

## **SPIRITUAL ‘OPPORTUNITIES’**

### **PLUS A SHORT SELECTION OF THE SAINTS ON PRAYER: EMPHASIS ON ST. THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE**

**(From ‘THE ART OF PRAYER AN ORTHODOX ANTHOLOGY’ (compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo and translated by E. Kadloubovsky and E.M. Palmer, edited with an introduction by Timothy Ware, published by Faber and Faber, paperback edition, 1997, available for purchase at either Barnes & Noble or Borders)**

by

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

#### Preparatory Spiritual Discussion

Prayer is what the One Holy Catholic & Apostolic Church is all about, using prayer as a spiritual vehicle along the rocky ascetic road to the goal of all Orthodoxy – Deification of ourselves in God’s energies. Baptism is the first step on our struggle toward salvation:

... God sends down His grace upon men, and more especially she (note – the Holy Church) confesses the Sacrament of Baptism for the remission of sins, as containing within itself the principle of all the others; for through Baptism alone does a man enter into the unity of the Church, which is the custodian of all the rest of the Sacraments.

[Lay Theologian Alexei Khomiakov, *THE CHURCH IS ONE*, VIII – The Church And Its Mysteries]

...

Baptism is indeed of obligation; for it **alone** (emphasis supplied) is the door into the Church of the New Testament, and in Baptism alone does man testify his assent to the redeeming action of grace. Wherefore also in Baptism alone he is saved.

[Khomiakov, *ibid.*]

Whether we are ‘saved’ or not depends not on God as much as it does on ourselves; that is to say, we must take up the golden opportunity He has extended us to come to Him:

The demons want to make us always think of our salvation or our eternal spiritual death in juridical terms. They want us to think that either salvation or eternal death is a question of God’s decision. No, my brothers, we must awaken in order not to be lost. Our salvation or our eternal death is not a question of God’s decision, but it is a question of *our* decision, it is a question of the decision of our free

will which God respects absolutely. Let us not fool ourselves with confidence in God's love. The danger does not come from God; it comes from our own self.

[Dr. Alexandre Kalomiros, *RIVER OF FIRE*, St. Nectarios Press, Seattle, WA, 1980, XI.]

...

No, my brothers and sisters, unhappily for us, paradise or hell does not depend on God. If it depended on God, we would have nothing to fear. We have nothing to fear from Love. But it does not depend on God. It depends **entirely** (emphasis supplied) upon us, and this is the whole tragedy. God wants us to be in His image, eternally free. He respects us absolutely. This is love. Without respect, we cannot speak of love. We are men because we are free. If we were not free, we would be clever animals, not men. God will never take back this gift of freedom which renders us what we are. This means that we will always be what we want to be, friends or enemies of God, and there is no changing in this our deepest self.

[Kalomiros, *ibid.*, X.]

So, salvation is not automatic. We can't buy it in town, trade for it in the neighbourhood, or get it on e-Bay.

Our faith needs good works to sustain it. Indeed, if there are no good works, there is no faith. The two are not separate matters. They are integral to each other. Faith is made perfect by works (St. James 2: 22), but faith without works is dead. (St. James 2: 26):

Just as a body without a soul is no longer a man, and cannot properly be called a man, but a corpse, so faith also that does no works **cannot be called true faith, but false; that is to say, an external knowledge, fruitless, and attainable even by devils** (emphasis supplied).

[Khomiakov, *op. cit.*, IX – Faith and Life in Church Unity]

...

Wherefore there is but one faith, and when we ask, 'Can true faith save without works?' we ask a senseless question; or rather no question at all: **for true faith is a living faith which does works;** (emphasis supplied); it is faith in Christ, and Christ in faith.

[Khomiakov, *id.*]

St. James the Just and St. Paul were not at loggerheads with each other on this spiritual matter.

Our salvation may be achieved with the grace of God after we have made the commitment to become a warrior for the Lord and suffered for His cause.. He is the only door for His sheep. No one can enter but through Him. (St. John 10: 7, 9). “I am the door; by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” (St. John 10: 9) Christ wants us to take up His Cross, but He does not force us to do so. It’s our choice..

The following selections are not representative or chosen in any systematic way. That, frankly put, would have been somewhat unOrthodox. (smile). I opted for their spiritual impact and usefulness (as it seemed to me) for each of us as spiritual warriors for Christ. As Orthodox Christians, we battle spiritually not with others but ourselves. We must soften our hearts to our neighbour, who is everybody, not just people who are like or similar to us (our friends for example).

We fight the devil, the prince of this world, with a view toward living a life of inner peace and spirituality as a True Orthodox Christian on this earth in preparation for the next world which is not of this one.

The following profound gems of prayer advice are just that:

Enter eagerly into the treasure-house that lies within you, and so you will see the treasure-house of heaven: for the two are the same, and there is but one single entry to them both. The ladder that leads to the Kingdom is hidden within you, and is found in your own soul. Dive into **yourself** (emphasis supplied) and in your soul you will discover the rungs by which to ascend.

St. Isaac the Syrian

...

It is possible to replace the thought of God by the Jesus Prayer, but where is the necessity for this when they are **one and the same** (emphasis supplied)? The thought of God is the keeping in mind – without any deliberately imposed concept – of some truth such as the Incarnation, the death on the Cross, the Resurrection, God’s omnipresence, or others.

St. Theophan the Recluse

...

When you establish yourself in the inner man by the remembrance of God, then Christ the Lord will enter and dwell within you,. The two things go together.

St. Theophan the Recluse

...

There are only a few words in the Jesus Prayer, but they contain **everything** (emphasis supplied).

St. Theophan the Recluse

...

The union of the mind with the heart is a union of the spiritual thoughts of the mind with the spiritual feelings of the heart.

St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov)

...

... some of the Holy Fathers have given prime importance, among all the different kinds of spiritual exercise, to the Jesus Prayer. It enlightens, strengthens, and animates; it defeats all enemies visible and invisible, and leads **directly** (emphasis supplied) to God. See how powerful and effective it is! The Name of the Lord Jesus is the treasury of all good things, the treasury of strength and of life and of life in the spirit.

St. Theophan the Recluse

...

Let no-one think, my fellow Christians, that only priest and monks need to pray without ceasing, and not laymen. No, no: every Christian without exception ought to dwell always in prayer. Gregory the Theologian teaches all Christians that the Name of God must be remembered in prayer as often as one draws breath.

When the Apostle commanded us to 'Pray without ceasing' (I Thess. v. 17), he meant that we must pray **inwardly** (emphasis supplied) with our mind: and this is something that we can do always.

Attributed to St. Gregory Palamas

...

The very first action of God's grace in the turning of the sinner to God manifests itself by the bending of his mind and heart towards God. When later, after repentance and dedication of his life to God, the grace of God which acted from without descends on him and remains within him through the sacraments, then the turning of the

mind and heart to God, which is the essence of prayer, will also become unchangeable and permanent in him.

St. Theophan the Recluse

...

Secret meditation sets our feet on the path to **inner** prayer, which is the most **direct** (emphases supplied) road to salvation.

St. Theophan the Recluse

...

Training, then, must be twofold, outer and inner: outer in reading books, inner in thoughts of God; outer in love of wisdom, inner in love of God; outer in words, inner in prayer; outer in keenness of intellect, inner in warmth of spirit; outer in technique, inner in vision.... Prayer is likewise twofold, exterior and inner. There is prayer made openly, and there is secret prayer.... Voluntary prayer which is in secret, ... has no fixed time, being made whenever you wish, without bidding, simply when the spirit moves you.

St. Dimitri of Rostov

...

With reverence call in secret upon the Name of Jesus, thus: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner.'

Try to make this prayer enter ever more deeply into your soul and heart. Pray the prayer with your mind and thought, and do not let it leave your lips even for a moment. Combine it, if possible, with your breathing, and with all your strength try through the prayer to force yourself to a heart-felt contrition, repenting over your sins with tears. If there are no tears, at least, there should be contrition and mourning in the heart.

Igumen Nazarii

Staretz

Abbot of Valamo Monastery until 1801

If you're not praying the Jesus Prayer, now is the best time to start. The Fathers are clear that it is not simply a mechanistic repetitive process. With it, we hope to change inwardly and open our hearts to Christ. When you pray the Jesus Prayer through time "by God's help you will get the joy of self-acting inward prayer of the heart". [Anonymous (tr. From the Russian by R.M. French, Foreword by Huston Smith, *THE WAY OF A PILGRIM*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1965, p. 90.] Our spiritual progress rests upon one word, humility:

Humility is that single altar on which it is allowed us by spiritual law to offer the sacrifice of prayer and on which the offered sacrifice of prayer ascends to God and appears before His face. Humility is that **single vessel** (emphasis supplied) into which the gifts of grace are put by the finger of God.

[St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) (tr. by Father Lazarus), *ON THE PRAYER OF JESUS*, Ibis Press, Berwick, Maine, 2006, p. 104.]

...

If you harbour rancour against anybody, pray for him and you will prevent the passion from being aroused; for by means of prayer you will separate your resentment from the thought of the wrong he has done you. When you have become loving and compassionate towards him, you will wipe the passion completely from your soul. If somebody regards you with rancour, be pleasant to him, be humble and agreeable in his company, and you will deliver him from his passion.

[St. Maximos the Confessor]

+In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.