

Words of the Liturgy

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“Lord Have Mercy”

“LORD HAVE MERCY” How frequently these three words are repeated in our churches and in our personal prayers. They are repeated in litanies which consist of short petitions, each of which ends with the words “Lord have mercy”

At evening services and during the reading of the Hours we repeat these words sometimes 3, sometimes 12 and sometimes even 40 times. How marvelous is the score of the Russian composer Lvovsky for the multiple “Lord have mercy” sung at the Elevation of the Cross. And there are many other services during which Lord have mercy” is repeated many times, insistently, repentantly...

Let us not be disturbed by such frequent repetition of some of our short prayers, in particular the prayer “Lord have mercy” The object of such repetition is to imbue our hearts, our minds, our entire souls with the prayer. The aim is to focus our attention on the topic of the prayer which the Church considers of particular importance for our spiritual growth. This repetition, as “leitmotif” in music, penetrates our consciousness and remains long in our memory, staying with us even as we leave the church for our everyday existences.

“Lord have mercy.” Three words, but what depth of meaning do they hold. First, by calling God “Lord”, we confirm His rule over the world, the mankind and, most importantly, over ourselves, over those who speak these words. 'Lord' means master, ruler. This is why we call ourselves the “servants” of God. This appellation has nothing offensive about it, as is readily suspected by some of those who would fight the Lord.

Servitude by itself is negative as it deprives the human being of the original gift - the gift of freedom. But as this gift was given to man by God, only in God can man find the plenitude of freedom. It follows, therefore, that service to God is in fact the perfect freedom in God.

Our service to God is far from perfect. Every day, every hour we flee from that blessed Servitude. We flee to where there is neither light, nor love, nor joy, nor life-which we can only find in God. We flee from perfect joy to the bottomless pit of sorrow. Then, we awake spiritually, we return to our senses, we begin to understand that we have nowhere to go, when we flee God, except to death. As King David said: “Whither shall I go from Thy spirit and from Thy countenance whither shall I flee?” We return to God -- some of us after a momentary absence, some after many years of alienation. And, in order to reestablish our

filial servitude to Him, the servitude which we are constantly fleeing, we beg for forgiveness and repeat: have mercy, have mercy.

So there they are, these minor words, these few words of prayer with which we can pray in all places and at all times: "Lord have mercy". It is good to value them, cherish and nurture them. They are our praying beads made up of words and they link our hand with the right hand of the Lord.