



Wisdom from the Fathers

True Christianity and true monasticism,” writes St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, “consist in the practice of the commandments of the Gospel.” The definition of the Christian and of the monk is thus one and the same. “Monasticism,” he writes, “is simply the duty of fulfilling with exactitude the commandments of the Gospel. The monastic life is simply a life lived in accordance with the commandments of the Gospel”. But obviously the same evangelical rules that the monk seeks to carry out are also binding upon all other members of the Church.

As St. Clement of Rome expresses it, “...we are all in the same arena and involved in the same struggle...” St. Paul talks of having “fought with beasts at Ephesus” (1 Corinthians 15:32), and while he may mean a literal fight against animals in an outward arena, or a fight against bestial human beings (Acts V) his words have also a symbolical meaning: the real struggle is always an inner one, and the arena where the struggle with the beast takes place is the unseen realm of the interior life.

Such, then, is Bishop Ignatius’ basic theme : he tells us of the struggle to be undertaken by every Christian in the spiritual arena. He speaks to us all, whether monks or not, explaining how we may tame, control, and transform the beast within- the lions and howling wolves of our inner jungle- and so build in our hearts Jerusalem, the city of peace and unity.

Introduction to *The Arena*, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov