

From the Teachings of
St. Seraphim of Sarov

The Spiritual World

The spiritual world is gained by sorrows. The scriptures say: "We went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place" (Ps. 66:12). For those who desire to serve God the path lies through many sorrows. How can we praise the holy martyrs for the sufferings which they bore for God, when we cannot even bear a fever? Nothing so aids the acquiring of internal peace as silence, and as much as is possible, continual discussion with oneself and rarely with others.

A sign of spiritual life is the immersion of a person within himself and the hidden workings within his heart.

This peace, as some priceless treasure, did our Lord Jesus Christ leave his followers before His death, saying, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27). The apostle also spoke this about it: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7); "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

In this way, we must direct all our thoughts, desires and actions toward obtaining God's peace, and always cry out with the Church: "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us" (Is. 26:12).

It is necessary by all means to try to keep one's spiritual peace, and not to become provoked by insults from others. To do this, it is necessary always to restrain oneself from anger, and by careful watch to guard the mind and heart from unclean waverings.

Insults from others must be borne without disturbance; one must train oneself to be of such a nature, that one can react to insults as if they did not refer to oneself. Such an exercise can bring serenity to our heart and make it a dwelling of God Himself.

We see an example of such a lack of malice in the life of St. Gregory the Miracle-Worker. A certain immoral woman demanded payment from him, purportedly for a sin committed with her. He, not in the least angry with her, humbly said to one of his friends: pay her the price which she demands, quickly. The woman became possessed as soon as she accepted the unrighteous payment. The bishop then prayed and exorcised the evil spirit from her.

If it is impossible not to become indignant, then at least restrain your tongue according to the words of the Psalmist: "I am so troubled that I cannot speak" (Ps. 77:4). In this instance we can take as examples for ourselves St. Spyridon of Tremifunt and St. Ephraim the Syrian. The first bore an insult when he entered the palace by the demand of the Greek emperor: one of the servants present in the emperor's chamber, taking him for a beggar, laughed at him, did not allow him to enter the chamber and even struck him on the cheek. St. Spyridon, being without malice, turned the other cheek to him, according the word of the Lord (see Mt. 5:39). The Blessed Ephraim, living in the desert, was once deprived of food in the following fashion. His pupil, carrying the food, accidentally broke the vessel on the way. Blessed Ephraim, seeing the pupil downcast, said to him: "Do not grieve, brother. If the food did not want to come to us, then we will go to it." And so the monk went, sat next to the broken vessel, and, gathering the food together, ate it. He was thus without malice!

In order to keep spiritual peace, it is necessary to chase dejection away from oneself, and to try to have a joyful spirit, according to the words of the most wise Sirach: "Sorrow has killed many, but there is no good in it" (Sir. 30:25).

In order to keep spiritual peace it is also necessary to avoid judging others in any way. Condescension towards your neighbor and silence protect spiritual peace. When a person is in such an state, then he receives Godly revelations.

In order not to lapse into judgment of others, it is necessary to be mindful of oneself, to refuse to receive any bad information from anyone and to be as if dead to others. For the protection of spiritual peace it is necessary to enter into oneself more often and ask: Where am I? In addition, it is necessary to watch that the physical senses, especially sight, serve the inner person, not diverting the soul with mortal items, because the gifts of grace are received only by those who have inner workings and keep watch over their souls.