John of the Ladder

Study #2 (steps 4-6)

<u>4 Fundamental Virtues</u>

Obedience (4)
Repentance (5)
Remembrance of Death (6)

I. Obedience (4)

"As flower comes before every fruit, so detachment, either of body or will, always precedes obedience. . . Obedience is absolute renunciation of our own life, clearly expressed in bodily action . . .Obedience is the tomb of the will and the resurrection of humility." (John, 4:1,3)
"For obedience is distrust in oneself in everything, however, good it may be, right to the end of one's life." (John, 4:5)
"The beginning of the mortification both of the soul's desire and of the bodily members is much hard work. . .Only when he sees himself doing his own will does this blessed living corpse feel sorry and sick at heart; and fears the responsibility of using his own judgment." (John 4:4)

<u>Various points of obedience</u>

1. **Obedience to a Priest:**
2. **Obedience the Word of God:**
3. **Obedience to Church Tradition**
4. **Obedience to Church's Ethics**

1. Trust and not questioning once trust has been established (John 4:6)
2. Submission vs. Self-will (John 4:9)
3. Confession complete and nothing left un-confessed: (John 4:12)
"Wounds displayed in public will not grow worse, but will be healed." (John 4:10)

4. A life free of judging others:
". . .they tried not to wound a brother's conscience in any way. . .And once when one of the brethren spoke ill of his neighbor to the Shepherd, the holy man at once ordered him to be driven out, saying, 'O cannot allow a visible as well as an invisible devil in the monastery. . .(and) if . . .some other brother began to criticize people . . . by a secret nod (was) reminded him of this, and quietly put a stop to it." (John 4:14)

II. On Painstaking and True Repentance (5)

"Repentance is the renewal of baptism and is a contract with God for a second life. A penitent is a buyer of humility. Repentance is constant distrust of bodily comfort. . . .Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of good deeds contrary to the sins. Repentance is purification of the conscience. (John, 5:1)

1. The witness of the holy convicts at the "Prison"

- Extreme examples of voluntary self-renunciation & suffering
- John spent 30 days visiting the "Prison"

"He (John) wished the Prison of Alexandria to be seen as an image of 'mourning,' showing that in a sense sin is man's self-inflicted enslavement - an impasse from which tears are the only way out. (John Chryssavgis, Ascent to Heaven, p.131)"

2. On Holy Compunction:

Three levels of Compunction (Chryssavgis)

i. As a natural inclination
ii. As a gift of grace - temporary
iii. As a permanent state - highest gift of grace

"But to the courageous soul they (the convicts) will serve as a spur, and a shaft of fire; and he will go away carrying zeal in his heart. (John 5:27)"

A.) Compunction is a divine piercing of the heart that leads to change

". . .the actual piercing comes from God and can either arrive from without, whether directly from God or indirectly through some other person whom we meet or through a word we hear, or else from within, through our heart, in which case it is also originated in God. (John Chryssavgis, Ascent to Heaven, p.129)

Chrysostom:

"Man builds a wall around himself, thus preventing the sting of compunction from touching him."

B.) Man's compunction is sustained by remembrance of death.

III. Remembrance of death & sins (6)

1. A literal Remembrance

"The remembrance of death is a daily death; and the remembrance of our departure is an hourly sighing and groaning. . . He who with undoubting trust daily expects death is virtous; but he who hourly yields himself to it is a saint. . .It is impossible, someone says, impossible to spend the present day devoutly unless we regard it as the last of our whole life. (John 6:1,7, 24)

2. Remembrance of death produces:

A.) Voluntary detachment from every creature
B.) Complete renunciation of their own will.

3. Remembrance of the Sublime and Essentials. (John 6:15)

1 On the Love of God
2 Remembrance of God
3 Remembrance of the Kingdom
4 Remembrance of the Martyrs

5 Remembrance of God's Presence: "I beheld the Lord ever before me. (Psalm 15: 8)"
6 Remembrance of one's departure, judgment, sentence and punishment

4. The Remembrance of death and fasting

A vivid remembrance of death cuts down food; and when in humility food is cut, the passions are cut out too. . .Insensibility of heart dulls the mind, and abundance of food dries the fountain of tears. Thirst and vigil afflict the heart, and when the heart is afflicted the waters flow. (John, 6:12-13)