



## Contents

FOREWORD	21
ENCOMIUM <i>An Offering of Praise to Saint Abba Isaac the Syrian, Inadequate for the Sublimity of its Subject, but Written With Much Love</i> , by Photios Kontoglou	45
TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION <i>A Historical Account of the Life and Writings of Saint Isaac the Syrian</i>	51
<b>HOMILY 1</b> <i>On renunciation and the monastic life</i>	113
<b>HOMILY 2</b> <i>On thankfulness to God, in which there are also essential elementary lessons</i>	120
<b>HOMILY 3</b> <i>That without toil the soul enters into understanding of the wisdom of God and of His creatures, if she becomes still to the world and the cares of life; for then she can come to know her nature and what treasures she has hidden within herself</i>	127
On the soul, the passions, and the purity of the mind in questions and answers • On the senses, and on temptations also • On our Master's tender compassion, whereby from the height of His majesty He has condescended to men's weakness; and on temptations	
<b>HOMILY 4</b> <i>On the love of God and renunciation and the rest which is in God</i>	141
<b>HOMILY 5</b> <i>On keeping oneself remote from the world and from all things that disquiet the mind</i>	155
<b>HOMILY 6</b> <i>That to our profit God has permitted the soul to be susceptible to accidents; and on ascetical activities</i>	169
<b>HOMILY 7</b> <i>On the kinds of hope in God; and for whom it is right to put his hope in God, and who it is that entertains such hope foolishly and imprudently</i>	181

**HOMILY 8** *On what helps a man to approach God in his heart, and what is the real cause that secretly brings help near him; and again, what is the cause that leads a man to humility* 185

**HOMILY 9** *On sins voluntary and involuntary, and on those which are committed because of some accidental circumstance* 189

**HOMILY 10** *On the words of the divine writings which urge men to repentance, and that they were said with a view to men's weakness, lest they perish from the living God, but that one must not employ them as an excuse for sinning* 193

**HOMILY 11** *On how the beauty of monastic life is preserved and on how it can be a means for God to be glorified* 196

**HOMILY 12** *That the servant of God who has stripped himself of the things of the world, and is come forth in quest of Him, must never, because he has not attained to a sure apprehension of the truth, cease from his quest for fear of this, and grow cold in that ardor which is born of love for things divine and of searching out their mysteries; and on how the mind is confounded by the memory of the passions* 198

**HOMILY 13** *On the alteration and change that takes place in those who are making their way on the path of stillness, which has been laid out by God; for sometimes melancholy and suffocation of soul occur, sometimes sudden joy and unaccustomed fervor. Glory be to Him Who orders our paths aright! Amen* 200

**HOMILY 14** *Concerning hesychasts: on when they begin to understand what place they have attained with their labors in the boundless sea that is the life of stillness; and on when they can have a little hope that their toils have begun to yield them fruit* 201

**HOMILY 15** *On guarding and keeping oneself from lax and negligent men, and on how, by drawing near to them, heedlessness and laxity rule over a man and he is filled with every passion. And on guarding oneself from proximity to youths, lest the mind be defiled by licentious thoughts* 203

- HOMILY 16** *On renouncing the world and refraining from familiarity with men* 210
- HOMILY 17** *On a rule for beginners and their state and the matters that pertain to them* 214
- HOMILY 18** *On the successive stages of the monastic life, briefly and distinctly noted; and how and in what way its virtues are born from each other* 217
- HOMILY 19** *That abstention from cares is profitable for hesychasts; and that going out and coming in is harmful; and concerning distraction* 219
- HOMILY 20** *On the paths that bring a man nigh to God, which are revealed to him by the sweet works of night vigil; and that those who labor in this practice are fed with honey all the days of their life* 222
- HOMILY 21** *A narration concerning saintly men and the all-holy words I heard from them, and on their wondrous way of life* 226
- On an aged elder • On another elder • On the question of a certain brother • On the reproach of a certain brother
- HOMILY 22** *On the different kinds of noetic powers of the mind employed in the working of revelations and spiritual visions* 236
- On that which during prayer occurs within stillness
- HOMILY 23** *On the many different kinds of prayer, and the dominion of the mind; and to what extent this dominion is empowered to initiate its own movements in the different forms of prayer; and what the natural limit of prayer is, and to what extent you are empowered to pray therein; and that when prayer exceeds this limit, it is no longer prayer, although this activity is called prayer* 238
- On pure prayer
- HOMILY 24** *On the subject of a discourse spoken by true knowledge* 246
- HOMILY 25** *On the things that are bestowed upon a brother within his cell* 248

- HOMILY 26** *On the profit that comes to the soul that seeks after profound theoria, that she might immerse herself therein away from the carnal thoughts that arise from the recollections of things* 252
- HOMILY 27** *Against those who say: If God is good, why has He made these things?* 257
- HOMILY 28** *On the vision of the nature of incorporeal beings, in questions and answers* 262
- HOMILY 29** *On the example and similitude furnished by a divine vision concerning the Lord's Day and the Sabbath* 267
- HOMILY 30** *On different suitable ways of wise guidance for the instruction of disciples* 270
- HOMILY 31** *Containing a most necessary and extremely beneficial daily reminder for the man who has chosen to sit in his cell and give heed to himself alone* 273
- HOMILY 32** *On the power and evil activity of sin, and on what produces it and what causes it to cease* 275  
On the passions
- HOMILY 33** *That in certain conflicts, labor is better than being in danger of falling* 281
- HOMILY 34** *On guarding the heart and on subtler divine vision* 282
- HOMILY 35** *On the signs and workings of the love of God* 284
- HOMILY 36** *On the modes of virtue* 286
- HOMILY 37** *A discourse on various subjects in questions and answers, on the trustworthy way of life and every kind of virtue. This discourse will be especially useful for those who have stripped off the world, those who dwell in the desert, those who are recluses, and those who through voluntary mortification look forward to the crown of righteousness* 289  
On fasting and vigil • On the difference in tears

**HOMILY 38** *That the body that fears temptations becomes a friend of sin* 318

**HOMILY 39** *On the different methods of the devil's warfare against those who journey on the narrow way that transcends the world* 320

On the first method • On the second method of the devil's warfare  
On the third method of the enemy's warfare against strong and courageous men • On the enemy's fourth and obdurate warfare

**HOMILY 40** *On continuous fasting, and remaining collected in one place, and what are the consequences of this; and that by discerning knowledge I have learned the exact use of these things* 329

**HOMILY 41** *On the motions of the body* 337

**HOMILY 42** *On the kinds of different temptations; and on how sweet are the temptations that come to pass and are endured for the truth's sake; and on the levels and disciplines through which the sagacious man makes his way* 340

The trials of the friends of God, that is to say, the humble • The trials of the enemies of God, that is to say, the proud • On patience • On faint-heartedness

**HOMILY 43** *An explanation of the modes of discipline: what is the force of each, and what is the difference of each* 346

On the purification of the body, the soul, and the mind

**HOMILY 44** *An epistle of our Father among the Saints Isaac the Syrian written to a certain brother possessed of the love of stillness, on how the devil contrives to make those who constantly endeavor to practise stillness to desist from their constant stillness by means of the love of a relative or honored men, and on how it behooves the hesychast to disdain all things for the sake of the knowledge of God which is to be found in stillness, even as it has been shown in the case of our Fathers of old* 350

**HOMILY 45** *An epistle of our Father among the Saints Isaac the Syrian to his natural and spiritual brother, who, dwelling in the world and thirsting to see him, exhorted and entreated the saint by letters to come to visit him in inhabited parts* 355

**HOMILY 46** *Containing profitable subjects replete with the wisdom of the Spirit* 357

**HOMILY 47** *On how great are the measures of knowledge and the measures pertaining to faith* 360

**HOMILY 48** *Containing counsels replete with profit, which he spoke with love to those who listened to him humbly* 363

**HOMILY 49** *On the angelic movement that is awakened in us by God's providence for the soul's advancement in things spiritual* 373

On the second activity that works upon man

**HOMILY 50** *On the varying states of light and darkness that occur in the soul at all times, and her training in matters of the right and of the left* 376

**HOMILY 51** *On the harm of foolish zeal that has the guise of the fear of God, and on the help that comes of clemency; and on other subjects* 378

On involuntary evil thoughts that originate from the previous laxity of negligence

**HOMILY 52** *On the three degrees of knowledge and the difference of their working and their ways of thinking; and on the faith of the soul and the mystic riches concealed in it; and on how much the knowledge of this world in its ways and means is opposed to the simplicity of faith* 390

On the first degree of knowledge • On the second degree of knowledge • On the third degree of knowledge, which is the degree of perfection • A recapitulation of the three degrees of knowledge

**HOMILY 53** *Short sections on other differences in the concepts of knowledge* 402

- HOMILY 54** *On the subject of prayer and the other things which are necessarily required for constant recollection and are profitable in many ways, if a man read them with discretion and observe them* 404
- On the solitary life, and that we must not be timorous and afraid, but must make our heart steadfast through trust in God, and have courage with unhesitating faith, since we possess God as our Guardian and Protector
- HOMILY 55** *On how the hidden wakefulness in the soul is preserved, and how sleep and coldness steal into the mind and quench the soul's holy fervor and deaden the Godward desire that yearns for things spiritual and heavenly* 412
- HOMILY 56** *On patience for the sake of the love of God, and in what manner help is obtained through patience* 415
- HOMILY 57** *On those who live near to God and pass all their days in the life of knowledge* 421
- HOMILY 58** *On the many changes that cleave to the mind and are tested by prayer* 426
- HOMILY 59** *On love of the world* 428
- HOMILY 60** *That without necessity we should not desire or ask to have manifest signs wrought by our hands or unto us* 431
- HOMILY 61** *On the reasons why God permits temptations to come upon those who love Him* 436
- HOMILY 62** *On how a man can know the measure in which he stands by the thoughts that are stirred in him* 438
- HOMILY 63** *On why men who are unspiritual in their knowledge investigate spiritual things in accord with the grossness of their flesh; and on how the mind can be raised above the grossness of the flesh, and what is the cause that a man is not liberated from it; and on when and by what means the mind can remain without phantasies at the time of entreaty* 444

**HOMILY 64** *On prayer, prostrations, tears, reading, silence, and hymnody. Excellent admonitions that teach watchfulness and rules for an ascetical way of life, that by them a man may acquire for himself a comely rank* 447

On silence

**HOMILY 65** *An epistle of our Father among the Saints Isaac the Syrian, sent to his friend, wherein he expounds things respecting the mysteries of stillness, and how many monks, being ignorant of these things, are negligent in this wonderful activity, and that the majority of them hold on to their cells by reason of the tradition current among monks; and together with this, a brief collection of sayings useful for the practice of stillness* 463

**HOMILY 66** *A study and elucidation with examples concerning diverse concepts, and on what use each one of them has* 468

A selection of short sections

**HOMILY 67** *On how the discerning monk ought to dwell in stillness* 473

**HOMILY 68** *That we can understand the degree of our manner of life from the changing states of our mind, and that we should not childishly rely on the great diversity of our labors, but as wise men we should recognize the degree of our soul from the secret renewal which we perceive day by day; and on the subtle stage of discernment* 476

**HOMILY 69** *On true knowledge, and on temptations, and on how one ought to know clearly that not only certain lesser, weak, and untrained men are tempted, but also those are tempted who have been accounted worthy of dispassion for a time, who have achieved perfection in their manner of thought, and have in part drawn near to the purity that is conjoined with mortification, and have been raised above the passions in so far as this is permitted by God while men are in this world, under the yoke of life conjoined to the passionate flesh: they have a contest, and are vexed with passions because of the flesh, and in [God's] mercy they even suffer abandonment on certain occasions because of the danger of pride* 481



- HOMILY 70** *The concise sense of [the previous] chapter, with the significance of the things that were said; and on prayer* 487
- HOMILY 71** *On the difference of the virtues, on the end of the entire course, and on the greatness of love for mankind which in a spiritual manner perfects all the saints, and firmly plants the divine likeness in them through God's abundant love, which He has poured out upon the race of the sons of men* 491
- HOMILY 72** *On faith and humility* 499
- HOMILY 73** *On the benefit to be had from fleeing from the world* 507
- HOMILY 74** *On the means whereby a man can acquire a change of his hidden thoughts with a change of his external discipline* 509
- HOMILY 75** *On night vigil and the various ways of its observance; and that we must not make the aim of our labors the fulfillment of a definite quantity of prayers, but rather with freedom and discernment we should be like children of God with their Father, laboring with the eagerness proper to love; and on how the work of vigil is more venerable than all other disciplines; and on what things are sought by those who choose this work; and on how men should perform night vigil; and on the gifts that these men are granted from God, and the conflicts and battles waged against them by the ruler of this world* 515
- HOMILY 76** *An answer that Saint Isaac made to a brother who asked him, 'Why is it that, although our Lord defined mercy as likeness to the majesty of the Heavenly Father, solitaries honor stillness above mercy?' And a defense concerning this; and that it is not right to neglect the afflicted and the sick when they are near* 528
- HOMILY 77** *On how much honor humility obtains, and how very lofty is its rank* 534

<b>Appendix A</b> <i>Additional Homilies by Saint Isaac the Syrian, From the Syriac Printed Text</i>	
I <i>On the different kinds of revelations and [divine] workings given to the saints in images and likenesses</i>	540
II <i>On the gloomy darkness that befalls those who pursue the life of knowledge in stillness</i>	544
III <i>On [divine] overshadowing</i>	546
IV <i>On how it is right for a man's life to be set apart [from the world]</i>	547
V <i>On the workings of grace</i>	550
VI <i>On hidden states, and the powers and operations therein</i>	553
VII <i>Brief subjects</i>	554
<b>Appendix B</b> <i>The First Syriac Epistle of Saint Macarius of Egypt</i> 557	
The First Syriac Epistle of Saint Macarius of Alexandria, On the Christian Discipline	
<b>Appendix C</b> <i>Glossary</i>	568
<b>Appendix D</b> <i>Table of Homily Equivalences</i>	575
Index of Subjects	578
Index of Scriptural Passages	605

