



## Praying Unceasingly: The Jesus Prayer

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### **Abstract**

*This article elucidates the theology and practice of the Jesus Prayer based on the readings of the tradition of the Church on prayers. Prayer, to the average person, is asking God for something. But, the Jesus prayer is not this. It is an attempt to change the one who prays. This prayer is traditionally a monastic prayer. Its simplicity allows everyone to practice it. In this prayer, there is faith and hope in the goodness of Christ. It is the prayer from our whole being. It is a cry out of the deep heart and nepsis without ceasing. The unceasing repetition of the Jesus Prayer kept the mind on the thought of God and dispersed all irrelevant thoughts (logismoi). This is the prayer requires watchfulness as a lantern requires a candle. Watchfulness, mature in Christ, the fruit of Spirit, and theosis will follow in the praying unceasingly: the Jesus Prayer.*

**Keywords:** Christ; Jesus Prayer; logismoi; mercy; nepsis; the Philokalia.

### **INTRODUCTION**

We all know that prayer is the most important exercise in the spirituality especially in Christianity. Prayer is our true life, our highest task. Without prayer we are not genuinely human. We have been created to pray, just as we have been created to speak or to think. Yet how are we to pray? We can all of us commence with exterior prayer, with words of prayer recited from memory or repeated from books. But how are we to advance from this to living inner prayer? “Pray without ceasing,” says St. Paul (1 Thess. 5:17). How shall we make prayer not just one activity among others but the activity of our entire life, a dimension present in everything that we undertake? How can prayer become part of our very self, not merely something that we do but something that we are? “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Where do we begin, how do we embark on the journey inward?

To questions such as these many Eastern Church Fathers such as the Philokalia Fathers<sup>1</sup> in the present work an answer that may at first sight seem oversimplified but that is in fact profound and far-reaching. Begin the journey, they tell us, by practicing the

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<sup>1</sup> St. Makarios St. Nikodimos, *The Philokalia, Volume One*, ed. Philip Sherrard Kallistos Ware G.E.H Palmer, *The Philokalia* (LONDON: Faber and faber, 1979).



Jesus Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*. Use this short invocation at home during your set periods of daily prayer. Use it in church at appropriate moments in the services. Use it also in a “free” manner, once or many times, throughout the day as you go about your customary tasks. It is a prayer for all seasons, a prayer that can be said by anyone, in any place and at any time. Yet, despite its straightforward character, it is a prayer that leads also to the deepest mysteries of contemplation and creative silence. As St. Ignatius Brianchaninov puts it, “Such is the property of the Prayer of Jesus—it leads its practicer from earth to heaven, and places him among the celestial inhabitants.”<sup>2</sup> Calling it “the royal way” and the “narrow way,” he states: “Do not think of it as a human institution; it is a divine institution.”

The vitality of Jesus Prayer is the power of the name of Jesus. In the words of St. Theophan the Recluse (1815–1894), “The Jesus Prayer is like any other prayer. It is stronger than all other prayers only in virtue of the all-powerful Name of Jesus, Our Lord and Saviour.”<sup>3</sup> The invocation of the Holy Name is an ancient way of praying that goes back to Christ Himself. At the Last Supper, Jesus explicitly taught His disciples to pray in His name (John 14:14; 16:24). This new commandment to pray in His name, given by the Saviour on the eve of His Passion, evidently represented a significant turning point for the apostles, a decisive step forward in their relationship with Christ. The name of the Lord is above every name; it is a source of delight, a source of joy, a source of life. It is Spirit. It quickens, transforms, purifies, deifies.”<sup>4</sup> Ignatius goes so far as to assert that the Holy Name is itself divine: “The Name of our Lord Jesus Christ is divine—divine are the force and virtue of this Name—all-powerful and salvific, beyond our understanding.”<sup>5</sup> Similar language is used by St. John of Kronstadt (1829–1908) that the name of Jesus, invoked in prayer with faith, already contains God’s presence.<sup>6</sup> According to Ignatius, belief in the divine power of the Name possesses “all the authority of a dogma” of the Church.<sup>7</sup> Thus,

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<sup>2</sup> Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*, ed. Father Lazarus, 5 year edi. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2013), 28–29.

<sup>3</sup> Igumen Chariton of Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), 99.

<sup>4</sup> Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*, 4, 32.

<sup>5</sup> Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Conversation between a Starets and a Disciple* (Sisteron: Editions Presence, 1976), 100.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony M. Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Light & Life Publishing Company, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Brianchaninov, *Conversation between a Starets and a Disciple*, 88.



the power of the Jesus Prayer lies in the name, “Jesus”, the name that is above every name.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus Prayer is an attempt to change the one who prays. Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos explains how this can happen. We should not to break the rule of this prayer: a Christian, while he is feeding, working, driving, sitting, moving or doing something else, should always cry out: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me.” Therefore, the name of Jesus will subdue the passions of the soul in the heart. We must live with the name of the Lord Jesus to take the Lord's Spirit and the heart, both of which become one. Do not sever your heart from God, but dwell in Him and still keep our heart in remembrance of our Lord Christ Jesus until the name of the Lord is embedded in the heart and nothing else is ever in our view.<sup>9</sup> By constant, almost incessant repetition, we make the reality of mercy, both receiving it from God and passing it on to others, the foundation of our lives.

We read about it in that classic of Orthodoxy, *The Way of a Pilgrim*.<sup>10</sup> This book is the story of an unnamed peasant who seeks out someone who will teach him how to fulfill the Biblical command to “pray without ceasing.” He wanders through Russia and Siberia with a knapsack of dried bread for food and the charity of people for shelter. He asks many church authorities and religious people, but none can teach him how to pray without ceasing. He is about to come away from his journey empty-hearted when at last he meets a holy man who teaches him the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus....” From this man he learns that to pray without ceasing is “a constant, uninterrupted calling upon the divine name of Jesus during every occupation, at all times, at all places, even during sleep.” He learns to repeat it as many as 12,000 times a day without effort. The Jesus Prayer becomes a constant, warming presence within him, and brings him great joy.

As we pray the Jesus Prayer again and again, it becomes established in our hearts. With time, silence can come to our consciousness effortlessly. This Prayer allows one mindful of the existence of God in the middle of distress, tentation, suffering, rage or resentment. As a result, we become prayer. We begin to pray, not in our own words, nor in

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<sup>8</sup> Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, 88–89.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>10</sup> Anonymous, *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, Olga Savin. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001).



our own minds, but in the Spirit.<sup>11</sup> Paul Evdokimov writes that it is not enough to say prayers; one must become, be prayer, prayer incarnate.<sup>12</sup> St. Theophan is more precise and says, “standing before God with the mind in the heart.”<sup>13</sup> That’s why this prayer is very significant in spirituality. Jesus Prayer is a praying unceasingly with the mind in the heart. It is a prayer of the heart.<sup>14</sup> In this article, I will elucidate the theology of Jesus Prayer as well the practical matters and benefits for the readers.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based on the readings of the tradition of the Church Father writings. I describe the several points of the topic from the theological and spiritual matters in order to give the practical steps for the lay readers to practice Jesus Prayer daily.

## DISCUSSION AND RESULT

### Jesus Prayer

The Jesus Prayer is a spiritual practice that is in line with the centrality of Christ. The brief prayer reads, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner* (Κύριε Ιησού Χριστό, Υιός του Θεού, ἐλέησον μη τον αμαρτωλόν). A similar prayer to Jesus can be found in Luke 17:13; 18:38, Mark 10:47, and Matthew 20:31. In the book of Acts, “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) The power in the prayer comes from our proclaiming the Lord’s name. In its simple form we confess our faith in Jesus Christ as our God and Lord.

The Jesus Prayer can be shortened in many ways. It can become seven words in English: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” or two words in Greek, *Kyrie eleison*, “Lord have mercy”, or “Lord Jesus” or simply “Jesus,” repeated prayerfully.<sup>15</sup> Brianchaninov admits that, in the New Testament itself, no precise description is given of the way in which the first Christians prayed in the name of Jesus. But he considers that any such description was at that time unnecessary, because in the apostolic era the Jesus Prayer was generally known to all. There are, as a matter of fact, no specific references to the

<sup>11</sup> M. Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–23, 27–18.

<sup>15</sup> Kallistos, *Kallistos Ware Bishop - The Power of the Name\_ The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality* (Fairacres Oxford: SLG Press, 1986), 5.



Jesus Prayer, in the technical sense, until the rise of monasticism in the fourth and fifth centuries. The Desert Fathers of Egypt used to practise what is often termed “monologic” prayer, that is to say, the frequent repetition of a single word or phrase. The first emergence of a spirituality clearly centred upon the name of Jesus is to be found in an author of the mid-fifth century, St. Diadochus of Photice. Instead of proposing a variety of short formulae, he advocates the exclusive use of the invocation *Lord Jesus*, but he does not indicate what further words, if any, were to follow this opening clause. Constantly repeated, this prayer will help us to control our wandering imagination, and will bring us to an unceasing awareness of the divine presence.<sup>16</sup> In the two centuries following Diadochus, different writers began to recommend the invocations *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me*, or *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*; and this latter phrase came gradually to be accepted as the standard form of the Jesus Prayer. Greek sources, from the fourteenth century onwards, sometimes add at the end the words *a sinner*, and this is the formula most commonly adopted in the Russian tradition. But there has never been any strict uniformity. Much briefer invocations are also found, such as “My Jesus,” or even the name “Jesus” entirely on its own. But this last practice, although frequent in the medieval West, is rare in the Greek and Russian tradition.<sup>17</sup> Whatever the variants, the essential and unchanging element in the Jesus Prayer is the Holy Name of Jesus himself. It is thus that gives to the prayer its uniqueness and force.

This prayer is traditionally a monastic prayer. During the rite of monastic profession, the future monk or nun is given a rosary or prayer-rope, to be used when invoking the Holy Name, and in this way the Jesus Prayer may be seen as part of the monastic vow.<sup>18</sup> But Brianchaninov insists that the Jesus Prayer is suitable for “all the people of God without exception whether monks or lay people.”<sup>19</sup> Its simplicity allows everyone to practice it. St. Theophan affirms that the Jesus prayer practice is plain. Stand in the heart before the Lord, and call upon Him: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me!' The essential part of this is not in words, but in faith, contrition and self-abandonment to the Lord. With these thoughts, even without words, one may stand before the Lord and it will still be

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<sup>16</sup> Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*, 24–25.

<sup>17</sup> Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*.

<sup>18</sup> Brianchaninov, *Conversation between a Starlets and a Disciple*, 73; Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*.

<sup>19</sup> Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*, 38, 47.



prayer.<sup>20</sup> In this prayer, there is faith and hope in the goodness of Christ. In praying this simple prayer, we pursue an undivided attention to love Christ, which can translate to loving our neighbors.

### ***The Two Parts of the Jesus Prayer***

There are two main parts of the Jesus Prayer. Kallistos Ware states that the Prayer first talks of the grace of Heaven, praising Jesus as the Lord of all existence and as the everlasting Son. And at its end the Prayer switches to our status as sinners-sinful by reason of dropping, sinful by our moral wrongdoing. The prayer then starts with adoration, and concludes with penance.<sup>21</sup>

The first part of the prayer, “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God”, contains a confession of faith in the divinity of Christ, but also in all the Holy Trinity. Ware explains that the Jesus Prayer is not only Christ-centred but Trinitarian. This is, in outward form, a prayer to the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ. But the other two persons are also present, although they are not named. For, by speaking of Jesus as 'Son of God', we point towards His Father; and the Holy Spirit is also embraced in our prayer. St. Hesychios the Priest states, “In the presence of Christ you will feel the Holy Spirit spring up within your soul. It is the Spirit who initiates man’s intellect, so that it can see with “unveiled face” (2 Cor. 3:18). For “No one can say ‘Lord Jesus’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). In other words, it is the Spirit who mystically confirms Christ’s presence in us.”<sup>22</sup>

Jesus is the personal name conferred on Christ after his human birth from the Virgin Mary. This has the sense of Saviour, the anointed king, the one who has mercy. He is also addressed as 'Lord' and 'Son of God': here the Prayer speaks of his Godhead, of his transcendence and eternity. He is referred to as 'Jesus,' the spiritual name given to him by his mother and foster-father after his birth in Bethlehem. All his manhood, the Incarnation, the Prayer talks to the true truth to his conception as a human being and his divine Godhead. The offering, therefore, is an expression of confidence in Jesus Christ as truly

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<sup>20</sup> Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, 89.

<sup>21</sup> Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (America: ST. VLADIMIR’S SEMINARY PRESS, 1986), 90–93; Kallistos, *Kallistos Ware Bishop - The Power of the Name\_ The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality*, 8–9.

<sup>22</sup> St. Nikodimos, *The Philokalia, Volume One*, 166–167.



divine and fully human respectively. He is the *Theanthropos* or 'God-man' that protects us from our sins just because at once He is God and man at once.<sup>23</sup>

The second part, “have mercy on me, a sinner,” there is a confession made by the one praying. He acknowledges his fall, both universal and personal, his sinfulness and the need for salvation. The word ‘mercy’ in Greek is *eleos* and it means “olive oil” for healing bruises and minor wounds, feeding or making food, shedding the light, and anointing. Ware states that 'mercy' represents compassion in motion, compassion striving to bring about redemption, salvation and wholeness. To have compassion is to acquit the other of the remorse he cannot brush out with his own attempts to rid him of the debts he cannot compensate himself, and render him free from the illness for which he cannot find any remedy.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the word 'mercy' means that much of this is granted as a free gift: whoever requests for mercy has no demands to the person, no privileges to which he may appeal. As sinners, we earnestly pray for healing from our sins,<sup>25</sup> lighting our feet,<sup>26</sup> blessing and feeding our soul.<sup>27</sup>

These two parts of the prayer, the confession of faith and the repentance of the one praying, give fullness and content to the prayer. Ware states, then, that the Jesus Prayer shows both the problem of man and the answer of Christ. Such are among the wealthy, both spiritual and devotional, present in the Prayer of Jesus; present, however, in a vivifying and active manner, not merely in the abstract. This unique meaning of the Jesus Prayer resides in the fact that it brings such realities to reality, such that they are grasped not only implicitly and practically but in all their fullness of our being.<sup>28</sup> To understand why this Prayer possess such efficacy, we must turn to two further aspects: the levels of prayer and the discipline of repetition. Therefore, I will explain further these two aspects and the benefits.

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<sup>23</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 91.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Kallistos, *Kallistos Ware Bishop - The Power of the Name\_ The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, 91.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 75–76.

<sup>28</sup> Kallistos, *Kallistos Ware Bishop - The Power of the Name\_ The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality*, 9.





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### *The Three Levels of Prayer*

St. Theophan describes about the degree of prayer.<sup>29</sup> First, he says, there is bodily prayer, prayer with the lips, consisting of reading, standing, making prostrations, etc. The second degree is prayer with attention when the mind has learned to focus completely on the words being prayed or read. The third degree is prayer of feeling when the heart now begins to be warmed by the thoughts that existed formerly in the mind. The mind has now descended into the heart. Thought and feeling are now wedded. When the prayer of feeling becomes continuous, then, says St. Theophan, spiritual prayer has begun. This is the last stage of prayer where the Holy Spirit prays in us and for us.

Brianchaninov, like St. Theophan, explains three main stages or levels on this journey inwards, which he describes as “oral,” “mental,” and “cordial”; that is prayer of the lips, prayer of the mind or intellect, and prayer of the heart. There is a progression happening when we practice the prayer:<sup>30</sup>

- (1) Prayer of the Lips. One can start with invoking the name of Jesus vocally or by simply moving the lips to say this prayer. We seek to concentrate our mind upon the meaning of the words that we pronounce.
- (2) Prayer of the Mind. The vocal prayer alone is not enough. One must focus his or her mind on the meaning of the words in the prayer, and ultimately on Jesus himself. St. Gregory of Sinai suggests that the prayer of the lips and the prayer of the mind be used alternately to avoid tiredness. We have to struggle constantly against wandering thoughts. Through the faithful and persistent repetition of the Jesus Prayer, constantly to recall our volatile attention to the awareness of Christ’s presence. Each time the mind wanders, we are to bring it back firmly yet without inner anger—back to the centre, back to the One whom we are invoking, back to Jesus. In this level we need attentiveness or nepsis.<sup>31</sup> St. Hesychios says that nepsis and the prayer of Jesus are the complement one another; for near focus goes with constant prayer, while prayer goes with strong watchfulness and intellectual attentiveness.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, 63,67.

<sup>30</sup> Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*, 66–67.

<sup>31</sup> Literally, the opposite to a state of drunken stupor; hence spiritual sobriety, alertness, vigilance. It signifies an attitude of attentiveness.

<sup>32</sup> St. Nikodimos, *The Philokalia, Volume One*, 178.





(3) Prayer of the Heart. In this way our invocation becomes prayer of the heart, or more exactly prayer of the mind in the heart. We pray with our entire being: spirit, soul, and body together. True prayer proceeds not only from the mouth but more especially from the heart, that is, from our whole being. It is a cry out of the deep.

The transition from the second to the third level is crucial and decisive. Prayer of the heart is not simply the result of human effort, and still less is it the automatic consequence of any physical technique. It is on the contrary a gift from God, the free gift of His grace, conferred by Him on those whom He chooses, at the time He chooses.<sup>33</sup>

Our part is watchfulness and unceasing prayer like St. Nikiphoros the Monk stated that when the mind is strongly founded in the head, it must not stay quiet and idle there; it should repeat and meditate continuously on the prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,' and should never quit doing so. For this prayer prevents the mind from disturbance, renders it impregnable to diabolical assaults and enhances the devotion and appetite for God every day.<sup>34</sup> Next, I will explain the most important part to achieve the prayer of the heart.

### ***Unceasing Prayer and Watchfulness***

Jesus Prayer is a process and you will go through stages. Brianchaninov tells us that we are guided to the temple of the heart by our clear attentive beginning. With the involvement of the conscience it is one thing to pray attentively; it is another thing to fall through the spirit into the temple of the conscience and from there to deliver sacred worship overflowing through spiritual grace and strength. The second is the result of the first test. Throughout meditation the mind's focus pulls the spirit into sorrow. Through commitment increasing, heart and mind compassion is transformed into heart and mind union. Eventually, as the focus allows the meditation its own, the spirit descends into the heart for the greatest and most important worship service. Much of this is achieved with the direction of God's grace. To aim for the second before receiving the first is dangerous.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*.

<sup>34</sup> St. Makarios St. Nikodimos, *The Philokalia, Volume Four*, ed. Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware G. E. H. Palmer (LONDON: Faber and Faber, 1995), 206.

<sup>35</sup> Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*, 48.



Undoubtedly this simplicity of Jesus Prayer never ceases from any thoughts,<sup>36</sup> images or fantasies,<sup>37</sup> and passions.<sup>38</sup> St. Makarios of Egypt says, “The most important work that a spiritual wrestler can do, is to enter within the heart, there to fight Satan ; to hate and repel the thoughts that he inspires and to wage war upon him.”<sup>39</sup> We need the stability of the mind in watchfulness and Jesus Prayer in order to tame any thoughts and passions and achieve the mental or unceasing prayer. Jesus himself made this clear when he said: “Without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). St. Hesychios the Priest stated that forgetfulness will extinguish our guard over our minds as water extinguishes fire; yet the constant repeating of the prayer of Jesus, coupled with stern caution, uproots it from our souls. The prayer for Jesus needs patience, as a lamp demands a fire.<sup>40</sup> St. Evagrius the Solitary says,

Prayer is an ascent of the mind to God. If you love God, you converse with him continually as you would with your father, banishing every passion from your mind. The unceasing repetition of the Jesus Prayer kept the mind on the thought of God and dispersed all irrelevant thoughts (*logismoi*). Unceasing prayer is the way of attentiveness or *nepsis* to guard our nous or intellect and control *logismoi*.<sup>41</sup>

St. Barsanouphios and John say, “We must know that the constant invocation of the Name of God is a medicine which cures not only all the passions but also their effects. As a physician applies a cure or a poultice to the patient's wound, and these take effect though the patient himself does not know how this happens, so the Name of God when invoked kills all passions, although we do not know how. My brother, the passions are afflictions; and so, the Lord does not excommunicate us because of them, but He says: 'Call upon me in the time of affliction; and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me’” (Ps. xlix. 15. Sept.). Therefore, when beset by any kind of passion, there is nothing more useful than to

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<sup>36</sup> M.Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Passions is in Greek, the word signifies literally that which happens to a person or thing, an experience undergone passively; hence an appetite or impulse such as anger, desire or jealousy, that violently dominates the soul. Many Greek Fathers regard the passions as something intrinsically evil, a 'disease' of the soul.

<sup>39</sup> Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, 201.

<sup>40</sup> St. Nikodimos, *The Philokalia, Volume One*, 179–180.

<sup>41</sup> M.Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*.



call upon the Name of God. All we can do, weak as we are, is to flee for refuge to the Name of Jesus. For the passions, being demons, retreat if this Name is invoked.<sup>42</sup>

Abba Philimon advises paying close attention to your heart and looking over it, so that it will not allow access to your thoughts which are bad or pointless and worthless in any way. Without delay, whether sleeping or up, dining, drinking or in service, at times let the heart meditate on the Psalms inwardly and mentally, and at other times repeat the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of Heaven, have mercy on me." And when you chant, make sure that your mouth is not saying one thing while your mind is thinking about another.<sup>43</sup> And St. Theophan says that there is only one way to begin: and that is by taming passions. These cannot be brought under control in the soul except by guarding the heart and by attention. Those, therefore, who pass through all these stages in due order, each in its own time, can, when the heart is cleansed from passions, devote themselves entirely and wholly to psalmody, and to fighting against thoughts and they can look up towards heaven with their physical eyes or contemplate it with the spiritual eyes of the soul, praying aright in purity.<sup>44</sup>

Watchfulness and praying are an integral part. St. Symeon the New Theologian spoke of the value of uniting devotion with prayer: Mind must be as unified as the flesh is to the spirit ... Attention must move out to track the enemy like a hunter, so it must first fight for evil to avoid the soul's negative thinking. Prayer will at once obey focus, banish and eliminate all the bad thoughts that focus has previously battled, as it can not kill them by itself.<sup>45</sup> Jesus links watchfulness with prayer, "Watch, therefore, at all times praying..." The sublime troparion of the Bridegroom Christ which is chanted contritely during Holy Week is a call to such watchfulness: "*Behold, the Bridegroom comes in the middle of the night; and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching, but unworthy is he whom He shall find in slothfulness. Beware, then, O my soul, and be not overcome by sleep, lest thou be given over to death and shut out from the Kingdom. But return to soberness and*

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>43</sup> St. Nikodimos, *The Philokalia, Volume One*, 348.

<sup>44</sup> Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, 200.

<sup>45</sup> M.Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*.



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*cry aloud: Holy, holy, holy art Thou, O God: through the Theotokos have mercy upon us.*<sup>46</sup>

In watchfulness we need effort to struggle our three spiritual giants as St. Mark the Monk suggest us that if you wish to gain victory over the passions, enter within yourself through prayer and God's help; then descend into the depths of your heart and there track down these three powerful giants—forgetfulness, laziness, and ignorance. It is these three who maintain our moral adversaries' ranks: assisted by these three, all the other emotions, falling back to the heart, behaving, working, and gaining energy in self-indulgent and uneducated souls. But if by means of great attention and persistence of mind, and with help from above, you find those evil giants that are unbeknown to many, you will easily drive them away with the weapons of righteousness—with the remembrance of what is good, with the eagerness that spurs the soul to salvation, and with knowledge from heaven.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Benefits and Practical Matters***

There are three major benefits from praying the Jesus Prayer regularly.<sup>48</sup> First, it is nepsis or watchfulness to tame the passions. In a life full of trials, the Jesus Prayer helps us to be aware of the constant spiritual warfare we are facing and to renounce sinful desires and passions. Second, it is mature in Christ. The constant invocation of Jesus' name keeps our spirit burning for the love of Christ. The fruits of the Spirit such as love, joy, and peace, and faithfulness will follow. And the third, it is theosis. The Jesus Prayer helps us assimilate the presence of God in our life. Theosis cannot happen without prayer. The Church Fathers say about prayer: “The power of prayer fulfills (completes) the sacrament of our union with God... Prayer uplifts and unites human beings with God” (St. Gregory Palamas). “The effect of prayer is union with God” (St. Gregory of Nyssa).

There are several practical matters considering the Jesus Prayer.<sup>49</sup> First, frequency. St. Paul invites us to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17). The Jesus Prayer can be used to do this. One famous story of the Jesus Prayer tells of a pilgrim being told to pray up to 12,000 times a day. Nevertheless, counting is not really important. What is important is humility, constancy, and the grace of Christ. The way our holy Fathers teach us to use the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, 200–201.

<sup>48</sup> Emil Salim, *Praying Incessantly: The Jesus Prayer* (Handout, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



Jesus Prayer is to repeat it as part of our daily law of worship over and over hundreds of times. It is best to add it to your prayers in the morning, as this is when the mind is quietest. Start by saying it focuses verbally on any phrase. Repeat at least for 15 minutes consistently, and then extend to 30 minutes when you continue to see the difficulty of managing your emotions.

Second, time and place. One can have a formal time doing the Jesus Prayer, with a religious gesture such as prostration. However, one can pray this prayer anytime and anywhere, even during a conversation with another person!

Third, prayer rope. The prayer rope is useful for staying focus and for reminding us to pray. Fourth, breathing. There is a lot of debate about whether the Jesus Prayer must be accompanied by a breathing rhythm following the words. One crucial point is that rhythmic breathing is not necessary for the Jesus Prayer. Some people find rhythmic breathing helpful while praying the Jesus Prayer, especially to focus on praying and to calm down. If wanted, one can simply inhale while saying ‘Lord Jesus’ and exhale while saying ‘have mercy on me!’

The invocation of the name of Jesus in the Jesus Prayer could use of image in prayer such as an icon. Before the icon we can make stability of our mind. One possible reason is to say that with the use of icons, our thoughts can easily focus on the images that are present visually. This is not the case with mental images, which we cannot hold on tightly unless we are an experienced prayer. Our thoughts can easily wander and other unwanted images may appear and overtake our prayer. And by using the icon we can make a directness.

Some worries should be avoided. First, is the Jesus Prayer a mantra? It is not, because it doesn’t have power in itself apart from the union with Christ. The practice of this Prayer should not be confused with methods used in Eastern Yoga or meditation. Second, mechanical repetition. Is repetition meaningless? Not necessarily. There is always the danger of empty religiosity, but the Jesus Prayer can be done always with reverence, faith, and love.



## CONCLUSION

Jesus Prayer is a prayer of faith and hope in Christ's goodness. We praise the glory of God, recognizing Jesus as the Creator of all life and the eternal Soul. And at its end the Prayer switches to our status as sinners-sinful by reason of dropping, sinful by our moral wrongdoing. We can experience the benefit of the Jesus Prayer by practicing this prayer incessantly, watchfulness, and following the practical matters above.

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