

# The Spiritual Instructions of St Seraphim

Little Russian Philokalia – Vol. 1: Saint Seraphim

## 1 – GOD

God is Fire that warms and kindles, the heart and inward parts. And so, if we feel in our hearts coldness, which is from the devil – for the devil is cold – then let us call upon the Lord, and He will come and warm our hearts with perfect love not only for Him, but for our neighbor as well. And from the presence of warmth the coldness of the hater of good will be driven away.

The Fathers wrote, when they were asked: Seek the Lord, but do not be curious as to His dwelling place.

Where God is, there is no evil. Everything that comes from God brings peace and profit and leads a man to humility and self-condemnation.

God shows us His love for mankind not only when we do good, but also when we offend and displease Him. How patiently He endures our transgressions; and when He chastises, how mercifully He chastises!

Do not call God just, says St Isaac; for His justice is not evident in your deeds. If David called Him just and righteous, His Son, on the other hand, showed us that He is rather good and merciful. Where is His justice? We were sinners, and Christ died for us. (St Isaac the Syrian, Homily 90.)

A man becomes perfect in the sight of God to the extent that he follows in His footsteps; in the true age God will reveal His face to him. For the righteous, to the degree that they enter into contemplation of Him, behold His image as in a mirror; but there they will behold the revelation of Truth.

If you do not know God, it is impossible for love of Him to be awakened in you; and you cannot love God if you do not see Him. The vision of God comes from knowledge of Him; for contemplation of Him does not precede knowledge of Him.

One should not think about the doings of God when one's stomach is full; on a full stomach there can be no vision of the Divine mysteries.

## 2 – THE MYSTERY OF THE HOLY TRINITY

In order to look upon the Most Holy Trinity one must ask the aid of those who taught about the Trinity – St Basil the Great, St Gregory the Theologian, and St John Chrysostom – whose intercession is able to draw upon men the blessing of the Most Holy Trinity. But one should be warned not to attempt to look directly for oneself.

## 3 – THE REASONS WHY JESUS CHRIST CAME INTO THE WORLD

The reasons why Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world are these:

The love of God for the human race: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son* (Jn 3:16).

The restoration in fallen humanity of the image and likeness of God, as the holy Church celebrates it: *Man who, being made in the image of God, had become corrupt through sin, and was full of vileness, and had fallen away from the better life Divine, doth the wise Creator restore anew* (first Canon of the Matins for the Nativity of Christ, ode 1).

The salvation of men's souls: *For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved* (Jn 3:17).

And so we, in conformance with the purposes of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, should spend our life in accordance with this Divine teaching, so that through it we may obtain the salvation of our souls.

#### 4 – FAITH

Before anything else one must believe in God, that He is, and that *He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him* (Heb 11:16).

Faith, according to the teaching of St Antioch, is the beginning of our union with God. One who truly believes is a stone in the temple of God; he is prepared for the edifice of God the Father, raised to the heights by the power of Jesus Christ, that is, of the Cross, with the aid of ropes, that is, the grace of the Holy Spirit.

*Faith without works is dead* (James 2:26), and the works of faith are: love, peace, long-suffering, mercy, humility, rest from all works (as God Himself rested from His works), bearing of the Cross, and the life in the Spirit. Only such faith can be considered true. True faith cannot be without works; one who truly believes will unfailingly have works as well.

#### 5 – HOPE

All who have firm hope in God are raised up to Him and enlightened by the radiance of the eternal Light.

If a man has no care whatever for himself because of love for God and virtuous deeds, knowing that God will take care of him – such hope is true and wise. But if a man takes care for his own affairs and turns with prayer to God only when unavoidable misfortunes overtake him and he sees no way of averting them by his own power, only then beginning to hope in God's aid – such hope is vain and false. True hope seeks the Kingdom of God alone and is convinced that everything earthly that is necessary for this transitory life will unfailingly be given.

The heart cannot have peace until it acquires this hope. It gives peace to the heart and brings joy into it. Concerning this hope the most venerable and holy lips of the Saviour have said: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Matt 11:28); that is, have hop in Me, and you will have relief from labor and fear.

In the Gospel of St Luke it is said of Symeon: *And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ* (Lk 2:26). And he did not kill his hope, but awaited

the desired Saviour of the world and, joyfully taking Him into his arms, said: Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart into Thy Kingdom, which I have desired, for I have obtained my hope – Christ the Lord.

## 6 – LOVE OF GOD

He who has attained perfect love exists in this life as if he did not exist. For he considers himself a stranger to the visible, patiently awaiting the invisible. He has been completely changed into love of God and has forgotten every other love.

He who loves himself cannot love God. But he who, for love of God, does not love himself, loves God.

He who truly loves God considers himself a pilgrim and a stranger on this earth; for in his yearning toward God with soul and mind, he contemplates Him alone.

The soul that is filled with love of God, at the time of its departure from the body, does not fear the prince of the air, but takes flight with the angels as if from a foreign country to its native land.

## 7 – THE FEAR OF GOD

A man who has taken upon himself to travel the path of internal mindfulness must have above all the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom.

Upon his mind there must always be engraved these words of the prophet: *Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling* (Ps 2:11).

He should travel this path with the utmost care and with reverence for everything holy, and not negligently.

Otherwise, he must take heed lest there should apply to him the Divine decree: *Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently* (Jer 48:10).

Reverent carefulness is necessary here because this sea – that is, the heart, with its thoughts and desires, which one must cleanse by means of mindfulness – is great and vast, *and there are numberless reptiles there* (Ps 103:27), that is, numerous vain, unjust, and impure thoughts generated by evil spirits.

## 8 – THE KEEPING OF RECOGNIZED TRUTHS

One should not open one's heart to another without needs; out of a thousand you may find only one who would keep your secret. When we do not keep it to ourselves, how can we hope that another could keep it?

With a worldly man one should speak of human matters; but with a man who possesses a spiritual intelligence one should speak of heavenly matters.

People who are filled with the spiritual wisdom judge concerning the spirit of a given person according to the Holy Scriptures, looking to see whether his words conform to the will of God; and from this they draw their conclusions about him.

When you happen to be among people in the world, you should not speak about spiritual matters, especially when no desire to listen can be noticed in them. In such a case one should follow the teaching of St Dionysius the Areopagite (in *The Celestial Hierarchies*, Ch 2): “Having yourself become divine through knowledge of divine things, and having concealed holy truths as one whole in the depths of your soul, carefully guard them from the uninitiated; for as the Scripture says, one should not throw before swine the pure, bright, and precious adornment of mental pearls.” One must keep in mind the word of the Lord: *Neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you* (Matt 7:6a).

And therefore you should strive by every means to keep to yourself the treasure of your spiritual gifts. Otherwise you will lose it, and not find it again. For, according to the tested teaching of St Isaac the Syrian, better the help that comes from watchfulness than the help that comes from experience (Homily 89).

When need arises, or the situation calls for it, then you should act openly to the glory of God, according to the saying: Them that honor Me I will honor (I Kings 2:30), because then the way has already been opened.

## 9 – LOQUACITY

By itself loquacity with those whose temperaments are opposed to our own is enough to disrupt the interior balance of a mindful person.

But most lamentable of all is the fact that because of this the fire which our Lord Jesus Christ came to light upon the earth of human hearts can be extinguished. For “nothing so cools the fire that a monk draws from the Holy Spirit into his heart for the sanctification of his soul, as much as communication and loquacity and any conversation, except for conversation with children concerning God’s mysteries, which aids their growth in knowledge of God and contact with Him” (St Isaac the Syrian, Homily 8).

One should especially keep oneself away from the society of the feminine sex; for just as a wax candle, even though unlit, will melt when placed amongst burning candles, so the heart of a monk will imperceptibly weaken from conversation with women. Concerning this St Isidore of Pelusium explains thus: “If there are some conversations that corrupt good habits, then they are the ones that are conducted with women, even if these be quite decent, because they can secretly corrupt the inward man by means of bad thoughts; and even though the body be clean, the soul nevertheless will be defiled. Is there anything more solid than a rock? Or, thin, what is softer than water or drops of water? Nevertheless, the unceasing action of one element overpowers the other. Thus, if one almost unconquerable substance can be conquered by something which is nothing in comparison with it, and it suffers and is distracted, then can it be that the easily wavering human will, from the continuousness of the action, will not be defeated or corrupted? (Letter No 284; also in *Lives of the Saints*, Synodal ed., Moscow, 1904, under February 4).

And this is why, for the guarding of the inner man, one must strive to restrain the tongue from loquacity: *A man of understanding holdeth his peace* (Prov 11:12), and *he that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life* (Prov 13:3); and you remember the words of Job: *I made a covenant with mine eyes, and I will not think upon a maid*

(Job 31:1), and the words of the Lord Jesus Christ; *Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart* (Matt 5:28).

If you have not previously heard from someone concerning a certain subject, you are not obliged to answer: *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame to him* (Prov 18:13).

## 10 – PRAYER

Those who have truly decided to serve the Lord God should practice the remembrance of God and uninterrupted prayer to Jesus Christ, mentally saying: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner. In the hours after the noon meal one may say the prayer thus: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, by the prayers of the Mother of God, have mercy on me a sinner; or one may have recourse directly to the Most Holy Mother of God, praying: Most Holy Mother of God, save us; or one may repeat the angelic greeting: O Theotokos and Virgin, rejoice. By such exercises in preserving oneself from dispersion and keeping peace of conscience one may draw near to God and be united to Him. For in the words of St Isaac the Syrian: “Without uninterrupted prayer we cannot draw near to God” Homily 69).

The manner of prayer was very well set forth by St Symeon, the New Theologian (*Philokalia*, “Discourse on the three manners of prayer”).

The merit of this was very well described by St John Chrysostom: “Prayer,” he said, “is a great weapon, a rich treasure, a wealth that is never exhausted, an undisturbed refuge, a cause of tranquility, the root of a multitude of blessings and their source and mother” (from the Slavonic anthology *Margarit*, Discourse 5, “Concerning the Incomprehensible”).

When at prayer in church it is profitable to stand with closed eyes in internal mindfulness, and to open your eyes only when you become downcast, or when sleep should weigh you down and incline you to doze; then you should fix your eyes upon an icon and the candle burning before it.

If in prayer it should happen that the mind be taken captive and its thoughts plundered, you must humble yourself before the Lord God and beg forgiveness, saying: I have sinned, Lord, by word, deed, thought, and by all my feelings.

Why one must always strive not to give oneself up to dispersion of thoughts: for through this the soul turns away from remembrance of God and love of Him through the working of the devil, as St Macarius says: the whole concern of our enemy is this – to turn our thought away from remembrance of God, and from fear and love [of Him] (Discourse 2, ch 15).

When the mind and heart are united in prayer and the soul’s thoughts are not dispersed, the heart is warmed by spiritual warmth in which the light of Christ shines, making the whole inner man peaceful and joyous.

We should thank the Lord for everything and give ourselves up to His will; we should likewise offer Him all our thoughts and words, and strive to make everything serve only His good pleasure.

## 11 – TEARS

All saints, and monks who have renounced the world, have spent their whole lives in weeping, in the hope of eternal consolation, according to the assurance of the Saviour of the world: *Blessed are they that mourn (weep), for they shall be comforted* (Matt 5:4).

And thus should we weep for the forgiveness of our sins. The words of the bearer of the purple should convince us of this: *Going they went and wept, casting their seeds; but coming they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves* (Ps 125:6-7); as well as the words of St Isaac the Syrian: “Moisten your cheeks with tears of your eyes, that the Holy Spirit may abide in you, and cleanse the filth of your malice. Move your Lord with your tears, that He may help you” (Homily 68).

When we weep at prayer, and laughter mixes in, then know that this comes from the cunning of the devil. It is difficult to understand the stealth, subtle workings of our enemy.

The heart of one who weeps tears of tender feeling (*umileniye*) is illumined by rays of the Sun of righteousness – Christ our God.

## 12 - Sorrow

When the evil spirit of sorrow seizes the soul, it fills it with distress and unpleasantness, and thus it does not allow one to pray with the necessary diligence, it hinders one from reading the Scriptures with proper attention, it deprives one of meekness and deference in one's relations with the brothers, and it produces an aversion for every kind of conversation. For the soul that is filled with sorrow becomes as if mad and delirious and is unable calmly either to accept good advice or to reply meekly to questions asked of it. It flees people as if they were the cause of the sorrow and fails to understand that the cause of the affliction is within oneself. Sorrow is a worm of the heart that gnaws at the mother that gave it birth.

The sorrowing monk will not stir his mind to contemplation and can never offer pure prayer.

He who has overcome the passions has also overcome sorrow. But he who has been overcome by passions will not escape the chains of sorrow. As a sick man is known by the color of his face, so one who is possessed by passions is given away by his sorrow.

He who loves the world cannot but sorrow. But he who disclaims the world is always joyful.

As fire purifies gold, so the sorrow of longing for God purifies a sinful heart.

## 13 - BOREDOM AND DESPONDENCY

An inseparable companion of the spirit of sorrow is boredom. It attacks a monk, as the Fathers have observed, at about midday, and it produces in him such a terrible restlessness that both the place where he lives and the brothers who live with him become unbearable to him; and during the reading there is aroused in him a kind of disgust, repeated yawning, and great hunger. Once the belly has been satisfied, the demon of boredom insinuates into the monk the idea of going out of his cell and talking to someone, suggesting that the only way

of saving oneself from boredom is by constantly conversing with others. And the monk who is vanquished by boredom is like desert tumbleweed that now stops for a moment, and now is again at the mercy of the wind. He is like a wisp of cloud pursued by the wind.

This demon, if he cannot entice the monk out of his cell, begins to distract his mind during prayer and reading. This - the notion occurs to him - shouldn't be like that, and that doesn't belong here, one must put things in order; and the demon does all this in order to make the mind idle and unproductive.

This affliction is cured by prayer, abstinence from idle talk, manual labor according to one's strength, reading of the Word of God and patience; for it is born of faintheartedness, inactivity, and idle talk (St Isaac the Syrian, 212).

It is difficult for one just beginning the monastic life to avoid boredom, for it is the first thing to attack him. Therefore above all one must guard against it by means of strict and absolute fulfillment of all the duties laid upon the novice. When your activities fall into a real order, boredom will find no place in your heart. Only those affairs have no orderly arrangement are afflicted with boredom. And so obedience is the best treatment for this dangerous affliction.

When boredom vanquishes you, say to yourself, in accordance with the instructions of St Isaac the Syrian: "You desire again an unclean and shameful life. And if the thought occurs to you: it is a great sin to kill oneself (with ascetic practices), you should say in return: I am killing myself because I cannot live uncleanly. I shall die here so as not to see real death - the death of my soul in its relation to God. It is better for me to die here in purity than to live an evil life in the world. I have preferred such a death to my sins. I am killing myself because I have sinned against God, and I will no longer anger Him. What is life to me apart from God? This affliction I will bear, so as not to be deprived of the hope of heaven. Why should God care for my life, if I live evilly and anger Him?" (Homily 22).

Boredom is one thing, and the anguish of spirit that is called despondency is quite another. It sometimes happens that a man is in such a spiritual state that it seems to him that it would be easier to be annihilated or to be tally without consciousness or feeling than to remain any longer in this immeasurable painful state. One must come out of it quickly. Guard yourself against the spirit of despondency, for from it comes every kind of evil (St Barsanuphius the Great, Answer 73).

There is a natural despondency, St Barsanuphius teaches, caused by weakness; and there is despondency caused by a demon. They may be distinguished thus: Diabolical despondency comes before the time when one must give oneself some rest; or when someone proposes to do something, before he can finish a third or a fourth of it the demon forces him to leave the work and stand up. In such a case one should not listen to him, but should offer a prayer and patiently continue to sit and work. And the enemy, seeing that the man offers a prayer because of this, withdraws, since he does not wish to give any occasion for prayer (St Barsanuphius the Great).

When it pleases God, says St Isaac the Syrian, to plunge a man into greater affliction, He permits him to fall into the hands of faintheartedness. The latter produces in him a strong force of despondency, in which he experiences a straitness of soul, and this is a foretaste of hell; as a consequence of this the spirit of delirium comes upon him and from it thousands of temptations spring forth: anxiety, rage, blasphemy, complaining about one's lot, depraved thoughts, moving from place to place, and the like. If you will ask: what is the cause of this? Then I will tell you: your negligence; because you did not take the trouble to seek a cure for them. For there is one treatment for all this, and with the aid of it a man soon finds comfort in his soul. And what kind of treatment is this? Meekness of heart. There is no way apart from this by which a man may tear down the wall of these vices; quite the contrary, he will find that they will overpower him (St Isaac the Syrian). Despondency is sometimes called by the Holy Fathers idleness, sloth, or indolence.



## 14 - DESPAIR

Just as the Lord is solicitous about our salvation, so too the murderer or men, the devil, strives to lead a man into despair.

A lofty and sound soul does not despair over misfortunes, of whatever sort they may be. Our life is as it were a house of temptations and trials; but we will not renounce the Lord for as long as He allows the tempter to remain with us and for as long as we must wait to be revived through patience and secure passionlessness!

Judas the betrayer was fainthearted and unskilled in battle, and so the enemy, seeing his despair, attached him and forced him to hang himself; but Peter, a firm rock, when he fell into great sin, like one skilled in battle did not despair nor lose heart, but shed bitter tears from a burning heart, and the enemy, seeing these tears, his eyes scorched as by fire, fled far from him wailing in pain.

And so, brother, St Antioch teaches, when despair attacks us let us not yield to it, but being strengthened and protected by the light of faith, with great courage let us say to the evil spirit: "What are you to us, estranged from God, a fugitive from heaven and evil servant? You dare do nothing to us. Christ, the Son of God, has authority both over us and over everything. It is against Him that we have sinned, and before Him that we will be justified.

And you, destroyer, leave us. Strengthened by His venerable Cross, we trample under foot your serpent's head" (St Antioch, Discourse 27).

## 15 - ILLNESSES

The body is a slave, the soul a sovereign, and therefore it is due to Divine mercy when the body is worn out by illness: for thereby the passions are weakened, and a man comes to himself; indeed, bodily illness itself is sometimes caused by the passions.

Take away sin, and illnesses will cease; for they occur in us because of sin, as St Basil the Great affirms (Discourse on the truth that God is not the cause of evil): Whence come infirmities? Whence come bodily injuries? The Lord created the body, but not infirmity; the soul, but not sin. And what is above all useful and necessary? Union with God and communion with Him by means of love. If we lose this love, we fall away from Him, and in falling away we become subject to various and diverse infirmities.

Headache may be caused by agitated and excessively forced mental activity.

## 16 – Patience and Humility

One should always endure any trial for the sake of God with gratitude. Our life is a single minute in comparison with eternity; and therefore, according to the Apostle, *the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18).



Bear it in silence when an enemy offends you, and open your heart to the Lord.

When anyone demeans or takes away your honor try by every means to forgive him, in accordance with the word of the Evangelist: *Of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again* (Lk 6:30).

When men revile us, we should consider ourselves unworthy of praise. If we were worthy, everyone would bow down to us.

We should always and before everyone humble ourselves, following the teaching of St Isaac the Syrian: *Humble yourself and you will see the glory of God in yourself* (Homily 57).

For this reason let us love humility and we shall see the glory of God; for where humility issues forth, there the glory of God abounds.

What is not in the light is all dark; likewise without humility there is nothing in a man but darkness alone.

## 17 – Works of Mercy

We should be merciful to the needy and to travelers - the great lamps and fathers of the Church took great care over this.

We should strive by every means to fulfill the word of God: *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful* (Lk 6:36). And again: *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice* (Matt 9:13).

To these saving words the wise listen, but the foolish do not listen; and therefore it is said: *He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully* (II Cor 9:6).

The example of St Peter the Breadgiver (Lives of the Saints, Sept 22), who threw bread to a poor man, can inspire us to be merciful to our neighbors.

We should do works of mercy with a good disposition of soul, according to the teaching of St Isaac the Syrian (Homily 80): If you give to one who asks, let the joy of your countenance precede your gift, and comfort his sorrow with good words.

## 18 - Duties and Love Toward One's Neighbor

With one's neighbor one should behave kindly, giving not even the appearance of offending. When we turn away from a man or offend him, it is as though a stone were laid on the heart.

The spirit of a disturbed or desponding man one must strive to encourage by a word of love.

If a brother has sinned, cover him, as St Isaac the Syrian advised (Homily 89): *Stretch out your garment upon the one who has sinned and cover him.*

We all ask the mercy of God, as the Church sings: *Had the Lord not been with us, who would have been preserved whole from the enemy, and likewise from the murderer of men?*

In relation to our neighbors we should be, both in word and in thought, pure and toward all impartial; otherwise we shall make our life unprofitable.

We should love our neighbor no less than ourselves, in accordance with the Lord's commandment: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself* (Lk 10:27).

But we should not do this in such a way that love for our neighbor goes outside the boundaries of moderation and diverts us from fulfillment of the first and chief commandment, namely, the love of God. Concerning this our Lord Jesus Christ instructs us in the Gospel: *He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me* (Matt 10:37).

This subject is treated quite well by St Dimitry of Rostov (Works, vol 2, Instruction 2): One may see love in a Christian man that is untrue to God where a creature is made equal to the Creator, or where a creature is revered more than the Creator, but true love may be seen where the Creator alone is loved and preferred above the whole creation.

## 19 -The Duties of Those Subject to Superiors

One should not interfere in the business of those in authority and judge it; by this means one offends the majesty of God, from Whom authorities obtain their position. For *there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God* (Rom 13:1).

One should not oppose authorities who act for good, so as not to sin before God and be subjected to His just chastisement: *Whoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation* (Rom 13:2).

One must be in obedience to a superior: for through this he who is obedient prospers mightily in the formation of his soul; and in addition he obtains by this means an understanding of things and comes to heartfelt contrition.

## 20 - Do Not Judge Your Neighbor

We must not judge anyone, even if with our own eyes we have seen someone sinning, or walking in transgression of God's commandments. For according to the word of God: *Judge not, that ye be not judged* (Matt 7:1), and again: *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand* (Rom 14:4).

It is much better always to bring to mind these words to the Apostle: *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall* (1Cor 10:12).

For we do not know how long we may remain in virtue, as says the Prophet who attained to knowledge of this matter by experience: *In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Thou didst hide Thy face, and I am troubled* (Ps 29:7,8).

## 21 - FORGIVENESS OF OFFENSES

For an offence, whatever kind may have been given, one must not only not avenge oneself, but on the contrary must all the more forgive from the heart, even though it may resist this, and must incline the heart by conviction of the word of God: *If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses* (Matt 6:15); and again, *Pray for them which despiteful use you* (Matt 5:44).

One must not nurse in one's heart malice or hatred towards a neighbor who bears ill-will; but we must strive to love him and, as much as possible, do good, following the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ: *Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you* (Matt 5:44).

And thus, if we will strive, as much as lies in our power, to fulfill all this, then we may hope that Divine Light will shine early in our souls, opening to us the path to the Jerusalem on High.

## 22 - Care for the Soul

Man, as far as his body is concerned, is like a lighted candle. A candle must be consumed; thus also the body must die. But the soul is immortal, and so our care also must be more for the soul than for the body: For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Mk 8:36).

Sts Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Ambrose of Milan, and others, from their youth to the end of their life were virgins; their whole life was devoted to care for the soul, and not for the body. Thus our whole endeavor too should be for the soul; the body should be strengthened only so that it might aid the strengthening of the spirit.

If we willfully exhaust our body to the point where the spirit also is exhausted, such an oppression will be foolish, even though it were done for the acquiring of virtue.

But if it be pleasing to God that a man undergo illnesses, He will give him also strength to endure.

And so let illness be not from us ourselves, but from God.

## 23 WITH WHAT SHOULD ONE NOURISH THE SOUL?

One should nourish the soul with the word of God: for the word of God, as St Gregory the Theologian says, is angelic bread, by which are nourished souls that hunger for God. Most of all one should occupy oneself with reading the New Testament and the Psalter, which one should do standing up. From this there occurs an enlightenment in the mind, which is changed by a Divine change.

One should habituate oneself in this way so that the mind might as it were swim in the Lord's law; it is under the guidance of this law that one should direct one's life.

It is very profitable to occupy oneself with reading the word of God in solitude, and to read the whole Bible intelligently. For one such occupation alone, apart from good deeds, the Lord will not leave a person without His mercy, but will fill him with the gift of understanding.

And when a man nourishes his soul with the word of God, there is realized (in him) an understanding of what is good and what evil.

The reading of the word of God should be performed in solitude, in order that the whole mind of the reader might be plunged into the truths of the Holy Scripture, and that from this he might receive warmth, which in solitude produces tears; from these a man is wholly warmed and is filled with spiritual gifts, which rejoice the mind and heart more than any word.

One should likewise nourish the soul also with knowledge of the Church: how she has been preserved from the beginning up to the present, what she has endured in one or another time; but one should know this not so as to desire to direct people, but in case one should encounter powerful opposition.

Most of all one should do this strictly for oneself, so as to acquire peace of soul, according to the teachings of the Psalmist: *Great peace have those who love Thy law, O Lord* (Ps 118:165).

## 24 - PEACE OF SOUL

Nothing is better than peace in Christ; in it is destroyed every warfare of the spirits of the air and earth: *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (Eph 6:12).

It is the mark of a wise soul when a man plunges his mind within himself and has activity in his heart.

Then the grace of God overshadows him, and he is in a peaceful state, and by means of this also in a most peaceful state: peaceful, that is, with a good conscience; and most peaceful, for the mind beholds within itself the grace of the Holy Spirit, according to the word of God: *And His place is in peace* (Ps 75:3).

Can one, seeing the sun with one's sensuous eyes, not rejoice? But how much more joyful it is when the mind sees with its inner eye the Sun of justice, Christ! Then in truth one rejoices with angelic joy; of this the Apostle too said: *Our conversation is in heaven* (Phil 3:20).

When one walks in a peaceful state, it is as if one ladles out spiritual gifts with a spoon.

The Holy Fathers, being in a peaceful state and being overshadowed by Divine grace, lived long.

When a man enters into a peaceful state, he can give out from himself and also upon others light for the enlightenment of the mind; but before this a man must repeat these words of the prophetess (Hannah): *Let not high-sounding words come out of your mouth* (1 Kings [Samuel] 2:3), and the word of the Lord: *Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye* (Matt 7:5).

This peace, like some priceless treasure, our Lord Jesus Christ left to His disciples before His death, saying: *Peace I leave you, My peace I give unto you* (Jn 14:27). Of it the Apostle likewise speaks: *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus* (Phil 4:7).

And so we must concentrate all our thoughts, desires, and actions in order to receive the peace of God and to cry out ever with the Church: *O Lord our God, give us peace* (Is 26:12).

## 25 - PRESERVING PEACE OF SOUL

One must by every means strive to preserve peace of soul and not to be disturbed by offenses from others; for this one must in every way strive to restrain anger and by means of attentiveness to keep the mind and heart from improper feelings.

And therefore we must bear offenses from others with equanimity and accustom ourselves to such a disposition of spirit that these offenses seem to concern not us, but others.

Such a practice can give quietness to the human heart and make it a dwelling for God Himself.

An example of such angerlessness we see in St Gregory the Wonderworker, from whom a certain prostitute in a public place asked recompense, as if for a sin he had committed with her; and he, not becoming in the least angry with her, meekly said to a certain friend of his: give her quickly the sum she demands. The woman had no sooner taken the unjust recompense than she was subject to the attack of a demon; and the Saint drove the demon out of her by prayer (Lives of Saints, Nov 17).

If, however, it is impossible not to be disturbed, then at least one must strive to restrain the tongue, according to the Psalmist: *I was troubled and spoke not* (Ps 76:5).

In this case we may take as an example Sts Spyridon of Trimithoundos and Ephraim the Syrian. The first (Lives of the Saints, Dec 12) bore an offense thus: When, at the demand of the Greek Emperor, he entered the Palace, one of the servants who had been in the Emperor's chamber, taking him for a beggar, burst out laughing at him, did not allow him into the chambers, and then hit him on the cheek. St Spyridon, being gentle, in accordance with the word of the Lord, turned the other to him also (Matt 5:39). St Ephraim (lives of the Saints, Jan 28), while fasting in the wilderness, was deprived of food by a disciple in this fashion: The disciple, carrying food to him, accidentally shattered the dish on the way. The Saint, seeing the sorrowing disciple, said to him: Do not be said, brother; if the food did not desire to come to us, then we will go to it. And he went, sat down beside the shattered dish and, gathering the food, ate it: so without anger was he.

And in what fashion to vanquish anger one may see from the Life of St Paisius the Great (Lives of the Saints, June 19), who asked the Lord Jesus Christ, Who had appeared to him, to free him from anger; and Christ said to him: If you wish to vanquish anger and rage together, desire nothing, neither hate anyone nor belittle anyone.

In order to preserve peace of soul, one must remove from oneself despondency and strive to have a joyful spirit and not a sad one, according to the word of Sirach: *For sorrow has killed many, and there is not profit therein* (Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus, 30:23).

When a man has a great insufficiency of those things needed for the body, it is difficult to vanquish despondency. But this, of course, is applicable to weak souls.

For a preservation of peace of soul one must likewise by every means flee from judgment of others. By not judging and by silence peace of soul is maintained: when a man is in such a state, he receives Divine revelations.

For the preservation of peace of soul one must more often enter into oneself and ask: where am I?

At the same time one must watch that the bodily senses, especially sight, serve for the inner man and do not distract the soul by means of sensuous objects: for they only receive grace-bearing gifts who have interior activity and are vigilant over their souls.

## 26 - GUARDING THE HEART

We must vigilantly guard our heart from unfitting thoughts and impressions, according to the word of the writer of Proverbs: *Keep thine heart with the utmost care; for out of thee are the issues of life* (Prov 4:23).

From constant guarding of the heart purity is born in it, purity

in which is beheld the Lord, according to the assurance of eternal Truth: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*

(Matt 5:8).

Whatever of that which is best has flowed into the heart, we should not pour out without need; for that which has been gathered can be free of danger from visible and invisible enemies only when it is guarded in the interior of the heart.

The heart boils, being kindled by Divine fire, only when there is living water in it; but when this is poured out, it grows cold and a man freezes.

## 27 - DISCERNMENT OF THE HEART'S WORKINGS

When a man receives something Divine, in his heart he rejoices; but when he receives something diabolic, he is disturbed.

The Christian heart, when it has received something Divine, does not demand anything else in order to convince it that this is precisely from the Lord; but by that very effect it is convinced that this is heavenly, for it senses within itself spiritual fruits: *love, joy peace*, and the rest (Gal. 5:22).

On the contrary, though the devil might transform himself even *into an angel of light* (II Cor 11:14), or might produce thoughts seemingly good: still the heart would feel a certain obscureness and agitation in its thoughts. Explaining this, St Macarius of Egypt says: Though satan might produce also visions of light, he is entirely unable to produce a blessed effect: which is the well-known sign of his work (St Macarius, Homily 4, ch 13).

And thus, from these diverse workings of the heart, a man may know what is Divine and what diabolic, as St Gregory the Sinaite writes: From the effect one may know whether the light shining in one's soul is of God or of satan.

## 28 - THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

To receive and behold in the heart the light of Christ, one must as far as possible, divert one's attention away from visible objects. Having purified the soul beforehand by repentance and good deeds, and with faith in the Crucified, having closed the bodily eyes, immerse the mind within the heart, in which place cry out with the invocation of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; and then, to the measure of one's zeal and warmth of spirit toward the Beloved, a man finds in the invoked name a delight which awakens the desire to seek higher illumination.

When through such a practice the mind enters into the heart, the light of Christ shines, illuminating the chamber of the soul by its Divine radiance, as the Prophet Malachi says: *But unto you that fear My name, the Sun of justice shall arise* (Mal 4:2).

When a man beholds the eternal light interiorly, his mind is pure and has in it no sensory representations, but, being totally immersed in contemplation of uncreated goodness, he forgets everything sensory and wishes not even to see himself; he desires rather to hide himself in the heart of the earth, if only he be not deprived of this true good – God.

## 29 - ON THOUGHTS AND MOVEMENTS OF THE FLESH

If we do not agree with the evil thoughts suggested by the devil, we do good.

The impure spirit has a strong influence only on the passionate, while upon those who have purified themselves of passions he attacks only from the side, or exteriorly.

Is it possible for a man in his youth to burn and not be disturbed by fleshly thoughts? But one should pray to the lord God that the spark of impure passions may be extinguished at the very beginning. Then the flame of passions will not increase in a man.

## 30 - HEEDFULNESS TO ONESELF

He who is traveling the path of heedfulness should not trust only his own heart, but should verify the workings of his heart and his life with the law of God and with the active life of ascetics of piety who have passed through such endeavor. By this means one may the more easily both save oneself from the evil one and more clearly behold the truth.

The mind of a heedful man is as it were a watchman on duty, or an unsleeping guard of the inner Jerusalem. Standing at the height of spiritual contemplation, he looks with an eye of purity upon the enemy powers who go around and attack his soul, in accordance with the Psalmist: *And my eye hath looked down upon my enemies* (Ps 53:9).



From his eye the devil is not hidden, who *as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour* (I Peter 5:8), nor are they who bend their bow *to shoot in the dark the upright of heart* (Ps 53:9).

And thus such a man, following the teaching of the divine Paul, *receives the whole armor of God, that [he] may be able to with stand in the evil day* (Eph 6:13), and with this armor and with the cooperating grace of God, he repels visible attacks and vanquishes invisible warriors.

He who travels this path should not heed extraneous reports, from which the head can be filled with idle and vain thoughts and recollections; but he should be heedful toward himself.

Especially on this path one must watch lest one turn to the affairs of other, lest one think or speak of them, according the Psalmist: *That my mouth may not speak of the works of men* (Ps 16:4); but one should pray to the Lord: *From my secret [sins] cleanse me, and from those of others spare Thy servant* (Ps 18:13-14).

A man should turn his attention to the beginning and end of his life; however, toward the middle part, where occur fortunes or misfortunes, he should be indifferent.

To preserve heedfulness one must retire into oneself, according to the word of the Lord: *Salute no man by the way* (Lk 10:4), i.e. do not speak without need, unless someone run after you to hear from you something profitable.

Revere elders or brethren whom you meet with bows, having your eyes always closed.

### 31 - AGAINST TOO GREAT SOLICITUDE

Too great solicitude for worldly things is natural to an unbelieving and fainthearted man. And woe to us if we, in taking care for ourselves, do not confirm ourselves in our hope in God, Who takes care for us! If we do not ascribe to Him the visible goods which we use in this present age, how can we expect from Him those goods which are promised in the future? Let us not be such faint believer, but rather let us *seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added* unto us, according to the word of the Saviour (Matt 6:33).

It is better for us to despise what is not our, i.e.. the temporal and passing, and desire our own, i.e., incorruption and immortality. For when we shall be incorruptible and immortal, we shall become worth of visible contemplation of God, like the Apostles at the most divine Transfiguration, and we shall be joined in a union with God surpassing the mind, like the heavenly minds. For we shall be like the angels, and sons of God, *being the sons of the resurrection* (Lk 20:36).

### 32 - RENUNCIATION OF THE WORLD

Fear of God is acquired when a man, renouncing the world and everything that is in the world, concentrates all his thoughts and feelings on the single thought of God's law, and immerses himself entirely in contemplation of God and in a feeling of the blessedness promised to the saints.

One cannot renounce the world and come into a state of spiritual contemplation while remaining in the world. For as long as the passions are not quieted, one cannot acquire peace of soul. But the passions do not become

quiet as long as we are surrounded by the objects which awaken the passions. In order to come into perfect passionlessness and attain perfect silence of the soul, one must labor much in spiritual reflections and prayer. But how is it possible fully and calmly to immerse oneself in contemplation of God, and be instructed in His law, and ascend with all one's soul to Him in flaming prayer, while remaining amidst the perpetual roar of passions warring in the world? The world lies in evil.

Without having freed itself from the world, the soul cannot love God sincerely. For worldly things, in the words of St Antioch, are as it were a veil for the soul.

If, says the same teacher, we live in an alien city and our city is far from this city, and if we know our city; then why do we tarry in an alien city and prepare for ourselves a field and a dwelling in it? And how shall we sing a song to the Lord in an alien land? This world is domain of another, i.e. the prince of this world (Homily 15).

### 33 - ASCETIC LABORS

One should not undertake ascetic labors beyond one's measure, but one should strive to make our friend – the flesh – faithful and capable of performing virtues.

One should go by a middle path: *turn not aside to the right hand nor to the left* (Prov 4:27); and one should render unto the spirit what is spiritual, and unto the body what is bodily; for the maintenance of temporal life, one should render what is necessary, and for life in society, that which is lawfully demanded by it, in accordance with the words of the Holy Scripture: *Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's* (Matt 22:21).

One must condescend to the soul in its infirmities and imperfections, and bear its defects as we bear those of others; one must not, however, become lazy, but should spur oneself to do better.

Perhaps one has eaten too much, or done something similar to this which is natural to human weakness – do not be disturbed at this, and do not add injury to injury; be bestir yourself to correction and at the same time strive to preserve peace of soul, according to the word of the Apostle: *Blessed is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth* (Rom 14:22).

The same thought is contained in the words of the Saviour: Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3).

If the body has been worn out by ascetic labors or sickness, one should strengthen it with moderate sleep, food and drink, not observing even the times. Jesus Christ, after the raising of Jairus' daughter, immediately commanded: *Give her to eat* (Lk 8:55).

Every success in anything we should refer to the Lord and with the Prophet say: *Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory* (Ps 113:9).

To the age of about 35, that is, to the midpoint of our earthly life, it is a great accomplishment for a man to preserve himself, and many in these years do not remain in virtue, but turn aside from the right path to their own desires, thus St Basil testifies of this (Homily on the beginning of Proverbs): Many have gathered much in their youth, but being in the midst of life they could not bear the tumult of temptations which rose up against them from the spirit of cunning, and they were deprived of all this.

And there, in order not to experience such a metamorphosis, one much put oneself as it were on the scale of a test and an attentive self-examination, according to the teaching of St Isaac the Syrian. For as on a scale it is fitting that the destiny of each be weighed out (Homily 40, On Prayer).

## 34 - REPENTANCE

He who would be saved should ever have his heart disposed to repentance and broken, according to the Psalmist: *A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit: a broken and humbled heart God will not despise* (Ps 50:17).

In such brokenness of spirit a man can easily pass securely through the artful snares of the proud devil, whose whole care consists in agitating the human spirit, and in agitation sowing his tares, in *accordance with the words of the Gospel: Lord, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this* (Matt 13:27-28).

When, however, a man strives within himself to have his heart humble and his thought not agitated, but peaceful, then all the snares of the enemy are without effect; for where there is peace in one's thoughts, there resides the Lord God Himself – *His place is in peace* (Ps 75:3).

The beginning of repentance proceeds from fear of God and heedfulness, as the holy Martyr Boniface says (Lives of Saints, Dec 19): The fear of God is the father of heedfulness, and heedfulness is the mother of inner peace, and the latter gives birth to conscience, which causes the soul to behold its own ugliness as in a certain pure and undisturbed water; and thus are born the beginnings and roots of repentance.

Throughout our whole life, by our transgressions we offend in greater or less degree the majesty of God, and therefore we should also ever humble ourselves before Him, begging remission of our sins.

*Question:* Can a man who has received grace rise after falling?

*Answer:* He can, according to the Psalmist, *I was overturned that I might fall, but the Lord supported me* (Ps 117:13); for when Nathan the prophet accused David in his sin, the latter repented and immediately received forgiveness (II Kings 12:13).

An example of the same thing may be found in the anchorite who, going for water, fell into sin with a woman at the spring, and returning to his cell, acknowledged his sin and began again to lead an ascetic life as before, not accepting the counsel of the enemy who represented to him the seriousness of the sin and would have led him away from the ascetic life. The Lord revealed this incident to a certain father, and commanded him to glorify the brother who had fallen into sin for such a victory over the devil.

## 35 - FASTING

To lay upon oneself a strict rule of abstinence in everything, or to deprive oneself of everything that might serve to lighten one's weakness – not everyone can accept this.

One should partake of enough food every day so that the body strengthened, may be the friend and helper of the soul in the performance of virtue; otherwise it may happen that, while wearing out one's body, one's soul also will grow weak.

On Fridays and Wednesdays, and especially during the four fasts, partake of food once in the day, and the angel of the Lord will join himself to you.

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### 36 - Vigilance against temptations

One should, as far as it is proper and necessary, be sometimes a child, and sometimes a lion, this latter especially when passions or evil spirits rise up against us; because *we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (Eph 6:12).

We must always be attentive to the assaults of the devil; for can we hope that he will leave us without temptation, when he did not leave our Founder and Source of faith and Perfecter the Lord Jesus Christ Himself? The Lord Himself said to the Apostle Peter: *Simon, Simon, behold satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat* (Lk 22:31).

And thus we must ever call upon the Lord in humility and pray that He may not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength, but that He may deliver us from the evil one.

For when the Lord leaves a man to himself, the devil is ready to grind him, as a millstone grinds kernels of wheat.

### 37 - Solitude and Silence

More than anything else one should adorn oneself with silence; for St Ambrose of Milan says: I have seen many being saved by silence, but not one by talkativeness. And again one of the Fathers says that silence is the mystery of the future age, while words are the implement of this world (St Isaac the Syrian).

Only sit in your cell in heedfulness and silence, and by every means strive to draw near to the Lord, and the Lord is ready to transform you from a man into an angel, *and to whom*, He says, *will I look, but to him that is meek and silent, and that trembleth at My words?* (Is 66:2).

When we remain in silence, our enemy the devil will have no success with regard to a man with a hidden heart; by this, however, must be understood silence in the mind.

One who goes through such an ascetic endeavor should place all his hope on the Lord God, in accordance with the teaching of the Apostle: *Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you* (1 Peter 5:7).

Such a one should be constant in this ascetic endeavor, following in this case, the example of St John the Silent One and Anchorite (Lives of Saints, Dec 3), who in the traversing of this path strengthened himself with these Divine words: *I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee* (Heb 13:5).

If one cannot always remain in solitude and silence while living in a monastery and occupying oneself with the obediences placed upon one by the superior, then at least a little time that is left after obediences should be devoted to solitude and silence, and for this little the Lord God will not neglect to send down His grace-giving mercy.

From solitude and silence are born tender contrition and meekness; the activity of this latter in the human heart may be compared to that quiet water of Siloe, which flows without noise or sound, as the Prophet Isaiah speaks of it: *the water of Siloe that go softly* (Is 8:6).

Remaining in one's cell in silence, work, prayer, and instruction day and night in God's law, makes a man pious; for, in the words of the Holy Fathers, the cell of a monk is the Babylonian furnace, and in it the three youths found the Son of God (St Peter of Damascus, *Philokalia*).

### 38 - Absolute Silence

Absolute Silence is a cross upon which a man must crucify himself with all the passions and desires. But only think, how much our master Christ suffered before hand slanders and offenses, and only then ascended the Cross.

Thus we too cannot enter into absolute silence and hope for holy perfection if we do not suffer with Christ. For, says the Apostle: *If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him* (Rom 8:17), There is no other path (St Barsanuphius, Answer 342).

He who has entered into silence must unfailingly keep in mind why he has done so, in order that his heart may not be turned away to something else.

### 39 - The Active and the Contemplative Life

Man is composed of soul and body, and therefore his life's path also should consist of activities of the body and of the soul – of action and mental contemplation.

The path of the active life consists of: fasting, continence, vigils, prostration, prayer and other bodily ascetic labors, which comprise the narrow and grievous path which, according to God's word, leads to eternal life (Matt 7:14). The path of the contemplative life consists of the elevation of the mind to the Lord God, of heartfelt heedfulness, mental prayer, and, through such practices, contemplation of spiritual things.

Everyone who desires to traverse the spiritual lie must begin with the active life, and only then come to the contemplative: for without the active life it is impossible to enter the contemplative.

The active life serves to cleanse us of sinful passions, and it leads us up to the stage of active perfection; and by this very means it paves for us the path to the contemplative life. For only those who have been cleansed of passions and are perfect can approach that life, as one may see from the words of Holy Scripture: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Matt 5:8), and from the words of St Gregory the Theologian (in his sermon for Holy Pascha): Only those most perfect by their experience approach without danger to contemplation.

One should approach the contemplative life with fear and trembling, with contrition of heart and humility, with much experience of the Holy Scriptures, and, if one can find him, under the direction of some experienced elder; and not with audacity and self-esteem. For he who is audacious and disdainful, in the words of St Gregory the Sinaite (*Philokalia*), having sought with pride for something beyond his worth, is compelled to think he is ready for it prematurely. And again: If anyone imagines in conceit to attain something high, this is a satanic desire, and, without acquiring truth, he will be handily seized by the devil and his nets, as his servant.

But if one cannot find an instructor able to direct one into the contemplative life, in this case one must be direct by the Holy Scripture, for the Lord Himself commands us to learn from Holy Scripture, saying: *Search the Scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life* (Jn 5:39).

Likewise one must endeavor to read through the writings of the Fathers, and strive as much as possible, according to one's strength, to fulfill what they teach, and in this fashion, little by little ascend from the active life to the perfection of the contemplative.

For in the words of St Gregory the Theologian (Sermon on Holy Pascha), it is the very best deed when we each attain perfection ourselves. To God, Who calls us, we must offer a sacrifice living and holy, always and in everything being sanctified.

A man must not leave the active life even when he may have had success in it and have already entered the contemplative life, for it cooperates with the contemplative life and elevates it.

Traversing the path of the interior and contemplative life, one must not relax and leave it because people, having become attached to exterior and sensual things, strike us a blow in the very heart's feeling by the opposition of their opinions, and strive by every means to turn us aside from the traversing of the interior path, placing in our path various obstacles; for, in the opinion of the teachers of the Church (Blessed Theodoret, Commentary on the Song of Songs), the contemplation of spiritual things is preferred to the knowledge of sensual things.

And therefore one must not waver over any obstacles to the traversing of this path, strengthening oneself in this case with the word of God: *But let us fear not their fear, neither let us be dismayed: For God is with us. Let us sanctify the Lord God Himself in heartfelt remembrance of His Divine name and fulfillment of His will, and He shall be our fear* (Is 8:12, 13).

#### 40 - Instructions to a Novice

Whether by someone's advice, or by the authority of others, or by whatever other means you came to this monastery, do not fall into despondency: this is God's visitation to you. If you observe that which has been told you, you will be saved yourself together with your close ones who you care for: *I have not seen*, said the

Prophet, *the righteous forsaken, nor his seed* (Ps 36:35). Living, then, in this monastery, observe this: standing in church, be attentive to everything without neglect, learn the whole order of the Church service, *i.e.*, Vespers Compline, Nocturns, Matins, the Hours; learn to keep them in the mind.

If you are in your cell without any work for the hands, be diligent in all kinds of reading, but above all in the reading of the Psalter; strive to read each section many times, so as to keep all in the mind. If there is work for the hands, occupy yourself with it; if you are called to an obedience, go to it. At handiwork, or being anywhere at an obedience, constantly say the prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. At prayer pay heed to yourself, *i.e.*, gather the mind and unite it with the soul. At the beginning for a day, when for two and many, say this prayer with the mind alone, each time separately, paying particular attention to each word. Then, when the Lord will kindle your heart with the warmth of His grace and will unite it within you into a single spirit: then this prayer will flow within you ceaselessly and will always be with you, delighting and nourishing you. It is this very thing that is spoken of by the Prophet Isaiah: *For the dew from Thee is healing to them* (Is 26:19).

And when you will hold within yourself this nourishment for the soul, *i.e.*, this conversation with the Lord Himself, then why would you go to the cells of the brethren, even though you may be called by someone? I tell you truly that this is idle talk and love of idleness. If you do not understand yourself, can you reason about anything else and teach others? Be silent, be ceaselessly silent; keep always in mind the presence of God and His name. Enter into conversation with no one, but by every means guard against judging those who speak much or laugh. Be in this case deaf and dumb; no matter what may be said about you, let it pass by your ears. As your example you can take St Stephen the New (Lives of Saints, Nov 28), whose prayer was ceaseless, his disposition meek, his mouth silent, his heart humble, his spirit filled with tender feeling (*umileniye*), his body and soul pure, his virginity immaculate, whose true poverty and whose non-acquisitiveness were un murmuring, his obedience thorough, his execution patient and his labor diligent.

Sitting at meals, do not look and do not judge how much anyone eats, but be attentive to yourself, nourishing your soul with prayer. At dinner eat sufficiently, at supper restrain yourself. On Wednesdays and Fridays, if you are able, eat once a day. Every day without fail sleep four hours at night: the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, and the hour past midnight [*i.e.*, from 9:00 p.m. to 1:00a.m.]; if you become weak, you can sleep more in the afternoon. Hold to this unflinching to the end of your life: for this is necessary to give rest to your head. I, also, from my youth have held to such a path. And we always beg the Lord God to give us repose at right-time. If you will guard yourself thus, you will not be despondent but healthy and joyful.

I tell you in truth, that if you will conduct yourself thus, you will remain in the monastery without leaving to your death. Humble yourself, and the Lord will help you, *and He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday* (Ps 36), and *thy light will shine before men* (Matt 5:16).

#### 41 – Reply to a brother who asked instruction on leading an anchoritic life

One brother, when he had the intent to go away into the wilderness, came to Fr Seraphim, who was living in the wilderness, and asked him: How is it, Father, that some say that going away from coenobitic life into the wilderness is Phariseeism, and that by such means one shows disdain for the brethren or even judgment of them? Fr Seraphim replied to this: It is not our business to judge other, and we go away from the brotherhood not out of hatred for it, but rather because we have accepted and bear on ourselves the angelic habit, to which it is not fitting to be in a place where by word and deed the Lord God is angered. And therefore we, excluding



ourselves from the brotherhood, go away only from hearing and seeing that which is opposed to God's commandments, which happens in many of the brethren. We do not flee men, who are of one nature with us and bear one and the same name of Christ; but we flee the faults which they commit, as was said also to Arsenius the Great: Flee men, and you will be saved (Lives of Saints, May 8).

One monk was blessed by the abbot to begin an anchoritic life, and the abbot wrote to Fr Seraphim asking him to receive this monk and discipline him as he himself would. When this monk came with such a letter to Fr Seraphim, the latter received him quite kindly, and blessed him to build another cell not so far from his own. When, however, this monk began to ask instruction of him, he told him, out of the deepest humility, that "I myself don't know anything." And he reminded him of the words of the Saviour: *Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls* (Matt 11:29). Then he added: In the opinion of St John of the Ladder, we should learn, not from an angel or a man, but from the Lord Himself.

## 42 – WHAT AN ABBOT SHOULD BE

An abbot should be perfect in every virtue and have the senses of his soul trained by long schooling in the discernment of good and evil (Heb 5:14).

An abbot should be well versed in the Holy Scripture; he should be studying day and night in the Lord's law. Through such occupations he may acquire for himself the gift of discerning good and evil.

A true understanding of good and evil may be had only when an ascetic of piety comes to a sense of the future judgment and a foretaste of eternal blessedness, which occurs in a pious soul while yet in this present earthly life, in a mysterious and spiritual manner.

Before coming to the discernment of good and evil, a man is not fit to shepherd rational sheep, but only irrational ones; because without the understanding of good and evil we cannot comprehend the workings of the evil one.

And therefore an abbot, as a pastor of rational sheep, must also have the gift of discernment, so that in each case he could give useful advice to everyone asking in instruction: for, as Peter of Damacus says (in the *Philokalia*), not every man is fit to give advice to those who seek, but he who has received from God the gift of discernment and from long experience in ascetic life has acquired a perspicacious mind.

An abbot should also have the gift of penetrativeness, so that from the consideration of things present and past he may foresee those future as well, and see through the wiles of the enemy.

The distinguishing characteristic of an abbot should be his love for those subject to him: for a genuine shepherd, in the words of St John of the Ladder, is revealed by his love for his flock, for love compelled the Supreme Shepherd to be crucified on the Cross (in his Book to Shepherds, chapter 5).

## 43 – instruction to an abbot on how to direct the brethren

A certain abbot, being by chance in Sarov Monastery, when meeting Fr Seraphim asked his advice on how to direct the brethren. Fr Seraphim gave him the following instruction:

Let every abbot become and remain always in his relation to those subject to him as a wise mother.

A mother who loves her children lives not to satisfy herself, but to satisfy her children. The infirmities of her infirm children she bears with love: those who have fallen into filth she cleans, washes them calmly, clothes them in new white garments, puts their shoes on, warms them, feeds them, looks after them, comforts them, and from all sides strives to pacify their spirit so that she never hears the slightest cry from them; and such children are well disposed to their mother. Thus should every abbot live not to satisfy himself, but to satisfy those subject to him – he should be condescending to their weaknesses; bear with love the infirmities of the infirm; heal their sinful diseases with the plaster of mercifulness; raise with kindness those who have fallen into transgression; quietly cleanse those who have come sullied with the filth of some vice and wash them by placing upon them fasting and prayer above the ordinary amount which is set forth for all; clothe them, by instruction and by one's own exemplary life, in garments of virtues; keep constant watch over them; by every means comforting them, and from all sides defend their peace and repose to such an extent that the slightest cry or murmuring will never be heard from them; and then they will zealously strive to procure for the abbot peace and repose.

*With this the Spiritual Instructions of St Seraphim end.*

*Glory to our God!*