the cross to save us from the slavery of sin and from eternal death. We supplicate You to accept our prayers on behalf of all Your servants who have asked us to pray for them, those whose names are known to us and those whose are not, those who have no one to bring remembrance of them in front of Your divine and heavenly throne, and all of Your creation from the days of Adam until these latter days. For You are the True Creator of all things and the only God of every visible and invisible creature, and to You we send up glory, together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Psalm 142 (143)

○ Lord, hear my prayer; give ear to my supplication in Your truth; answer me in Your righteousness; do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for no one living shall become righteous in Your sight. For the enemy persecuted my soul; he humbled my life to the ground; he caused me to dwell in dark places as one long dead, and my spirit was in anguish within me; my heart was troubled within me. I remembered the days of old, and I meditated on the works of Your hands. I spread out my hands to You; my soul thirsts for You like a waterless land. Hear me speedily, ○ Lord; my spirit faints within me; turn not Your face from me, lest I become like those who go down into the pit. Cause me to hear Your mercy in the morning, for I hope in You; make me know, ○ Lord, the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You. Deliver me from my enemies, ○ Lord, for to You I flee for refuge. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Your good Spirit shall guide me in the land of uprightness. For Your name's sake, ○ Lord, give me life; in Your righteousness You shall bring my soul out of affliction. In Your mercy You shall destroy my enemies; You shall utterly destroy all who afflict my soul, for I am Your servant.

Prayer to the Mother of God in a Time of Distress

○ my beloved Queen, my hope, ○ Mother of God, protector of orphans and protector of those who are hurt, the savior of those who perish and the consolation of all those who are in distress, you see my misery, you see my sorrow and my loneliness. Help me, I am powerless, give me strength. You know what I suffer, you know my grief. Lend me your hand, for I have no one else as my hope but you, my protector and my intercessor before God. Be my Mother, my consoler, my helper. Protect me and save me, chase away from me my earthly concerns, my lowness of heart, and my despondency. Help me, ○ Mother of my God!

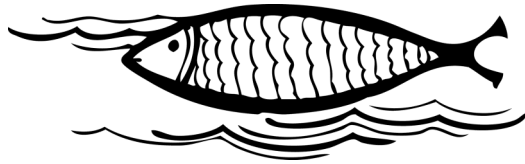
Psalm 50 (51)

Have mercy on me, ○ God, according to Your great mercy; and according to the abundance of Your compassion, blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from my lawlessness and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my lawlessness, and my sin is always before me. Against You only have I sinned and done evil in Your sight; that You may be justified in Your words, and overcome when You are judged. For behold, I was conceived in transgressions, and in sins my mother bore me. Behold, You love truth; You showed me the unknown and secret things of Your wisdom. You shall sprinkle me with hyssop, and I will be cleansed; You shall wash me, and I will be made whiter than snow. You shall make me hear joy and gladness; my bones that were humbled shall greatly rejoice. Turn Your face from my sins, and blot out all my transgressions.

Create in me a clean heart, ○ God, and renew a right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your guiding Spirit. I will teach transgressors Your ways, and the ungodly shall turn back to You. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, ○ God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall greatly rejoice in Your righteousness. ○ Lord, You shall open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise. For if You desired sacrifice, I would give it; You will not be pleased with whole burnt offerings. A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit, a broken and humbled heart God will not despise. Do good, ○ Lord, in Your good pleasure to Zion, and let the walls of Jerusalem be built; then You will be pleased with a sacrifice of righteousness, with offerings and whole burnt offerings; then shall they offer young bulls on Your altar.

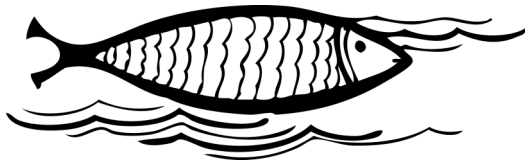
The Creed

I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not created, of one essence with the Father through Whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And He rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets. In one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen.



The prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, do not permit the spirit of laziness and meddling, lust for power and idle talk to come into me. Instead, grant me, your servant, the spirit of prudence, humility, patience, and love. Yes, Lord and King, give me the power to see my own faults and not to judge my brother. For you are blessed unto the ages of ages. Amen.



Supplicatory Hymns

Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for lacking every defense, we sinners address this supplication to you as Master, have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Lord, have mercy on us for we have trusted in You; do not be exceedingly angry with us and remember not our transgressions; but look graciously upon us now as the compassionate One and deliver us from our enemies. For You are our God and we Your people, all of us are the works of Your hands, and we have called upon Your name.

Both now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

O blessed Theotokos, open to us the gate of compassion, so that by placing our hopes in you we may not fail, but may be delivered through you from adversity, for you are the salvation of the Christian people.

Hymn to the Theotokos

I sing of your grace, O Sovereign Lady, and I pray you to grace my mind. Teach me to step rightly in the way of Christ's commandments. Strengthen me to keep awake in song, and drive away the sleep of despondency. O Bride of God, by your prayers release me, bound with the bonds of sin. Guard me by night and by day and deliver me from foes that defeat me. O bearer of God the Life-giver, enlighten me who am deadened by passions. O bearer of the Un-waning Light, enlighten my blinded soul. O marvelous palace of the Master, make me to be a house of the Divine Spirit. O bearer of the Healer, heal the perennial passions of my soul.

Guide me to the path of repentance, for I am tossed in the storm of life. Deliver me from the eternal fire and Gehenna. Let me not be exposed to the rejoicing of demons, guilty as I am of many sins. Renew me, grown old from senseless sins, O Most Immaculate One. Present me untouched by all torments and pray for me to the Master of all. Vouchsafe that I may find the joys of heaven with all the saints. O Most Holy Virgin, hearken unto the voice of your unprofitable servant. Grant me torrents of tears, O Most Pure one, to cleanse my soul from impurity.

I offer the groanings of my heart to you unceasingly; strive for me, O Sovereign Lady. Accept my service of supplication and offer it to our compassionate God. O you who are above the angels, raise me above this world's confusion. O Light-bearing heavenly tabernacle, direct the grace of the Spirit in me. I raise my hands and lips in your praise, defiled as they are by impurity, O Immaculate one. Deliver me from soul corrupting evils, and fervently intercede with Christ, to Whom is due honor and worship, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.



Petitions for the World

Lord, forgive those who hate us and those who wrong us; do good to those who do good; to our brethren and relatives, grant their requests for salvation and eternal life; visit the sick and grant them healing; govern those at sea; accompany the travelers; to those who serve us and those who help us grant remission of sins; forgive those who have asked us to pray for them and have mercy on them according to Your great mercy.

Remember, O Lord, all our fathers and brethren departed this life and rest them where the light of Your countenance shines. Remember, Lord, our brethren the captives and spare them from every tribulation. Remember, O Lord, those who labor and bring forth fruit in Your holy Churches, and grant to them all requests for salvation and eternal life.

Remember us as well, O Lord, Your humble and sinful servants, and illumine our minds with the light of Your knowledge, and guide us in the way of Your commandments; through the intercessions of Your most holy Mother, our Lady the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, and all Your Saints; for You are blessed to the ages of ages. Amen.

Prayer of St. Ioannikios

My hope is the Father, my refuge the Son, my protection the Holy Spirit. O holy Trinity, glory to You.

Prayer to a Person's Guardian Angel

Holy Angel, attendant on my wretched soul and my afflicted life, forsake me not a sinner nor depart from me because of my lack of self-control. Give no place to the wicked demon to dominate me through prevailing over this mortal body of mine. Hold me by my wretched and feeble hand, and lead me on the way of salvation. Yes, O holy Angel of God, the guardian and protector of my wretched soul and body, forgive me everything that I have done to trouble you all the days of my life and if I have sinned in anything this day. Shelter me tonight and preserve me from every prank of the evil one, that I not anger God by any sin. And intercede with the Lord on my behalf, that He strengthen me in the fear of Him, and that He make me a worthy servant of His goodness. Amen.



Prayer to Our Lord Jesus Christ

O Master Christ God, who by Your Passion have healed my passions and by Your wounds have healed my wounds, grant tears of compunction to me who have greatly offended You. Temper my body with the fragrance of Your life-creating Body and sweeten my soul with Your precious Blood, taking away the bitterness which the contending adversary has made me to drink.

Lift my mind up to You, since it has been drawn down below, and lead me up from the pit of destruction. For I have not repentance, I have not compunction, I have not a tear of supplication **as children which shall lead me up to my own inheritance**. I have been darkened in mind by the passions of life and I am not able to look up to You in my travail; I cannot rouse myself to fervor with tears of love for You.

But, O Master, Lord Jesus Christ, Treasury of good things, grant complete repentance to me and a suffering heart that shall seek You out. Grant Your grace to me and renew in me the likeness of Your image. I have abandoned You; do not abandon me. Come forth and seek me out, lead me forth into Your pasture, number me together with the sheep of Your chosen flock, and nourish me together with them on the verdure of Your divine Mysteries, by the intercessions of Your all-pure Mother and of all Your Saints. Amen.

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

