

**Lord, Do Not Discipline Us Harshly**  
*By His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)*

My Lord,

Perhaps one of the most difficult things in Your Gospel is that You allowed the wheat to grow together with the tares until the final judgment. In doing so, You taught us that Your Church on earth is not a gathering of saints as much as it is a community of strugglers seeking holiness.

Some may attain it; others may glimpse it only from afar; and many may not see it at all.

You willed Your Church to be a community of seekers of the truth—and the Truth is You, and in You it is revealed. Yet we still wonder why the Church is persecuted and in conflict until the end of time.

In our disputes and zealotry – which we mistakenly attribute to You – we imagine that we are defending You and defending Your Body stretched out across the earth.

But the truth is: we belong to this and that of your servants more we belong actually to You.

You also taught us that holiness is not given except to those who truly seek it on the narrow path.

Thus, we learned that we must be strict with ourselves, not others, and that we must demand truth and uprightness from ourselves before anything else.

Then You offered Your life so that truth, purity, and self-sacrifice might hold the highest place in Your creation. Your sacrifice became the true expression of Your pure words.

And because You humbled Yourself and made Your life consistent with Your word, Your whole life was a descent.

You ascended only twice.

The first time was so that the multitudes might hear Your teaching, when You went up the mountain to give them the new law.

The second time was upon the Cross. On the hill of Golgotha, You allowed Yourself to be lifted up as a martyr, embracing the world with Your outstretched arms.

Yet even this elevation was the summit of Your descent, for it led You to the tomb in an earthly cave.

And through this utmost descent You rose again and burst forth with life — the life of which You spoke in the Gospel, saying that You came to give it to us, and to give it to us abundantly.

But we often act contrary to you.

We love display and self-exaltation. We prefer that people see us as leaders rather than as servants and fathers.

We want followers, even if we lead them to destruction.

Because we are small within, we seek to become great—not through You, but through them—so that we may feel effective, influential, and important.

If Your children, out of love for us, see only our outward appearance, what excuse do we have, when we ourselves know who we are and are aware of the baseness, weakness, and impurity that dwell within us?

Teach us, Lord, how to descend so that You may raise us up.

Guide us to understand the true exaltation that befits Your people and Your servants.

Is it not enough for us to remain at Your feet?

Is not the whole fulfillment in listening to You, as Mary did when she received the good portion that shall not be taken away from her?

In the intoxication of our self-importance and ego, we often forget You, my Lord, and replace You with our followers.

We become preoccupied with the devil dwelling within us, following his whispers so we no longer see You or hear You. Thus, vainglory leads us to do what we perceive is right—when in truth it is our own sins.

And so, Lord, we no longer know how to distinguish between our passions and our zeal for Your house.

Do not allow turmoil, Lord, to drive us to act contrary to Your Gospel.

Have mercy on us and on our hardness of heart. Pour out upon us much more of Your abundant mercy.

You have entrusted us with a fearful responsibility, for You have chosen to place Your Holy Spirit in us – vulnerable vessels so easily broken.

How can we keep our vessels intact while slipping is so easy, and the illusion that we are Your chosen agents to correct Your Church and the world is so enticing?

Lord, how many times have we been tempted to act against Your Gospel in order to serve Your Church “better”?

How often have we violated Your Gospel when we sanctified the means for the sake of the end?

And how often have we betrayed You when we set You aside and used You as a tool for our own interests and desires?

Teach us, Lord, that we are not greater than You, for no servant is greater than his master.

Help us to accept Your example—the example of the one who is the persecuted, not the persecutor.

Direct our steps so that You may be our first love.

Grant that we may listen to You more than we speak about You, so that we may rightly discern between Your will and our passions.

My Lord, throughout history You have taught us that You permit both external and internal persecution when we stray from the truth and depart from the straight path.

Do not discipline us harshly, Lord, for we can scarcely endure it.

Preserve among us a remnant that bears witness to You—to the fullness of life You desired for us, and to the joy that Your angels proclaimed when You honored our earth when You visited us.

People are weary of Your Church because of us, O Lord. Forgive us and guide us onto the straight path.

It is You who we desire, Lord. Do not let us become distracted from You by that which belongs to You.