

## **A Contemplation and a Prayer**

*By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)*

With the dawn of this new year, silence strongly draws me to You, and I prostrate in the stillness of the night, gazing toward Your radiant face, O Lord. I cherish silence, O Lord, not as an end in itself, but as the fullness of Your presence, and as a greater opportunity to listen to Your voice and observe Your work in my life.

Here I am, like all men, bidding farewell to one year and welcoming another. I know well that time moves on with or without me, gripping all of us tightly in its grasp, for we are at the mercy of time even if we try to escape and hide this fact.

Poor is man, O my Lord Jesus, and even poorer when he forsakes You and replaces You with more and more things. Poor and destitute he remains, because without You he is a prisoner of time and space, revolving around them, seeking liberation from their constraints, only to return and find himself once again under their dominion.

In vain, we bid farewell to and welcome the passing times with frivolity and worldly joys. Unless we taste the flavor of eternal life, which You alone bestow, we will not know true liberation. Your words, "For a thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday when it is past," (Psalm 89:4) will remain incomprehensible to us.

But, my Lord, how can I live in eternity while I am torn between various concerns, confined to an earthly life for years that, however long they may be, will not exceed seventy or eighty, as the psalmist says (89:10)?

In the tumultuous night of welcoming this year, I prostrate in silence to examine and scrutinize myself. I find that I am still seeking You, yet I falter on both sides of the path. At times, I desire You with all my being and sincerity, while at other times, this world ensnares me, causing me to forget You and neglect my true life. It seems that I have not yet broken free from the shackles of this world. As my sins lay before me, they tell me (in the manner of Your Saint Isaac the Syrian) that I still love them, as evidenced by my return to them from time to time.

This world no longer entices me with anything. My heart yearns to be filled with You alone. Everything in this world, from its fleeting joys to its passing pleasures "fades quickly, like the grass of the field," and only Your living and vivifying presence remains.

It is not in vain that Your peaceful saint, John Climacus, placed the virtue of asceticism on the first step of the ladder leading to heaven! How can one who desires eternity remain a captive of the world?

And how can I ask for eternity while being submerged, even to the point of drunkenness, in worldly affairs?

How can I live in renewal while not letting go of the bondage to which I have become accustomed?

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Our world is filled with gossip, complaints, criticizing others, and self-glorification. How can we understand that true peace, to which we aspire, is not achieved by pursuing and drowning in these things?

Your face, which extends through the Church's institutions, remains marred by our shortcomings and those of us who lead them. We often stain it with our desires, knowingly or unknowingly.

And how evident it is in us who bear Your name, that we are not what You truly are. We confine You within our narrow boundaries and veil Your love from everyone, except from those we claim for ourselves and choose according to our desires.

We, O my Jesus, continue to be preoccupied with other beauties, which come from You. We become captivated by beauty, assuming it is from You, and we forget that Your true beauty is only revealed in the soul that adorns itself with You after casting away its sins, to be replaced by everything that comes from You and You alone.

Your people are weary, O Lord. Sins, corruption, and wars have burdened them. They have become so exhausted that they seek joy in whatever is offered to them. Anxiety leads and drives them to indulge in pleasures and to misunderstand true happiness.

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May You guide us, O Lord, in the coming year, to the paths of salvation and quench our thirst with Your everlasting fountain of life.

May You open our hearts to abhor our sins, to cast them away, and to replace them with the fragrance of Your flowers.

May You grant us the courage to break free from what pulls us toward death and energize us to persevere in what gives us life.

May You enable us to see Your will in what happens to us and with us, recognizing that Your discipline is born out of pure love, and it opens new paths for us to walk towards You, away from futile vanities that do not benefit us.

May You bestow upon us a boldness that does not shy away from You, but steadfastly and tenderly testifies to Your love for all the world to know.

May You preserve us in Your peace, so that we may forget its imitations and carry it to those around us.

May You warm us with Your love, my Lord, in this coming year, so that we may prefer it over any love that opposes You.

May You help us love silence, O Lord, that we may listen to You. Make us new from within, O my Christ, so that the year may truly become new.