

Two Paths That Lead to God *continued from front cover*

I have begun to share St. Porphyrios' way of thinking with my parishioners when they need encouragement and advice, and it has been received very well. I humbly suggest that we have a lot to learn from this great saint, which in turn can benefit our ministries and those we are called upon to serve.

I am grateful for IOCC and the work they do around the world to lighten people's burdens, chiefly in the realm of bodily needs. They provide food, shelter, clothing, educational and employment opportunities, and much more. As pastors, we too are called upon to lighten burdens, usually spiritual burdens, and we have a great ally and teacher in St. Porphyrios who points all of us toward Christ, the chief lifter of burdens.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Ignatius Valentine

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Two Paths That Lead to God

A Reflection by Fr. Ignatius Valentine

To state the obvious, we all have the responsibility to encourage and strengthen the people whom God has entrusted to our care. Perhaps, like me, you often find refuge in the lives and writings of Christ's holy ones, the saints, who provide us with pastoral gems that we can pass along to our people. In recent years, I have been greatly blessed to get to know St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia through his writings and the stories told about him by those who knew him. His holiness is

chiefly manifested through his humility and love. I want to share this short excerpt from the saint's excellent book *Wounded by Love* and then make a few comments on it.

The saint writes: "There are two paths that lead to God: the hard and debilitating path with fierce assaults against evil and the easy path with love. There are many who chose the hard path and 'shed blood in order to receive Spirit' until they attained great virtue. I find the shorter and safer route is the path with love. This is the path that you, too, should follow."

In reading this and other similar quotes from St. Porphyrios, I hear him saying that for most people, the way of strict asceticism and militant struggle against the passions and the devil is too challenging and fraught with distractions. This is not a wrong path for those called to it, but for most Christians, love of Christ and others is the "safer" path to salvation.



St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia

What does this mean? It is a nuanced matter of degrees. The question we ask is this: is it more profitable for Christians to focus their energy on turning to Christ, allowing Him to fight their battles as they seek to increase love for God and others in their lives, or is it more profitable for Christians to focus their energy on defeating the devil and their own sinfulness? Of course, every Christian must turn to Christ and struggle to resist sin and the devil. This is a given. But St. Porphyrios suggests that a mindset of embracing good—more than fighting evil—is the most profitable approach for most Christians. Elsewhere, he uses the analogy of light and darkness, and claims that instead of flailing against the darkness we instead should open up a window and let the light of Christ flood in.

We all have parishioners who are weary—wary of the world, wary of others, wary of themselves. Christ is the antidote for weariness. "My yoke is easy and my burden is light," says the Lord. He is constantly inviting us to enter into His rest. When our Lord Jesus becomes our central focus, then the passions that have a hold on us begin to lose their grip without us having to exert overwhelming effort.

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