

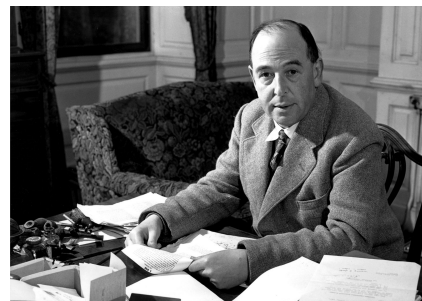
## Week 1: God's Greatest Creation

### St. Basil the Great on The Greatness of God

*"In the fear that human reasonings may make you wander from the truth, Moses has anticipated inquiry by engraving in our hearts, as a seal and a safeguard, the awesome name of God: "In the beginning God created." It is He---beneficent Nature, Goodness without measure, a worthy object of love for all beings endowed with reason, the beauty the most to be desired, the origin of all that exists---it is He who in the beginning created heaven and earth."*

### A Response to Atheism

*"Supposing there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case, nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. It is merely that when the atoms inside my skull happen, for physical or chemical reasons, to arrange themselves in a certain way, this gives me, as a by-product, the sensation I call thought. But, if this so, how can I trust my own thinking to be true? It's like upsetting a milk jug and hoping that the way it splashes itself will give you a map of London. But if I can't trust my own thinking, of course I can't trust the arguments leading to Atheism, and therefore have no reason to be an Atheist, or anything else. Unless I believe in God, I cannot believe in thought: so I can never use thought to disbelieve in God."*



-C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*

### Creation "Ex Nihilo" as Shown in "The Magician's Nephew"

Digory and his friend Polly happened to stumble upon a room where Digory's Uncle Andrew, who was a magician of sorts, was performing some strange experiments involving magical rings. These rings had the power to teleport people outside of this world, and into a forrest with various pools of water, each leading to a different world or existence.

The first world that Digory and Polly visited was one that had some bad vibes to it. It was a dark, quiet, and empty place called Charn, where Digory ended up waking up an evil witch named Jadis.

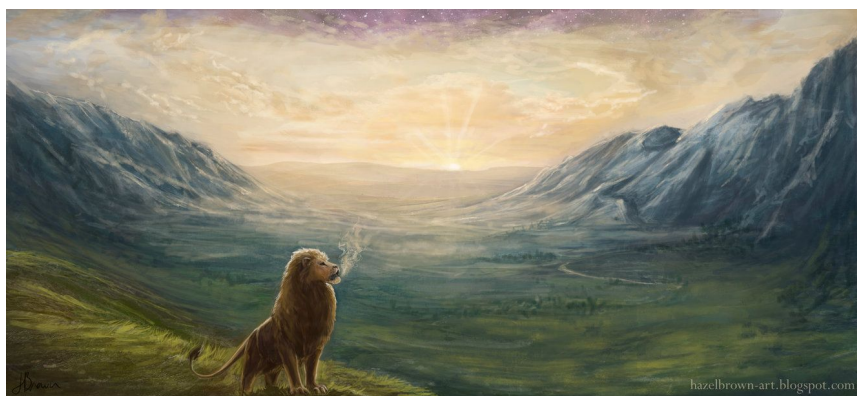
As the book progresses, Digory, Polly, Uncle Andrew, Jadis, a man named Mr. Ketterley, a Cabby, and his horse named Strawberry, end up in an empty world:

*And really, it was uncommonly like Nothing. There were no stars. It was so dark that they couldn't see one another at all and it made no difference whether you kept your eyes shut or open. Under their feet was a cool, flat something which might have been earth, but was certainly not grass or wood. The air was cold and dry and there was no wind."*

In the middle of the darkness, they started to hear a voice from all different direction. The blackness began to disappear as they saw the creation of stars. The voice got louder and a sun came over the horizon and lit up the darkness,. They were then able to get a glimpse of the singer, who was a Lion named Aslan.

“The lion was pacing to and from about that empty land, singing his new song. It was softer and more lifting than the song by which he had called the stars and the sun; a gentle rippling music. And as he walked and sang, the valley grew green with grass. It spread out from the Lion like a pool. It ran up the sides of the little hills like a wave. In a few minutes, it was creeping up the lower slopes of the distant mountains, making that young world every moment softer. The light wind could now be heard ruffling the grass.

Soon there were other things besides grass. The higher slopes grew dark with heather. Patches of rougher and more bristling green appeared in the valley. Digory did not know what they were until one began coming up quite close to him. It was a little, spiky thing that threw out dozens of arms and covered these arms with green, and grew larger at the rate of an inch every two seconds. There were dozens of these things all around him now. When they were nearly as tall as himself, he saw what they were. “Trees!” he exclaimed.”...



...There was certainly plenty to watch and to listen to. The tree which Digory had noticed was now full-grown beech whose branches swayed gently above his head. They stood on cool, green grass, sprinkled with daises and buttercups. A little way off, along the river bank, willows were growing. On the other side, tangles of flowers, lilac, wild rose, and rhododendron closed them in. The horse was tearing up delicious mouthfuls of new grass.

All this time the Lion’s song, and his stately prow, to and fro, backward and forward, was going on. What was rather alarming was that at each turn he came a little nearer. Polly was finding the song more and more interesting because she thought she was beginning to see a connection between the music and the things that were happening. When a line of dark firs sprang up on a ridge about a hundred yards away, she felt that they were connected with a series of deep, pro-longed notes which the Lion had sung a second before. And when he burst into a rapid series of lighter notes, she was not surprised to see primroses suddenly appearing in every direction. Thus, with an unspeakable thrill, she felt quite certain that all the things were coming (as she said) “Out of the lion’s head.”

### The Distraction of Uncle Andrew

“...In a few minutes, Digory came to the edge of the wood and there he stopped. The Lion was singing still. But now the song had once more changed. It was more like what we should call a tune, but it was also far wilder. It made you want to shout! It made you want to rush at other people and either hug them or fight them. It made Digory hot and red in the face. It had some effect on Uncle Andrew, for Digory could hear him saying, “A spirited gel, sir. It’s a pity about her temper, but a dem fine woman all the same, a dem fine woman” “

### The Creation of the Narnians

“...Can you imagine stretch of grassy land bubbling like water in a pot? For that is really the best description of what was happening. In all directions it was swelling into humps. There were a of very different sizes, some no bigger than molehills, some as big as wheelbarrows, two the size of cottages, and the humps moved and swelled till they burst, and the crumpled earth poured out of them, and from each hump there came out an animal. The moles came out just as you might see a mole come out in England. The dogs came out, barking the moment their heads were free, and struggling as you’ve seen them do when they are getting through a narrow hole in a hedge...And now you could hardly hear the song of the Lion; there was so much cawing, cooing, crowing, braying, neighing, baying, barking, lowing, bleating, and trumpeting...



Far overhead from beyond the veil of the blue sky which hid them the stars sang again; a pure, cold, difficult music. Then there came a swift flash like fire (but it burnt nobody) either from the sky or from the Lion itself, and every drop of blood tingled in the children’s bodies, and the deepest, wildest voice they had ever heard was saying: “Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be walking beasts. Be Divine Waters.”

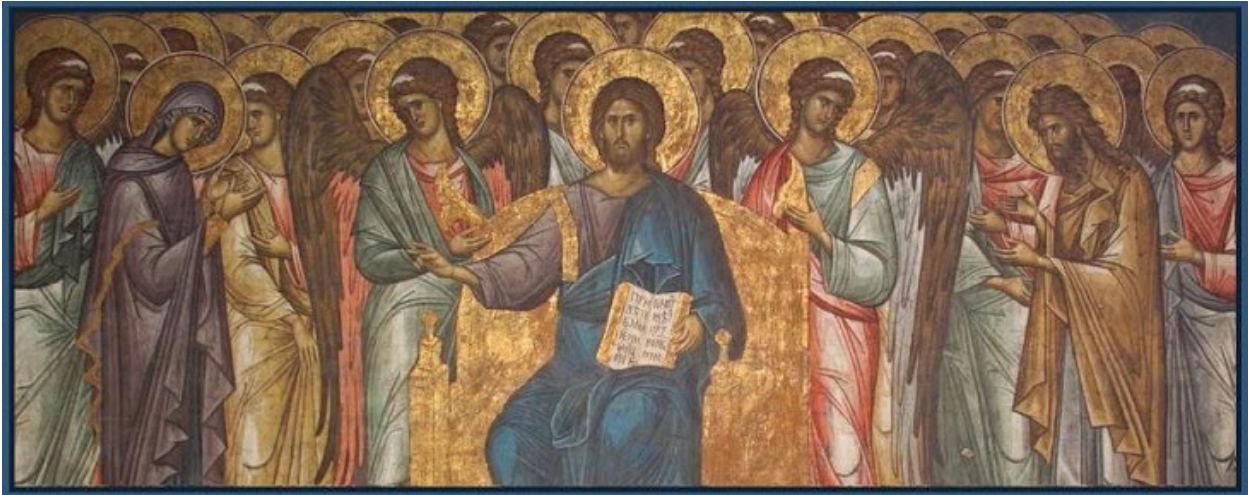
### A Word of Warning from Aslan

“Creatures, I give you yourselves.” Said the strong, happy voice of Aslan. “I give you forever this land of Narnia. I give you the woods, the fruits, the rivers. I give you the stars and I give you myself. The dumb beasts whom I have not chosen are your’s also. Treat them gently and cherish them, but do not go back to their ways, lest you cease to be talking beasts. For out of them you were taken, and into them you can return. Do not so.”

### St. Basil the Great on Genesis 1:1

*“Let us glorify the superb Artist, Who created the world most wisely and skillfully; and from the beauty of that which is visible, let us understand Him Who surpasses all in beauty....From the majesty of these sensible and limited bodies, let us make a conclusion regarding Him Who is endless, Who surpasses every majesty, and in the multitude of His power surpasses every understanding.”*

## Week 2: The Invisible Creation



### Mother Alexandra's Experience of Angels

It was early morning, when I was seven years old, that I saw the angels. I am as sure of it now as I was then. I was not dreaming nor "seeing things"—I just know they were there, plainly, clearly, distinctly. I was neither astonished nor afraid. I was not even awed—I was only terribly pleased. I wanted to talk to them and touch them.

Our night nursery was lit by the dawn and I saw a group of angels standing, as if chatting, around my young brother's bed. I was aware of this, although I could not hear their voices. They wore long flowing gowns of various soft-shaded colors. Their hair came to their shoulders, and different in color from fair and reddish to dark brown. They had no wings. At the foot of my brother Mircea's bed stood one heavenly being, a little aside from the others—taller he was, and extraordinarily beautiful, with great white wings. In his right hand he carried a lighted taper; he did not seem to belong to the group of angels gathered around the bed. He clearly stood apart and on watch. I knew him to be the guardian angel. I then became aware that at the foot of my own bed stood a similar celestial creature. He was tall, his robe was dark blue with wide, loose sleeves. His hair was auburn, his face oval, and his beauty such as I cannot describe because it was comparable to nothing human. His wings swept high and out behind him. One hand was lifted to his breast, while in the other he carried a lighted taper. His smile can only be described as angelic; love, kindness, understanding, and assurance flowed from him. Delighted, I crawled from under the bedcovers and, kneeling up against the end of the bed, I stretched out my hand with the ardent wish to touch my smiling guardian, but he took a step back, put out a warning hand, and gently shook his head. I was so close to him I could have reached him easily. "Oh, please don't go," I cried; at which words all the other angels looked toward me, and it seemed I heard a silvery laugh, but of this sound I am not so certain, though I know they laughed. Then they vanished.

I was but a child when I saw my guardian angel. As time passed I still sporadically remembered and acknowledged his presence, but mostly, I ignored him. Paradoxically, it was evil and distress that brought me up short and cleared my vision.

Perhaps due to all I had witnessed and undergone in the War and under Communist occupation, I was, in the following years, plagued by demonic nightmares. My only salvation while in these dreams was to make the Sign of the Cross. I have always known that I was asleep; it was a conscious dreaming—but to drag myself out of sleep into wakefulness was torture.

One day, in looking through a collection of old icons, I came across one done in three panels representing the guardian angel; in the middle panel, he is defending his sleeping charge from bad dreams. Later, when plagued once more by one of my most fearsome of nightmares, upon waking I suddenly remembered the icon, and with overpowering clarity I recollected that as a child I had seen my guardian angel.

With utmost certainty, at that instant, I turned to my guardian angel as I had not done since my childhood; and I knew positively as I did when I saw him, that he was standing by me to protect me. Reassured and at peace, I fell back into deep, restful sleep.

This, my own experience, stands both at the beginning and at the end of this book, for without it I would probably never have started upon my study. Also, without all I have studied this experience would have remained simply a remarkable experience (at least to myself), but unexplained and meaningless. Today, for me, it has a very real and uplifting significance and the angels have taken on a stupendous reality. Their activity among us has become to me a vital, positive reality. I no longer seek to see them, the knowledge of their presence is enough. To try to have a vision of angels or to hope or ask for such a thing is wrong. To seek intimacy with them by any other means than the grace of God is useless; Christ is our only way of union with the Father and with all his creatures.

### **A Few Scriptural References for St. Dionysius's 9 Rank's of Angels**

**Isaiah 6:2:** *"Around Him stood Seraphim, each one with six wings, with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew, crying to one another Holy Holy Holy is the Lord of Hosts; , the whole earth is full of His Glory!"*

**Colossians 1:16:** *"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers."*

**Ephesians 1:21:** *"...far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is not named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."*

**Ephesians 3:10:** *"...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the Church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places..."*



### **St. Dionysius on the Number of Angels in Existence**

*“I think we also ought to reflect on the tradition in scripture that the angels number is a thousand times a thousand, and ten thousand times ten thousand. These numbers are enormous to us, square and multiply themselves and thereby indicate clearly that the ranks of the heavenly beings are **innumerable!** So numerous indeed are the blessed armies of transcendent intelligent beings that they surpass the frail and limited realm of our physical numbers.”*

### **St. John of Damascus on Angelic Movement**

*“For the angel acts in different places by virtue of natural swiftness and the ability to pass without delay from place to place. They are vigorous and prompt in the execution of the Divine will with a natural quickness. They appear immediately in whatever place the Divine Pleasure may command.”*

### **Explaining “Outside of Time” through the Anophora Prayers**

*“Remembering this saving commandment of all things which have come to pass for us, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming...”*

### **The Fall of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12**

*“How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who rose up in the morning! He who sends for all the nations is crushed to the earth. For you said in your mind: “I will ascend to heaven; I will place my throne above the stars of heaven. I will sit on a lofty mountain, on the lofty mountains toward the north. I will ascend above the clouds; I will be like the Most-High. But now you shall descend to Hades, to the foundations of the earth. Those who see you will marvel at you, and they will say “This is the man who greatly upset the earth, who shook kingdoms, and who made all the inhabited world a desert. He destroyed its cities and did not set free those in captivity.*

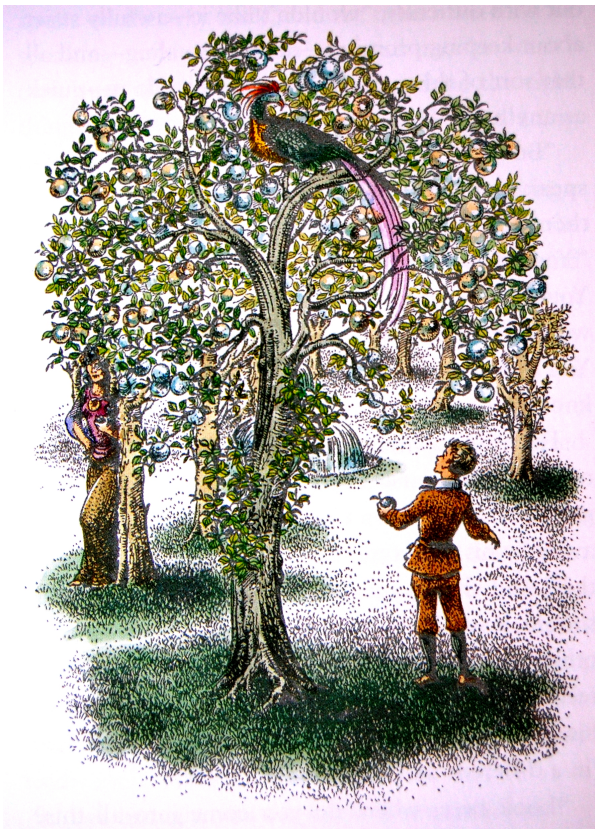
*All the kings of the nations sleep in honor, every man in his house. But you shall be cast forth on the mountains like a loathsome dead person, with many dead pierced with swords who go down into Hades, and as a garment defiled in blood, you will not be clean. So you will not be clean, because you destroyed my land and killed my people. You, an evil seed, will not endure forever. Prepare your children from slaughter for the sins of their father, that they may not arise and inherit the earth, and fill it with wars...”*



### Encountering Evil in “The Magician’s Nephew”

After the creation of the new world of Narnia, Digory confronts Aslan, who points out that despite this new world being only 7 hours old, it was Digory who awoke the witch Jadis from Charn, and brought her into this newly created world. In order to correct the wrong that was done, Aslan charged Digory to go to a distant land and bring back a seed from a special tree, that will protect Narnia from evil for many years to come.

When Digory gets to the special tree with the fruit that Aslan required, he came across a sign that said: “Come in by the gold gates or not at all. Take of my fruit for others or forbear. For those who steal or those who climb my wall shall find their heart’s desire and find despair.”



Digory knew by this that he had to take the fruit for others and not himself, but he was tempted in the garden by Jadis (sound familiar?!) who tried to convince him that he should take some of it for himself, and for his ailing mother back in London.

“I know what errand you have come on,” said the Witch. “For it was I who was close beside you in the woods last night and heard all of your counsels. You have plucked fruit in the garden yonder. You have it in your pocket now. And you are going to carry it back, untasted, to the Lion; for HIM to eat and for HIM to use! You simpleton! Do you know what the fruit is? I will tell you. It is the apple of youth, the apple of life. I know, for I have tasted it; and I feel already such changes in myself that I know I shall never grow old or die. Eat it, Boy, eat it; and you and I will both live forever and be the king and queen of this whole world, or of your world, if we decide to go back there.”

### Avoiding the Demons through Imagery of the Magician’s Nephew

C.S. Lewis hints at the reality of how demons act towards mankind in the beginning of “The Magician’s Nephew.” He described how Jadis the witch acts differently towards the main characters at different points in the book. There are times when she practically ignores them, and other times (like with Digory at the Tree), where she preys heavily upon their desires:

“I expect most witches are like that. They are not interested in things or people, unless they can use them; they are terribly practical.”

### Christ the Conqueror in “The Magician’s Nephew”

One of the true blessings that we have in the spiritual war, is that we have Christ on our side! We see this demonstrated allegorically in the Magician’s Nephew, by listening to the response of Aslan to His creation, after evil had come into the world:

“You see friends” Aslan said, “that before the new, clean world I gave you is seven hours old, a force of evil has already entered it; waked and brought hither by this son of Adam.”

The beasts, even Strawberry (the horse), all turned their eyes on Digory till he felt that he wished the ground would swallow him up. “But do not be cast down,” said Aslan, still speaking to the Beasts. “Evil will come of that evil, but it is still a long way off, and I will see to it that the worst falls upon myself. In the meantime, let us take such order that for many hundred years yet this shall be a merry land in a merry world. And as Adam’s race has done the harm, Adam’s race shall help to heal it.”

### St. Porphyrios on our Life with Christ

*“Fix your gaze unwaveringly upward toward Christ. Become familiar with Christ. Work with Christ. Live with Christ. Breathe with Christ. Suffer with Christ. Rejoice with Christ. Let Christ be everything for you...No one can deny that Christ is the fullness of life. Those who deny this truth are soul-sick. They deny that which they are lacking. And so the devil finds their soul empty and enters in. And just as a child is deeply traumatized if he is deprived of his father and mother in this life, so too and so much more so, is the person who is deprived of Christ.”*





## Week Three: Heaven, Hell, and the End Times

### A Description of Eternity from “The Last Battle”

“And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us, this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them, it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has ever read: Which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”

### Our Disposition Towards the End Times from the Canon of St. Andrew

*“My soul my souls arise, why are you sleeping? The end is drawing near! Awake then and be watchful, that Christ our God May Spare you, who is everywhere present and fills all things!”*

### The Parable of the Bridegroom in Matthew 25: 1-13

*“The Kingdom of heaven shall be likened to 10 virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.*

*And at midnight, a cry was heard: “Behold, the bridegroom is coming, go to meet him!” Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out!” But the wise answered saying “No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves”. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.*



*Afterward, the other virgins came also saying “Lord, Lord open to us!” But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly I say to you, I do not know you’.*

*Watch therefor, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*

### The Experience of Heaven and Hell in “The Last Battle”

There was a fierce battle in which 11 dwarfs were thrown into the “Shrine of Tash”, which was in reality an old stable where the “Devil God” Tash was housed by the Calormenes. After the last battle of Narnia occurred between the Narnians and Calormenes, the Narnia King Tirian also ended up in the stable, face to face with Tash. After speaking the name of “Aslan”, Tash disappeared, and King Tirian began to take notice of his surroundings:

Tirian had thought, or he would have thought if he had time to think at all, that they were inside a little thatched stable, about twelve feet long and six feet wide. In reality, they stood on grass, the deep blue sky was overhead, and the air which blew gently on their faces was that of a day in early summer...

It is at this point that Tirian comes face to face with the other Kings and Queens of Narnia’s past. After some introductions, they notice the dwarfs sitting off in the distance.



Lucy led the way and soon they could all see the Dwarfs. They had a very odd look. They weren’t strolling about or enjoying themselves (although the cords with which they had been tied seemed to vanish) nor were they lying down and having a rest. They were sitting very close together in a little circle facing one another. They never looked around or took any notice of the humans till Lucy and Tirian were almost near enough to touch them. Then the dwarfs all cocked their heads as if they couldn’t see anyone, but were listening hard and trying to guess by the sound what was happening.

“Look out!” said one of them in a surly voice. “Mind where you are going. Don’t walk onto our faces!”

“All right!” said Eustace indignantly. “We’re not blind. We’ve got eyes in our heads!”

“They must be darn good ones if you can see in here,”” said the same Dwarf whose name was Diggle.

“In where?” asked Edmund.

“Why you bone-head, in here of course,” said Diggle. “In this pitch black, poky, smelly, little hole of a stable.”

“Are you blind?” said Tirian

“Ain’t we all blind in the dark!” said Diggle.

“But it isn’t dark, you poor stupid Dwarfs,” said Lucy. “Can’t you see? Look up! Look around! Can’t you see the sky and the trees and the flowers? Can’t you see me?”

“How in the name of all Humbug can I see what ain’t there? And how can I see you any more than you can see me in this pitch darkness?”

“But I can see you!” said Lucy. “I’ll prove I can see you. You’ve got a pipe in your mouth”

“Anyone that knows the smell of baccy could tell you that,” said Diggle.

“Oh the poor things! This is dreadful,” said Lucy. Then she had an idea. She stooped and picked up some wild violets. “Listen Dwarf,” she said. “Even if your eyes are wrong, perhaps your nose is all right: Can you smell that?” She leaned across and held the fresh damp flowers up to Diggle’s ugly nose. She then had to jump back in order to avoid a blow from his hard little fist.



“None of that!” he shouted. “How dare you! What do you mean by shoving a lot of filthy stable litter in my face? There was a thistle in it too! It’s like your sauce! And who are you anyway!?”

“Earth-man” said Tirian, “She is the Queen Lucy, sent hither by Aslan out of the deep past. And it is for her sake that I, Tirian your lawful King, do not cut all your heads from your shoulders, proved and twice proved traitors that you are.”

“Well if that doesn’t beat everything!” exclaimed Diggle. “How can you go on talking all that rot? Your wonderful lion didn’t come and help you did he? Thought not. And now, even now, when you have been beaten and shoved into this black hole, just the same as the rest of us, you are still at your old game. Starting a new lie! Trying to make us believe we’re none of us shut up, and it ain’t dark, and heaven knows what.”

“There is no black hole, save in your own fancy, fool,” cried Tirian. “Come out of it.” And leaning forward, he caught Diggle by the belt and hood and swung him right out of the circle of Dwarfs. But the moment Tirian put him down, Diggle darted back to his place among the others, rubbing his nose and howling...

Eventually, Aslan appeared, and the Kings and Queens of Narnia spoke to him about their sadness of the state of the Dwarves. They asked Aslan what could be done for them.

...Aslan raised his head and shook his mane. Instantly a glorious feast appeared on the Dwarfs' knees: Pies and tongues and pigeons and trifles and ices, and each Dwarf had a goblet of good wine in his right hand. But it wasn't much use. They began eating and drinking greedily enough, but it was clear that they couldn't taste it properly. They thought they were eating and drinking only the sort of thing you might find in a stable. One said he was trying to eat hay and another said he had got a bit of an old turnip and a third said he found a raw cabbage leaf. And they raised golden goblets of rich red wine to their lips and said: "Ugh! Fancy drinking dirty water out of a trough that a donkey's been at! Never thought we'd come to this."

But very soon, every Dwarf began suspecting that every other Dwarf had found something nicer than he had, and they started grabbing and snatching, and went on to quarreling, till in a few minutes there was a free fight and all the good food was smeared on their faces and clothes or trodden under foot. But when at last they sat down to nurse their black eyes and their bleeding noses, they all said: "Well at any rate, there's no Humbug here. We haven't let anyone take us in. The Dwarfs are still for the Dwarfs."

"You see," said Aslan. "They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out. But come children, I have other work to do."

### **A Definition of Paradise from "The Last Battle"**

"Inside the stable", the Kings and Queens of Narnia come across a tree that has some incredible looking fruit. This particular section offers a wonderful "taste" or description of how standing in the Light of Christ, participating in His Glory, and reaching a state of "Theosis", would put all other earthly pleasures to shame:

What was the fruit like? Unfortunately, no one can describe a taste. All I can say is that, compared with those fruits, the freshest grapefruit you've ever eaten was dull, and the juiciest orange was dry, and the most melting pear was hard and woody, and the sweetest wild strawberry was sour. And there were no seeds or stones and no wasps. If you had once eaten that fruit, all the nicest things in this world would taste like medicines after it. But I can't describe it. You can't find out what it is like unless you can get to that country and taste it for yourself."



# An Experience of God

## St. Seraphim of Sarov's Conversation With Nicholas Motovilov

I'm sure all of us from time to time, have tried to imagine what Heaven is like. When we put our mind to work, we might come up with all sorts of various images, based off of our own world experiences, or what we might have heard or seen in a movie or television show.

For the Eastern Orthodox Church, Heaven is not a "place" so to speak...it is a person. Heaven is being in the eternal presence of the Grace of God, Who illumines all of creation with His Divine Light!

St. Seraphim in this conversation with Nicholas Motovilov, one of his spiritual children, describes the Aim of the Life of a Christian: Obtaining the Holy Spirit.

### The Aim of the Christian Life

"It was Thursday," writes Motovilov. "The day was gloomy. The snow lay eight inches deep on the ground; and dry, crisp snowflakes were falling thickly from the sky when St. Seraphim began his conversation with me in a field near his hermitage, opposite the river Sarovka, at the foot of the hill which slopes down to the river bank. He sat me on the stump of a tree which he had just cut down, and squatted opposite me.

"The Lord has revealed to me," said the great elder, "that in your childhood you had a great desire to know the aim of our Christian life, and that you have continually asked many great spiritual persons about it."

I must admit, that from the age of twelve this thought had constantly troubled me. In fact, I had approached many clergy about it, however their answers had not satisfied me. This could not have been known to the elder.

"But no one," continued St. Seraphim, "has given you a precise answer. They have said to you: 'Go to church, pray to God, do the commandments of God, do good—that is the aim of the Christian life.' Some were even indignant with you for being occupied with such profane curiosity and said to you, 'Do not seek things which are beyond you.' But they did not speak as they should. Now humble Seraphim will explain to you of what this aim really consists.

"However prayer, fasting, vigil and all the other Christian practices may be, they do not constitute the aim of our Christian life. Although it is true that they serve as the indispensable



means of reaching this end, the true aim of our Christian life consists of the **acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God**. As for fasts, and vigils, and prayer, and almsgiving, and every good deed done for Christ's sake, they are the only a means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. Mark my words, only good deeds done for Christ's sake brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit. All that is not done for Christ's sake, even though it be good, brings neither reward in the future life nor the grace of God in this life. That is why our Lord Jesus Christ said: *He who does not gather with Me scatters* (Luke 11:23). Not that a good deed can be called anything but gathering, even though a deed is not done for Christ's sake, it is still considered good. The Scriptures say: *In every nation he who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him* (Acts 10:35).

"As we see from another sacred narrative, the man who does what is right is pleasing to God. We see the Angel of the Lord appeared at the hour of prayer to Cornelius, the God-fearing and righteous centurion, and said: 'Send to Joppa to Simon the Tanner; there you will find Peter and he will tell you the words of eternal life, whereby you will be saved and all your house.' Thus the Lord uses all His divine means to give such a man, in return for his good works, the opportunity not to lose his reward in the future life. But to this end, we must begin with a right faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who came into the world to save sinners and Who, through our acquiring for ourselves the grace of the Holy Spirit, brings into our hearts the Kingdom of God, and opens the way for us to win the blessings of the future life.

"The acceptability to God of good deeds not done for Christ's sake is limited to this: the Creator gives the means to make them living (cf. Hebrews. 6:1). It rests with man to make them living or not. That is why the Lord said to the Jews: *If you had been blind, you would have had no sin. But now you say 'We see,' so your sin remains* (John 9:41). If a man like Cornelius enjoys the favor of God for his deeds, though not done for Christ's sake, and then believes in His Son, such deeds will be imputed to him as done for Christ's sake. But in the opposite event a man has no right to complain, when the good he has done is useless. It never is, when it is done for Christ's sake, since good done for Him not only merits a crown of righteousness in the world to come, but also in this present life fills us with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it is said: *God does not give the Spirit by measure* (John 3:34-35).

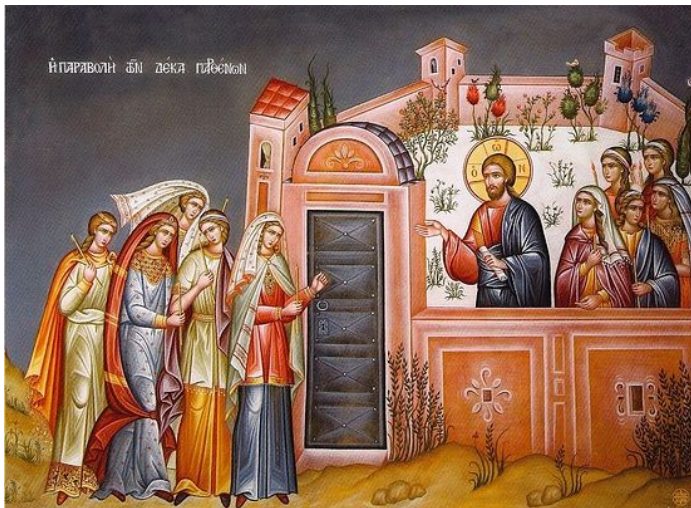
"That is it, your Godliness. Acquiring the Spirit of God is the true aim of our Christian life, while prayer, fasting, almsgiving and other good works done for Christ's sake are merely **means** for acquiring the Spirit of God."

## How Do We Acquire the Holy Spirit? Parable of the Wise Virgins

"What do you mean by acquiring?" I asked St. Seraphim. "Somehow I don't understand that."

"Acquiring is the same as obtaining," he replied. "Do you understand, what acquiring money means? Acquiring the Spirit of God is exactly the same. You know very well enough what it means to acquire in a worldly sense, your Godliness. The aim of ordinary worldly people is to acquire or make money; and for the nobility, it is in addition to receive honors, distinctions and other rewards for their services to the government. The acquisition of God's Spirit is also capital, but grace-giving and eternal, and it is obtained in very similar ways, almost the same ways as monetary, social and temporal capital.

"God the Word, the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, compares our life with the market, and the work of our life on earth He calls trading. He says to us all: *Trade till I come* (Lk. 19:13), *buying up every opportunity, because the days are evil* (Ephesians 5:16). In other words, make the most of your time getting heavenly blessings through earthly goods. Earthly goods are good works done for Christ's sake that confer the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, on us.



"In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, when the foolish ones ran short of oil, they were told: 'Go and buy in the market.' But when they had bought it, the door of the bride-chamber was already shut and they could not get in. Some say that the lack of oil in the lamps of the foolish virgins means a lack of good deeds in their lifetime. Such an interpretation is not quite correct. Why should they be lacking in good deeds, if they are called virgins, even though foolish ones? Virginity is the supreme virtue, an angelic state, and it could take the place of all other good works.

"I think that what they were lacking was the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God. These virgins practiced the virtues, **but in their spiritual ignorance they supposed that the Christian life consisted merely in doing good works.** By doing a good deed they thought they were doing the work of God, but they cared little whether they acquired the grace of God's Spirit. These ways of life, based merely on doing good, without carefully testing whether they

bring the grace of the Spirit of God, are mentioned in the patristic books: 'There is another way which is deemed good in the beginning, but ends at the bottom of hell.'

"Anthony the Great in his letters to monks says of such virgins: 'Many monks and virgins have no idea of the different kinds of wills which act in man, and they do not know that we are influenced by three wills: the first is God's all-perfect and all-saving will; the second is our own human will which, if not destructive, neither is it saving; and the third will is the devil's will—wholly destructive.' This third will of the enemy prompts man to do any no good deeds, or to do them good out of vanity, or merely for virtue's sake rather than for Christ's sake. The second, our own will, prompts us to do everything to flatter our passions, or else it teaches us like the enemy, to do good for the sake of good and not care for the grace which is acquired by it. But the first, God's all-saving will, consists in doing good solely to acquire the Holy Spirit, as an eternal, inexhaustible treasure which is priceless.

The acquisition of the Holy Spirit is, in a manner of speaking, the oil, which the foolish virgins lacked. They were called foolish just because they had forgotten the necessary fruit of virtue, the grace of the Holy Spirit, without which no one is or can be saved, for: 'Through the Holy Spirit every soul is quickened and through purification is exalted and illumined by the Triune Unity in a Holy mystery.'

"The oil in the lamps of the wise virgins could burn brightly for a long time. So these virgins, with their bright lamps were able to meet the Bridegroom, who came at midnight. With Him, they could enter the bridal chamber of joy. But the foolish ones, though they went to market to buy more oil, when their lamps were going out, were unable to return in time, for the door was already shut. The market is our life; the door of the bridal chamber, which was shut and barred the way to the Bridegroom is human death; the wise and foolish virgins are Christian souls; the oil is not the good deeds, but the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God which is obtained through good deeds and which changes souls from one state to another—such as, from a corruptible state to incorruptible state, from spiritual death to spiritual life, from darkness to light, from the stable of our being (where the passions are tied up like dumb animals and wild beasts) into a temple of the Divinity, the shining bridal chamber of eternal joy in Christ Jesus our Lord, the Creator, Redeemer and eternal Bridegroom of our souls.

"How great is God's compassion on our misery, that is to say, our inattention to His care for us, when God says: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock* (Rev. 3:20), meaning by "door" the course of our life which has not yet been closed by death! Oh, how I wish, your Godliness, that in this life you may always be in the Spirit of God! 'In whatsoever I find you, in that will I judge you,' says the Lord.



"Woe betide us if He finds us overcharged with the cares and sorrows of this life! For who will be able to bear His anger, who will bear the wrath of His countenance? That is why it has been said: *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation* (Mk. 14:38), that is, lest you be deprived of the Spirit of God, for watching and prayer brings us His grace.

### **The Importance and Emphasis on the Prayer Life**

"Of course, every good deed done for Christ's sake gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit, but **prayer gives us this grace most of all**, for it is always at hand, as an instrument for acquiring the grace of the Spirit. For instance, you would like to go to church, but there is no church or the service is over; you would like to give alms to a beggar, but there isn't one, or you have nothing to give; you would like to preserve your virginity, but you have not the strength to do so because of your temperament, or because of the violence of the wiles of the enemy which because of your human weakness you cannot withstand; you would like to do some other good deed for Christ's sake, but either you have not the strength or the opportunity is lacking. This certainly does not apply to prayer. Prayer is always possible for everyone, rich and poor, noble and humble, strong and weak, healthy and sick, righteous and sinful.

"You may judge how great the power of prayer is even in a sinful person, when it is offered whole-heartedly, by the following example from Holy Tradition. When at the request of a desperate mother who had been deprived by death of her only son, a harlot whom she chanced to meet, still unclean from her last sin, and who was touched by the mother's deep sorrow, cried to the Lord: 'Not for the sake of a wretched sinner like me, but for the sake of the tears of a mother grieving for her son and firmly trusting in Thy loving kindness and Thy almighty power, Christ God, raise up her son, O Lord!' And the Lord raised him up.

"You see, your Godliness! Great is the power of prayer, and it brings most of all the Spirit of God, and is most easily practiced by everyone. We shall be happy indeed if the Lord God finds us watchful and filled with the gifts of His Holy Spirit. Then we may boldly hope *to be caught up . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air* (1 Thess. 4:17) *Who is coming with great power and glory* (Mk. 13:26) *to judge the living and the dead* (1 Peter 4:5) and *to reward every man according to his works* (Matt. 16:27).



"Your Godliness deigns to think it a great happiness to talk to poor Seraphim, believing that even he is not bereft of the grace of the Lord. What then shall we say of the Lord Himself, the never-failing source of every blessing both heavenly and earthly? Truly in prayer we are granted to converse with Him, our all-gracious and life-giving God and Savior Himself. But even here we must pray only until God the Holy Spirit descends on us in measures of His heavenly grace known to Him. And when He deigns to visit us, we must stop praying. Why should we then pray to Him, 'Come and abide in us and cleanse us from all impurity and save our souls, O Good One,' when He has already come to us to save us, who trust in Him, and truly call on His holy Name, that humbly and lovingly we may receive Him, the Comforter, in the mansions of our souls, hungering and thirsting for His coming?"

"I will explain this point to your Godliness through an example. Imagine that you have invited me to pay you a visit, and at your invitation I come to have a talk with you. But you continue to invite me, saying: 'Come in, please. Do come in!' Then I should be obliged to think: 'What is the matter with him? Is he out of his mind?'"

"So it is with regard to our Lord God the Holy Spirit. That is why it is said: *Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth* (Ps. 45[46]:10). That is, I will appear and will continue to appear to everyone who believes in Me and calls upon Me, and I will converse with him as once I conversed with Adam in Paradise, with Abraham and Jacob and other servants of Mine, with Moses and Job, and those like them.

Many explain that this stillness refers only to worldly matters; in other words, that during prayerful converse with God you must 'be still' with regard to worldly affairs. But I will tell you in the name of God that not only is it necessary to be dead to them at prayer, but when by the omnipotent power of faith and prayer our Lord God the Holy Spirit condescends to visit us, and comes to us in the plenitude of His unutterable goodness, we must be dead to prayer too.

"The soul speaks and converses during prayer, but at the descent of the Holy Spirit we must remain in complete silence, in order to hear clearly and intelligibly all the words of eternal life which he will then deign to communicate. Complete soberness of soul and spirit, and chaste purity of body is required at the same time. The same demands were made at Mount Horeb, when the Israelites were told not even to touch their wives for three days before the appearance of God on Mount Sinai. For our God is a fire which consumes everything unclean, and no one who is defiled in body or spirit can enter into communion with Him."

## **The Acquisition of Grace**

"Yes, father, but what about other good deeds done for Christ's sake in order to acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit? You have only been speaking of prayer."

"Acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit also by practicing all the other virtues for Christ's sake. Trade spiritually with them; trade with those which give you the greatest profit. Accumulate capital from the superabundance of God's grace, deposit it in God's eternal bank which will bring you immaterial interest, not four or six per cent, but one hundred per cent for one spiritual rouble, and even infinitely more than that. For example, if prayer and watching gives you more of God's grace, watch and pray; if fasting gives you much of the spirit of God, fast; if almsgiving gives you more, give alms. Weigh every virtue done for Christ's sake in this manner.

"Now I will tell you about myself, poor Seraphim. I come from a merchant family in Kursk. So when I was not yet in the monastery we used to trade with the goods which brought us the greatest profit. Act like that, my son. And just as in business the main point is not merely to trade, but to get as much profit as possible, so in the business of the Christian life the main point is not merely to pray or to do some other good deed. Though the apostle says: *Pray without ceasing* (1 Thess. 5:17), yet, as you remember, he adds: *I would rather speak five words with my understanding than ten thousand words with a tongue* (1 Cor. 14:19). And the Lord says: *Not everyone who says to Me: Lord, Lord, shall be saved, but he who does the will of My Father* (Mt. 7:21), that is he who does the work of God and, moreover, does it with reverence, for *cursed is he who does the work of God negligently* (Jer. 48:10). And the work of God is: believe in God and in Him Whom He has sent, Jesus Christ (John 14:1; 6:29). If we understand the commandments of Christ and of the Apostles aright, our business as Christians consists not in increasing the number of our good deeds which are only the means of furthering the purpose of our Christian life, but in deriving from them the utmost profit, that is in acquiring the most abundant gifts of the Holy Spirit.

"How I wish, your Godliness, that you yourself may acquire this inexhaustible source of divine grace, and may always ask yourself: Am I in the Spirit of God, or not?—there is nothing to grieve about. You are ready to appear before the awful judgment of Christ immediately. For 'In whatsoever I find you, in that will I judge you.' But if we are not in the Spirit, we must discover why not and what reason our Lord God the Holy Spirit has willed to abandon us. We must seek Him again and must go on searching until our Lord God the Holy Spirit has been found and is with us again, through His goodness. We must attack the enemies that drive us away from Him until even their dust is no more, as the Prophet David has said, *I will pursue my enemies and overtake them; and I will not turn back till they are destroyed. I will crush them and they will be unable to stand; they will fall under my feet* (Ps. 17[18]:38-39).

"That's it, my son. That is how you must spiritually trade in virtue. Distribute the Holy Spirit's gifts of grace to those in need of them, just as a lighted candle burning with earthly fire shines itself and lights other candles for the illumining of all in other places, without diminishing its own light. If it is so, with regard to the earthly fire, what shall we say about the fire of the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God? For earthly riches decrease with distribution, but the more the heavenly riches of God's grace are distributed, the more they increase in the one who distributes them. Thus the Lord Himself was pleased to say to the Samaritan woman: *All who drink this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water that I shall give him will never be thirsty any more; but the water that I shall give him will be in him a spring of water leaping up to eternal life* (John 4:13-14)."

### **The Presence of the Holy Spirit in History**

"Father," said I, "you speak all the time of the acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit as the aim of the Christian life. But how and where can I see it? Good deeds are visible, but can the Holy Spirit be seen? How am I to know whether He is with me or not?"

"At the present time," the elder replied, "Owing to our almost universal coldness to our holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and our inattention to the working of His Divine Providence in us, and to the communion of man with God, we have gone so far that, one may say, we have almost abandoned the true Christian life. The testimonies of Holy Scripture now seem strange to us; when, for instance, by the lips of Moses the Holy Spirit says: 'And Adam saw the Lord walking in Paradise' (cf. Gen. 3:10), or when we read the words of the Apostle Paul: 'We went to Achaia, and the Spirit of God went not with us; we returned to Macedonia, and the Spirit of God came with us.' More than once in other passages of Holy Scripture the appearance of God to men is mentioned.



"That is why some people say: 'These passages are incomprehensible. Is it really possible for people to see God so openly?' But there is nothing incomprehensible here. This failure to understand has come about because we have departed from the simplicity of the original Christian knowledge. Under the pretext of education, we have reached such a darkness of ignorance, that the things the ancients understood so clearly, seem to us almost inconceivable. Even in ordinary conversation, the idea of God's appearance among men did not seem strange to them. Thus, when his friends rebuked him for blaspheming God, Job

answered them: 'How can that be when I feel the Spirit of God in my nostrils?' (cf. Job 27:3). That is, 'How can I blaspheme God when the Holy Spirit abides with me? If I had blasphemed God, the Holy Spirit would have withdrawn from me; but look! I feel His breath in my nostrils.'

"It is said that Abraham and Jacob saw the Lord and conversed with Him in exactly the same way, and that Jacob even wrestled with Him. Moses and all the people with him saw God, when he received the tablets of the law on Mount Sinai from God. A pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, or in other words, the evident grace of the Holy Spirit, served as guides to God's people in the desert. People saw God and the grace of His Holy Spirit not during sleep, in dreams, or in the excitement of a disordered imagination, but truly and openly.

"We have become so inattentive to the work of our salvation, that we misinterpret many other words in Holy Scripture as well, all because we do not seek the grace of God and in the pride of our minds, do not allow it to dwell in our souls. That is why we are without true enlightenment from the Lord, which He sends into the hearts of men who hunger and thirst wholeheartedly for God's righteousness or holiness.

"Many explain the part in the Bible, *God breathed the breath of life into the face of Adam* the first-created, who was created by Him from the dust of the ground, it must mean that until that moment there was neither human soul nor spirit in Adam, but only the flesh created from the dust of the ground. This interpretation is wrong, for the Lord created Adam from the dust of the ground with the constitution which the holy Apostle Paul describes: *May your spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thess. 5:23). And all these parts of our nature were created from the dust of the ground, and Adam was not created dead, but an active being like all of God's animate creatures living on earth.

"The point is, that if the Lord God had not breathed afterwards into his face, this *breath of life*—that is, the **grace** of our Lord God the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the Father, rests in the Son and is sent into the world for the Son's sake—Adam would have remained without the Holy Spirit within him. It is the Holy Spirit who raised Adam to Godlike dignity. However perfect, he had been created and superior to all the other creatures of God, as the crown of creation on earth, he would have been just like all the other creatures, though they have a body, soul and spirit, each according to its kind, do not have the Holy Spirit within them. But when the Lord God breathed into Adam's face the breath of life, then, according to Moses' word, *Adam became a living soul* (Gen. 2:7), that is, completely and in every-way like God, and like Him, forever immortal. Adam was immune to the action of the elements to such a degree that water could not drown him, fire could not burn him, the earth could not swallow him in its abysses, and the air could not harm him by any kind of action whatever. Everything was subject to him as the

beloved of God, as the king and lord of creation, and everything looked up to him, as the perfect crown of God's creatures. Adam was made so wise by this breath of life, which was breathed into his face from the creative lips of God, the Creator and Ruler of all, that there has never been a man on earth wiser or more intelligent, and it is unlikely that there ever will be. When the Lord commanded him to give names to all the creatures, he gave every creature a name which completely expressed all the qualities, powers and properties given it by God at its creation.

"As a result of this gift, of the supernatural grace of God, which was infused into him by the breath of life, Adam could see, understand the Lord walking in Paradise, comprehend His words, understand the conversation of the holy Angels, the language of all beasts, birds and reptiles and all that is now hidden from us the fallen and sinful creatures. All this was so clear to Adam before his fall. The Lord God also gave Eve the same wisdom, strength, unlimited power, and all the other good and holy qualities. He created her not from the dust of the ground, but from Adam's rib in the Eden of delight, the Paradise which He had planted in the midst of the earth.

"In order that they might always easily maintain the immortal, divine and perfect properties of this breath of life, God planted in the midst of the garden the *tree of life* with fruits endowed with all the essence and fullness of His divine breath. If they had not sinned, Adam and Eve themselves as well as all their posterity could have always eaten of the fruit of the tree of life and so would have eternally maintained the vivifying power of divine grace.

"They could have also maintained for all eternity the full powers of their body, soul and spirit in a state of immortality and perpetual youth, and they could have continued in this immortal and blessed state of theirs forever. At the present time, however, it is difficult for us even to imagine such grace.

"But through the tasting of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—which was premature and contrary to the commandment of God—they learnt the difference between good and evil and were subjected to all the afflictions which followed the transgression of the commandment of God. Then they lost this priceless gift of the grace of the Spirit of God, so that, until the actual coming into the world of the God-man Jesus Christ, *the Spirit of God was not yet* in the world *because Jesus was not yet glorified* (John 7:39).

"However, that does not mean that the Spirit of God was not in the world at all, but His presence was not so apparent. It manifested only externally, and only the signs of His presence in the world were known to mankind. Thus, for instance, many mysteries in connection with the future salvation of the human race were revealed to Adam as well as to Eve after their fall. For

Cain, in spite of his impiety and his transgression, it was easy for him to understand the voice which held grace and divinity, though convicting words. Noah conversed with God. Abraham saw God and His day and was glad (from John 8:56). The grace of the Holy Spirit acting externally was also reflected in all the Old Testament prophets and saints of Israel. Afterwards, the Hebrews established special prophetic schools where the sons of the prophets were taught to discern the signs of the manifestation of God or Angels, and to distinguish the operations of the Holy Spirit from the ordinary natural phenomena of graceless earthly life. Simeon who held God in his arms, Christ's grandparents Joachim and Anna, and countless other servants of God continually often had various divine apparitions, revelations and heard voices, which were corroborated by evident miraculous events. Though not with the same power as in the people of God, nevertheless the presence of the Spirit of God also acted in the pagans who did not know the true God, because even among them, God found the chosen people. For instance, there were the virgin-prophetesses called Sibyls who vowed virginity to an unknown God, but to God, the Creator of the universe, the all-powerful ruler of the world, as He was conceived by the pagans. Though the pagan philosophers also wandered in the darkness of ignorance of God, yet they sought the truth which is beloved by God. Because of this, God-pleasing seeking, they could partake of the Spirit of God. It is said, that nations who do not know God, practice by nature the demands of the law and do what is pleasing to God (cf. Rom. 2:14). The Lord so praises truth that He says of it Himself by the Holy Spirit: *Truth has sprung from the earth, and justice has looked down from heaven* (Ps. 84[85]:11).

"So you see, your Godliness, both in the holy Hebrew people, a people beloved by God, and in the pagans who did not know God, there was preserved a knowledge of God—thus, my son, a clear and rational comprehension of how our Lord God the Holy Spirit acts in man, and by means of our inner and outer feelings, one can be sure that this is really the action of our Lord God the Holy Spirit, and not a delusion of the enemy. That is how it was, from Adam's fall, until the coming into the world of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the flesh.

"Without this perceptible realization of the actions of the Holy Spirit which had always been preserved in human nature, men could not have possibly known for certain whether the fruit of the seed of the woman who had been promised to Adam and Eve had come into the world to crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15).



"At last the Holy Spirit foretold to St. Simeon, who was then in his 65th year, the mystery of the virginal conception and birth of Christ from the most pure Ever-Virgin Mary. Afterwards, having lived by the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God for three hundred years, in the 365th year of his life he said openly in the temple of the Lord that he knew for certain through the gift of the Holy Spirit that this was that very Christ, the Savior of the world, Whose supernatural conception and birth from the Holy Spirit had been foretold to him by an Angel three hundred years previously.

And there was also St. Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, who from her widowhood had served the Lord God in the temple of God for eighty years, and who was known to be a righteous widow, a chaste servant of God, from the special gifts of grace which she had received. She too announced that He was actually the Messiah Who had been promised to the world, the true Christ, God and Man, the King of Israel, Who had come to save Adam and mankind.

"But when our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished the whole work of salvation, after His Resurrection, He breathed on the Apostles, restored the breath of life lost by Adam, and gave them the same grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God as Adam had enjoyed. But that was not all. He also told them that it was better for them that He should go to the Father, for if He did not go, the Spirit of God would not come into the world. But if He, the Christ, went to the Father, He would send Him into the world, and He, the Comforter, would guide them and all who followed their teaching into all truth and would remind them of all that He had said to them when He was still in the world. What was then promised was *grace upon grace* (John 1:16).

"Then on the day of Pentecost He solemnly sent down to them in a tempestuous wind the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire which alighted on each of them and entered within them and filled them with the fiery strength of divine grace which breathes as with dew and acts with gladness in souls who partake of its power and operations (Acts ch. 2). And this same fire-infusing grace of the Holy Spirit which is given to us all, the faithful in Christ, in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, is sealed by the Sacrament of Chrismation on the chief parts of our body as appointed by the Holy Church, the eternal keeper of this grace. It is said: 'The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.' On what do we put our seals, your Godliness, if not on vessels containing some very precious treasure? But what on earth can be higher and what can be more precious than the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are sent down to us from above in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism? This baptismal grace is so great and so indispensable, so vital for man, that even a heretic is not deprived of it until his actual death; that is, till the end of the period appointed on high by the providence of God as a lifelong test of man on earth, in order to see what he will be able to



achieve (during this period given to him by God) by means of the power of grace granted to him from on high.

"And if we were never to sin after our baptism, we should remain for ever saints of God, holy, blameless, and free from all impurity of body and spirit. But the trouble is that we increase in stature, but do not increase in grace and in the knowledge of God as our Lord Jesus Christ increased; but on the contrary, we gradually become more and more depraved and lose the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God and become sinful in various degrees, and very sinful people. But if a man is stirred by the wisdom of God, which seeks our salvation and embraces everything, and if he is resolved for its sake to devote the early hours of the day to God and to watch in order to find His eternal salvation, then, in obedience to its voice, he must hasten to offer true repentance for all his sins and must practice the virtues which are opposite to the sins committed. Then through the virtues practiced for Christ's sake, he will acquire the Holy Spirit Who acts within us and establishes in us the Kingdom of God. The word of God does not say in vain: *The Kingdom of God is within you* (Luke 17:21), and it *suffers violence, and the violent take it by force* (Matt. 11:12). That means that people who, in spite of the bonds of sin which fetter them and (by their violence and by inciting them to new sins) prevent them from coming to Him, our Savior, with perfect repentance for reckoning with Him. They force themselves to break their bonds, despising all the strength of the fetters of sin—such people at last actually appear before the face of God made whiter than snow by His grace. *Come, says the Lord: Though your sins be as purple, I will make you white as snow* (Is. 1:18).

"Such people were once seen by the holy Seer John the Divine *clothed in white robes* (that is, in robes of justification) and with *palms in their hands* (as a sign of victory), and they were singing to God a wonderful song: *Alleluia*. And no one could imitate the beauty of their song. Of them an Angel of God said: *These are they who have come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb* (Rev. 7:9-14). They were washed with their sufferings and made white in the communion of the immaculate and life-giving Mysteries of the Body and Blood of the most pure and spotless Lamb—Christ—Who was slain before all ages by His own will for the salvation of the world, and Who is continually being slain and divided until now, but is never exhausted (in the Sacrament of Communion). Through the Holy Mysteries we are granted our eternal and unfailing salvation as a viaticum to eternal life, as an acceptable answer at His dread judgment and a precious substitute beyond our comprehension for that fruit of the tree of life of which the enemy of mankind, Lucifer, who fell from heaven, would have liked to deprive the human race. Though the enemy and devil seduced Eve, and Adam fell with her, yet the Lord not only granted them a Redeemer in the fruit of the seed of the woman Who trampled down death by death, but also granted us all in the woman, the Ever-Virgin Mary Mother of God, who crushes the head of the serpent in herself and in all the human race, a constant

mediatress with her Son and our God, and an invincible and persistent intercessor even for the most desperate sinners. That is why the Mother of God is called the "Plague of Demons," for it is not possible for a devil to destroy a man so long as man himself has recourse to the help of the Mother of God.

### **Grace is Light**

"And I must further explain, your Godliness, the difference between the operations of the Holy Spirit Who dwells mystically in the hearts of those who believe in our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ and the operations of the darkness of sin which at the suggestion and instigation of the devil, acts predatorily in us. The Spirit of God reminds us of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and always acts triumphantly with Him, gladdening our hearts and guiding our steps into the way of peace, while the false, diabolical spirit reasons in the opposite way to Christ, and its actions in us are rebellious, stubborn, and full of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

*And whoever lives and believes in Me will never die* (John 11:26). He who has the grace of the Holy Spirit in reward for right faith in Christ, even if on account of human frailty his soul were to die for some sin or other, yet he will not die for ever, but he will be raised by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *Who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29), and freely gives grace upon grace. Of this grace, which was manifested to the whole world and to our human race by the God-man, it is said in the Gospel: *In Him was life, and the life was the light of men* (John 1:4); and further: *And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness has never swallowed it* (John 1:5). This means that the grace of the Holy Spirit which is granted at baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in spite of man's fall into sin, in spite of the darkness surrounding our soul, nevertheless shines in our hearts with the divine light (which has existed from time immemorial) of the inestimable merits of Christ. In the event of a sinner's impenitence this light of Christ cries to the Father: 'Abba, Father! Be not angry with this impenitence to the end (of his life).' Then, at the sinners conversion to the way of repentance, it effaces completely all trace of past sin and clothes the former sinner once more in a robe of incorruption spun from the grace of the Holy Spirit. The acquisition of this is the aim of the Christian life, which I have been explaining to your Godliness.

"I will tell you something else, so that you may understand more clearly what is meant by the grace of God, how to recognize it and how its action is manifested particularly in those who are enlightened by it. The grace of the Holy Spirit is the light which enlightens man. The whole of Sacred Scripture speaks about this. Thus our Holy Father David said: *Thy law is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths* (Ps. 118[119]:105), and *Unless Thy law had been my meditation, I should have died in my humiliation* (Ps. 118[119]:92). In other words, the grace of the Holy Spirit which is expressed in the Law, by the words of the Lord's commandments, is my lamp and light. If this

grace of the Holy Spirit (which I try to acquire so carefully and zealously that I meditate on Thy just judgments seven times a day) did not enlighten me amidst the darkness of the cares which are inseparable from the high calling of my royal rank, whence should I get a spark of light to illumine my way on the path of life, which is darkened by the ill-will of my enemies?

"In fact the Lord has frequently demonstrated before many witnesses how the grace of the Holy Spirit acts on people whom He has sanctified and illumined by His great inspirations. Remember Moses after his talk with God on Mount Sinai. He so shone with an extraordinary light that people were unable to look at him. He was even forced to wear a veil when he appeared in public. Remember the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor. A great light encircled Him, *and His raiment became shining, exceedingly white like snow* (Mk. 9:3), and His disciples fell on their faces from fear. But when Moses and Elijah appeared to Him in that light, a cloud overshadowed them in order to hide the radiance of the light of the divine grace which blinded the eyes of the disciples. Thus the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God appears in an ineffable light to all to whom God reveals its action."

### **The Theosis Experience: Shining with the Light of Tabor**

"But how," I asked Father Seraphim, "can I know that I am in the grace of the Holy Spirit?"

"It is very simple, your Godliness," he replied. "That is why the Lord says: *All things are simple to those who find knowledge* (Prov. 8:9). The trouble is that we do not seek this divine knowledge which does not puff up, for it is not of this world. This knowledge which is full of love for God and for our neighbor builds up every man for his salvation. Of this knowledge the Lord said that God *wills all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth* (I Tim. 2:4). And of the lack of this knowledge He said to His Apostles: *Are you also yet without understanding* (Mat. 15:16)? Concerning this understanding [15], it is said in the Gospel of the Apostles: *Then opened He their understanding* (Lk. 24:45), and the Apostles always perceived whether the Spirit of God was dwelling in them or not; and being filled with understanding, they saw the presence of the Holy Spirit with them and declared positively that their work was holy and entirely pleasing to the Lord God. That explains why in their Epistles they wrote: *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us* (Acts 15:28). Only on these grounds did they offer their Epistles as immutable truth for the benefit of all the faithful. Thus the holy Apostles were consciously aware of the presence in themselves of the Spirit of God. And so you see, your Godliness, how simple it is!"

"Nevertheless," I replied, "I do not understand how I can be certain that I am in the Spirit of God. How can I discern for myself His true manifestation in me?"

Father Seraphim replied: "I have already told you, your Godliness, that it is very simple and I have related in detail how people come to be in the Spirit of God and how we can recognize His presence in us. So what do you want, my son?"

"I want to understand it well," I said.

Then Father Seraphim took me very firmly by the shoulders and said: "We are both in the Spirit of God now, my son. Why don't you look at me?"

I replied: "I cannot look, Father, because your eyes are flashing like lightning. Your face has become brighter than the sun, and my eyes ache with pain."

Father Seraphim said: "Don't be alarmed, your Godliness! Now you yourself have become as bright as I am. You are now in the fullness of the Spirit of God yourself; otherwise you would not be able to see me as I am."

Then, bending his head towards me, he whispered softly in my ear: "Thank the Lord God for His unutterable mercy to us! You saw that I did not even cross myself; and only in my heart I prayed mentally to the Lord God and said within myself: 'Lord, grant him to see clearly with his bodily eyes that descent of Thy Spirit which Thou grantest to Thy servants when Thou art pleased to appear in the light of Thy magnificent glory.' And you see, my son, the Lord instantly fulfilled the humble prayer of poor Seraphim. How then shall we not thank Him for this unspeakable gift to us both? Even to the greatest hermits, my son, the Lord God does not always show His mercy in this way. This grace of God, like a loving mother, has been pleased to comfort your contrite heart at the intercession of the Mother of God herself. But why, my son, do you not look me in the eyes? Just look, and don't be afraid! The Lord is with us!"



After these words I glanced at his face and there came over me an even greater reverent awe. Imagine in the center of the sun, in the dazzling light of its midday rays, the face of a man talking to you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes, you hear his voice, you feel someone holding your shoulders; yet you do not see his hands, you do not even see yourself or his figure, but only a blinding light spreading far around for several yards

and illumining with its glaring sheen both the snow-blanket which covered the forest glade and the snow-flakes which besprinkled me and the great Elder. You can imagine the state I was in!

"How do you feel now?" Father Seraphim asked me.

"Extraordinarily well," I said.

"But in what way? How exactly do you feel well?"

I answered: "I feel such calmness and peace in my soul that no words can express it."

"This, your Godliness," said Father Seraphim, "is that peace of which the Lord said to His disciples: *My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you* (Jn. 14:21). *If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you* (Jn. 15:19). *But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world* (Jn. 16:33). And to those people whom this world hates but who are chosen by the Lord, the Lord gives that peace which you now feel within you, the peace which, in the words of the Apostle, *passes all understanding* (Phil. 4:7). The Apostle describes it in this way, because it is impossible to express in words the spiritual well-being which it produces in those into whose hearts the Lord God has infused it. Christ the Saviour calls it a peace which comes from His own generosity and is not of this world, for no temporary earthly prosperity can give it to the human heart; it is granted from on high by the Lord God Himself, and that is why it is called the peace of God. What else do you feel?" Father Seraphim asked me.

"An extraordinary sweetness," I replied.

And he continued: "This is that sweetness of which it is said in Holy Scripture: *They will be inebriated with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy delight* (Ps. 35:8) [16]. And now this sweetness is flooding our hearts and coursing through our veins with unutterable delight. From this sweetness our hearts melt as it were, and both of us are filled with such happiness as tongue cannot tell. What else do you feel?"

"An extraordinary joy in all my heart."

And Father Seraphim continued: "When the Spirit of God comes down to man and overshadows him with the fullness of His inspiration, then the human soul overflows with unspeakable joy, for the Spirit of God fills with joy whatever He touches. This is that joy of which the Lord speaks in His Gospel: *A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. In*

*the world you will be sorrowful [18]; but when I see you again, your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you (Jn. 16:21-22).* Yet however comforting may be this joy which you now feel in your heart, it is nothing in comparison with that of which the Lord Himself by the mouth of His Apostle said that that joy *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for them that love Him (I Cor. 2:9).* Foretastes of that joy are given to us now, and if they fill our souls with such sweetness, well-being and happiness, what shall we say of that joy which has been prepared in heaven for those who weep here on earth? And you, my son, have wept enough in your life on earth; yet see with what joy the Lord consoles you even in this life! Now it is up to us, my son, to add labours to labours in order to *go from strength to strength (Ps. 83:7),* and to *come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13),* so that the words of the Lord may be fulfilled in us: *But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall grow wings like eagles; and they shall run and not be weary (Is. 40:31); they will go from strength to strength, and the God of gods will appear to them in the Sion (Ps. 83:8)* of realization and heavenly visions. Only then will our present joy (which now visits us little and briefly) appear in all its fullness, and no one will take it from us, for we shall be filled to overflowing with inexplicable heavenly delights. What else do you feel, your Godliness?"

I answered: "An extraordinary warmth."

"How can you feel warmth, my son? Look, we are sitting in the forest. It is winter out-of-doors, and snow is underfoot. There is more than an inch of snow on us, and the snowflakes are still falling. What warmth can there be?"

I answered: "Such as there is in a bath-house when the water is poured on the stone and the steam rises in clouds."

"And the smell?" he asked me. "Is it the same as in the bathhouse?"

"No," I replied. "There is nothing on earth like this fragrance. When in my dear mother's lifetime I was fond of dancing and used to go to balls and parties, my mother would sprinkle me with scent which she bought at the best shops in Kazan. But those scents did not exhale such fragrance."

And Father Seraphim, smiling pleasantly, said: "I know it myself just as well as you do, my son, but I am asking you on purpose to see whether you feel it in the same way. It is absolutely true, your Godliness! The sweetest earthly fragrance cannot be compared with the fragrance which we now feel, for we are now enveloped in the fragrance of the Holy Spirit of God. What on earth can be like it? Mark, your Godliness, you have told me that around us it is warm as in a

bath-house; but look, neither on you nor on me does the snow melt, nor does it underfoot; therefore, this warmth is not in the air but in us. It is that very warmth about which the Holy Spirit in the words of prayer makes us cry to the Lord: 'Warm me with the warmth of Thy Holy Spirit!' By it the hermits of both sexes were kept warm and did not fear the winter frost, being clad, as in fur coats, in the grace-given clothing woven by the Holy Spirit. And so it must be in actual fact, for the grace of God must dwell within us, in our heart, because the Lord said: *The Kingdom of God is within you* (Lk. 17:21). By the Kingdom of God the Lord meant the grace of the Holy Spirit. This Kingdom of God is now within us, and the grace of the Holy Spirit shines upon us and warms us from without as well. It fills the surrounding air with many fragrant odours, sweetens our senses with heavenly delight and floods our hearts with unutterable joy. Our present state is that of which the Apostle says; *The Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 14:17). Our faith consists not in the plausible words of earthly wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power (cp. I Cor.2:4). That is just the state that we are in now. Of this state the Lord said: *There are some of those standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God come in power* (Mk. 9:1). See, my son, what unspeakable joy the Lord God has now granted us! This is what it means to be in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, about which St. Macarius of Egypt writes: 'I myself was in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.' With this fullness of His Holy Spirit the Lord has now filled us poor creatures to overflowing. So there is no need now, your Godliness, to ask how people come to be in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Will you remember this manifestation of God's ineffable mercy which has visited us?"

"I don't know, Father," I said, "whether the Lord will grant me to remember this mercy of God always as vividly and clearly as I feel it now."

"I think," Father Seraphim answered me, "that the Lord will help you to retain it in your memory forever, or His goodness would never have instantly bowed in this way to my humble prayer and so quickly anticipated the request of poor Seraphim; all the more so, because it is not given to you alone to understand it, but through you it is for the whole world, in order that you yourself may be confirmed in God's work and may be useful to others. The fact that I am a Monk and you are a layman is utterly beside the point. What God requires is true faith in Himself and His Only-begotten Son. In return for that the grace of the Holy Spirit is granted abundantly from on high. The Lord seeks a heart filled to overflowing with love for God and our neighbor; this is the throne on which He loves to sit and on which He appears in the fullness of His heavenly glory. 'Son, give Me thy heart,' He says, 'and all the rest I Myself will add to thee (Prov. 23:26; Matt. 6:33),' for in the human heart the Kingdom of God can be contained. The Lord commanded His disciples: *Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things* (Mat. 6:32,33). The Lord

does not rebuke us for using earthly goods, for He says Himself that, owing to the conditions of our earthly life, we need all these things; that is, all the things which make our human life more peaceful and make our way to our heavenly home lighter and easier. That is why the holy Apostle Paul said that in his opinion there was nothing better on earth than piety and sufficiency (cp. II Cor.9:8; I Tim.6:6). And Holy Church prays that this may be granted us by the Lord God; and though troubles, misfortunes and various needs are inseparable from our life on earth, yet the Lord God neither willed nor wills that we should have nothing but troubles and adversities. Therefore, He commands us through the Apostles to *bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ* (Gal. 6:2). The Lord Jesus personally gives us the commandment to love one another, so that, by consoling one another with mutual love, we may lighten the sorrowful and narrow way of our journey to the heavenly country. Why did He descend to us from heaven, if not for the purpose of taking upon Himself our poverty and of making us rich with the riches of His goodness and His unutterable generosity? He did not come to be served by men but to serve them Himself and to give His life for the salvation of many. You do the same, your Godliness, and having seen the mercy of God manifestly shown to you, tell of it to all who desire salvation. *The harvest truly is great, says the Lord, but the labourers are few* (Lk. 10:2). The Lord God has led us out to work and has given us the gifts of His grace in order that, by reaping the ears of the salvation of our fellow-men and bringing as many as possible into the Kingdom of God, we may bring Him fruit—some thirty fold, some sixty fold and some a hundredfold. Let us be watchful, my son, in order that we may not be condemned with that wicked and slothful servant who hid his talent in the earth, but let us try to imitate those good and faithful servants of the Lord who brought their Master four talents instead of two, and ten instead of five (Cf. Mat. 25:14-30).

"Of the mercy of the Lord God there is no shadow of doubt. You have seen for yourself, your Godliness, how the words of the Lord spoken through the Prophet have been accomplished in us: I am not a God far off, but a God near at hand (cp. Jer. 23:23), and thy salvation is at thy mouth (cp. Deut. 30:12-14; Rom. 10:8-13). I had not time even to cross myself, but only wished in my heart that the Lord would grant you to see His goodness in all its fullness, and He was pleased to hasten to realise my wish. I am not boasting when I say this, neither do I say it to show you my importance and lead you to jealousy, or to make you think that I am a Monk and you only a layman. No, no, your Godliness! *The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him in truth* (Ps. 144:18) *and there is no partiality with Him* (Eph. 6:9). For the Father loves the Son and gives everything into His hand (cp. Jn. 3:35). If only we ourselves loved Him, our heavenly Father, in a truly filial way! The Lord listens equally to the Monk and the simple Christian layman provided that both are Orthodox believers, and both love God from the depth of their souls, and both have faith in Him, if only as a grain of mustard seed; and they both shall move mountains. 'One shall move thousands and two tens of thousands' (cp. Deut. 32:30). The Lord Himself says: *All things are possible to him who believes* (Mk. 9:23). And the holy Apostle Paul loudly exclaims: I can do



all things in Christ Who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13). But does not our Lord Jesus Christ speak even more wonderfully than this of those who believe in Him: *He who believes in Me, not only the works that I do, but even greater than these shall he do, because I am going to My Father. And I will pray for you that your joy may be full. Hitherto you have asked nothing in My name. But now ask...* (Jn. 14:12,16; 16:24).

"Thus, my son, whatever you ask of the Lord God you will receive, if only it is for the glory of God or for the good of your neighbour, because what we do for the good of our neighbour He refers to His own glory. And therefore He says: "All that you have done unto one of the least of these, you have done unto Me" (cp. Matt. 25:40). And so, have no doubt that the Lord God will fulfill your petitions, if only they concern the glory of God or the benefit and edification of your fellow men. But, even if something is necessary for your own need or use or advantage, just as quickly and graciously will the Lord be pleased to send you even that, provided that extreme need and necessity require it. For the Lord loves those who love Him. The Lord is good to all men; He gives abundantly to those who call upon His Name, and His bounty is in all His works. He will do the will of them that fear Him and He will hear their prayer, and fulfill all their plans. The Lord will fulfill all thy petitions (cp. Ps. 144:19; 19:4,5). Only beware, your Godliness, of asking the Lord for something for which there is no urgent need. The Lord will not refuse you even this in return for your Orthodox faith in Christ the Saviour, for the Lord will not give up the staff of the righteous to the lot of sinners (cf. Ps. 124:3), and He will speedily accomplish the will of His servant David; but He will call him to account for having troubled Him without special need, and for having asked Him for something without which he could have managed very easily.

"And so, your Godliness, I have now told you and given you a practical demonstration of all that the Lord and the Mother of God have been pleased to tell you and show you through me, poor Seraphim. Now go in peace. The Lord and the Mother of God be with you always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen. Now go in peace."

And during the whole of this time, from the moment when Father Seraphim's face became radiant, this illumination continued; and all that he told me from the beginning of the narrative till now, he said while remaining in one and the same position. The ineffable glow of the light which emanated from him I myself saw with my own eyes. And I am ready to vouch for it with an oath.

### **Troparion of St. Seraphim of Sarov**

You loved Christ from your youth, O blessed one, and longing to work for Him alone you struggled in the wilderness in constant prayer and labor. With penitent heart and great love for Christ you were favored by the Mother of God. Therefore we cry to you: "Save us by your prayers, venerable Seraphim, our father."