

On the Beginning of the Spiritual Life, from Homily 1: St. Isaac the Syrian



St. Isaac the Syrian, (c. AD 613- c.A.D. 700). Ordained Bishop of Nineveh, great ascetic and teacher, and illuminated monastic writer. Because Saint Isaac wrote from personal experience his words are full of insight and strength for the spiritual life.

From:

Homily 1, On Renunciation and the Monastic Life by St. Isaac the Syrian

The Fear of God is the beginning of virtue, and it is said to be the offspring of faith. It is sown in the heart when a man withdraws his mind from the attractions of the world to collect its thoughts, wandering about from distraction, into reflection upon the restitution to come.

To lay the foundation of virtue, nothing is better than for a man to contain

himself by means of flight from the affairs of life, and to persevere in the illumined word of those straight and holy paths, even that word which in the Spirit the Psalmist named a lamp...

The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian, 2nd Revised Edition, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA, 2011, p. 113.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil, the tree that uproots love, is implanted in this very knowledge. It investigates the small faults of other men and the causes thereof, and their weaknesses; and it arms a man for stubbornly upholding his opinion, for disputation, and aids him in cunningly employing devices and crafty contrivances and other means which dishonour a man. In this knowledge are produced and are found presumption and pride, for it attributes every good thing to itself, and does not refer it to God.