

Explanation for the Prayer of St. Ephraim for Children

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This explanation was designed to be used by church school teachers or youth workers. The note for parents may be used to send home once the session on the prayer is completed.

For Parents:

Glory To Jesus Christ!

As a way to begin the Lenten Period, the Church School students “illuminated” or decorated a prayer card with the prayer of St. Ephraim on it. Below is a summary of the main points that we discussed with the children. Please note that the explanation given was meant to be understandable for the younger students. Parents of older children may want to go further into the meaning of the words in the daily life of an adolescent as well. There are also some links to more resources about the Prayer of Ephraim and his life at the bottom of the page.

This prayer, written in the fourth century, is used throughout the period of Great Lent to ask God to remove our attachments to the passions of life, and to replace them with the virtues that will bring us closer to Him. It closes with a reminder that our focus, especially at this time of year, is on our own choices, not those of others. After each sentence, we make a *prostration*, or bow our whole body so that our knees, hands, and forehead touch the floor. This helps us to remember that our whole body and our whole mind should be working hard to bring us closer to God.

For Church School Teachers and Youth Workers:

The prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian is one of the most beautiful prayers utilized by the church. However, it is often misunderstood due to language, choice of translation and for children - difficult vocabulary. This explanation should be utilized to help the youth in your parish to better understand the prayer and then use it in their lenten journey.

Understanding the Prayer

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk.

Sloth- laziness, not just physical laziness, but especially when it comes to things like saying our prayers, attending church services, and doing what God wants us to do; When we think about our day, it can be easy to spend 30 minutes or maybe even hours watching TV, hanging out with friends, playing sports, etc. Those things are not bad, but if we are then too tired to say our prayers at night, or don't wake up with enough extra time to say them when we wake up then we need to look at how we are using our time to glorify God. Also, if we find that we have nothing to do, we can use the gifts God has given us to help others. That might mean volunteering with a charitable organization, assisting an elderly neighbor, sending cards to those who are sick, saying extra prayers, etc.



Icon of St. Ephraim courtesy of Archangel Icons.

Despair- being hopeless and not trusting that God can solve anything; As children, it may feel like there is nothing that can be done about adult problems, but trusting in God and taking some of the actions mentioned above are very important ways to demonstrate the knowledge that with God all things are possible. Also, sometimes we can be in despair about our own actions and feel like we will never be able to do what God wants us to do, but through the power of the Holy Spirit in our baptism, we can overcome any obstacle the Evil One puts in our way.

Lust of power- wanting to be in control over yourself and others; Only God is in charge and it is important for us to remember that our actions should be guided by what He wants. We might not always be able to see His plan, but putting our faith in Him will always lead to the best results. (Yes, your parents are still in charge of you and responsible for you, because that is what God wants!)

Idle talk- using your words in ways that take you farther away from God and talking without thinking about what might result from your words; Connected to the idea of sloth, our time should be used to glorify God. Anything that comes out of our mouth that isn't focused on that idea takes us further from Him. This could include gossiping or boasting about ourselves too.

But give rather to Your servant the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love.

Chastity- remaining whole and complete in front of God; It hurts when someone breaks or ruins something that you have loaned to them. Everything that we have belongs to God. Chastity means preserving and keeping our whole body and whole mind focused on God.

Humility- putting others first and doing what is right to give glory to God and not ourselves; Humility is a difficult word to define and sometimes it is easier to think about its opposite- pridefulness. For example, many people donate food to those in need. A prideful person makes

that good deed about themselves, perhaps by making an announcement about it to make sure that everyone knows how good they were. A humble person makes that good deed about God, perhaps by saying a prayer to thank Him for having enough to share with others. We have examples of humility throughout the Bible, including Christ Himself.

Patience- putting what we want on hold, while we do what God wants us to do; Having patience usually means waiting for something. Having patience with others is an important part of living a life according to God's will. We know that since we were all created in the image and likeness of God, the way that we act towards others is the way that we act towards God.

Love- God is love; We can love lots of different people (parents, siblings, friends, priest, etc.) in lots of different ways. Every human being was made in the image and likeness of God so when we show love to them, we are showing love to Christ. A good guide is that when we treat others the way that Jesus would have treated them, we are showing love.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own faults, and not to judge my brother, for blessed are You, unto ages of ages. Amen.

Jesus Christ is the only perfect person. We all make mistakes- sometimes being lazy, giving up hope, wanting to be in control (**sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk**) are easier than putting the needs of others first and loving those who aren't kind to us. But, God blesses us with many, many chances to try again and get it right. As we work on doing the right things during Lent, it's important to focus on ways that we can get better, not on what others are doing. One way to do that is to say this prayer, including the *prostrations* on a regular basis. As we all become closer to God, we all become closer to each other too!

-Brief article on the life of Saint Ephraim - http://www.antiochian.org/saint_ephraim

-“Our Life in Christ”- A podcast series that further explains the sections of this prayer.

https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/series/the_prayer_of_st_ephraim