

St. George Newsletter

December 2013

Our series of lessons on the exterior and interior life of the Church continues.

Home prayer

priest Konstantin Slepchin

The foundation of the life of an Orthodox Christian is prayer and fasting. Prayer, as St. Philaret of Moscow says, “is the conversation of the soul with God”. As in a conversation, one cannot just hear one side, also in prayer we should stop from time to time to listen to God’s answer to our prayer.

The Church, praying every day “for each and for all”, has set for each person an individual rule of prayer. The content of this rule depends on spiritual maturity, life circumstances, and the strength of a person. The prayer book contains morning and evening prayers that everyone can do. They are addressed to the Lord, to His Mother, and to our guardian angels. With the blessing of one’s spiritual father, one can add prayers to favorite saints in one’s private prayers. If there is not opportunity to say the morning prayers in front of icons in quiet, it is better to read them on the road than to skip them entirely. In any case, one should not eat breakfast before saying the prayer “Our Father”.

If a person is ill or very tired, then the evening prayers may be said not before sleep, but some time earlier. Then before lying down to sleep, read at least the prayer of St. John of Damascus: “Master, Who lovest mankind, will this bed be my tomb...” and those prayers after it.

A very important part of the morning prayers is the commemoration. We must pray for the peace and health of our patriarch, ruling bishop, spiritual father, parents, relatives, godparents

and godchildren, and all people who somehow or other are connected with us. If someone is unable to reconcile with someone, even if it is not his own fault, he should commemorate the “offender” and sincerely wish him good.

The private prayer rule of many Orthodox Christians also contains reading of the Gospel or the Psalms. For example, the Optina monastery monks gave a blessing to many people to read one chapter of the Gospel and two chapters of the epistles daily. In this rule, they advised reading the last seven chapters of the Revelation one per day. In this way, the Gospel and Epistles are finished at the same time and can be started again together.

The prayer rule for a person is given from his spiritual father, and any changes or abbreviations should be discussed with him. A prayer rule given once should become a rule for our life, and any time it is not fulfilled, it needs to be considered, and discussed with the spiritual father.

The main purpose of the prayer rule is to dispose the soul of a Christian to frequent communion with God, to awaken in him penitential thoughts, to cleanse his heart from sin. Thus we, fulfilling this with dedication, according to the words of the apostle “pray always in the spirit... with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:18).

The Cross of Salvation

archpriest Rostislav Gan

The cross of life signifies the sorrows, the burdens of our earthly life which each one of us must overcome. As they say “for some the cross is for salvation, for others to their doom.”

Christ was crucified between two thieves. For one of them, the cross was unto his salvation; for the other, the cross was the weapon of his final death.

The cross of life is just the same. In order for it to work towards our salvation, the Lord set down only one condition, but without it, we cannot bear the cross. The words of the Lord are well known to us: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

First of all: in order to bear all your sorrows without grumbling, all the burdens, all of life's misfortunes, you must deny oneself, that is, deny your own desires, yearnings, refuse your pride, deny your identity, and deem yourself worthy of all punishment. Whoever endures all of life's sorrows with such an attitude, for them these sorrows will bring salvation, and for those who do not have patience, but grumble, these sorrows will bring not salvation but death.

But the fact is that no one will escape sorrows. They will exist one way or the other for each one of us. If man only rejects himself, for him these sorrows will not be a burden, they will be easy to bear.

This is the sole means for the sorrows of life, for the cross of life, to be easy to bear; for this cross to bring salvation and lead us into the Kingdom of God. Amen.

Sermon on the 6th Sunday

archpriest Leonid Kolchev

I will relate to you, brethren, a brief outline of today's Gospel reading for purposes of moral edification.

Jesus Christ came to the city of Capernaum, which was then called "the city of Jesus," since, not having His own home, often stayed here, most likely in the home of Holy Apostle Peter. As soon as His disciples learned this, they began coming here in large numbers to hear His teachings, and the sick would come to be healed by Him. Among the latter was one man suffering from palsy whom four sympathetic

people, with great difficulty, carried on stretchers to this house and lowered through the roof onto the floor at the feet of Jesus. The sick man said nothing, lying in his stretcher like a corpse but in apparent agony; those who brought him were likewise silent. And seeing their faith, the Lord, Seer of men's hearts, said to the sick man: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee," that is, the cause of this terrible disease was removed from him. The enemies of Christ misunderstood this--the Scribes and Pharisees. They thought it odd: who can forgive sins but God? Their bewilderment grew when Jesus Christ revealed His omniscience as He read their minds: "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk" No reply followed. Clearly, both are within the power of God, and so Jesus Christ said to the stricken of palsy: "I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." Following these words was the remarkable healing to the great joy of the suffering man. The people, beholding this miracle, praised God in the simplicity of their hearts, Who had granted such power to mankind.

I would like to draw your attention to the following Gospel words: "When Jesus saw their faith," that is, Christ forgave the sins of the sick man, then healed him. So, by the faith of some, others are granted mercy. The teaching of the Orthodox Church on prayer for others is founded upon this event, not only for the living, but for the dead, because the love we express in beseeching mercy for others never ceases (I Corinthians 13:8). Thus did Job the Much-Suffering pray for his friends, who had insulted him with their suspicions, and the Lord forgave them. The Prophet Moses more than once interceded for the cruelty of the Jewish people, and the Lord sent down His mercies. Judas Maccabeus, after the emancipation of the Jews from the Syrian yoke, brought sacrifice to God not only for the living, but for the dead. Apostle Paul himself begged the faithful to join him in prayers to God for his sake (Romans 15:30). That is why Apostle James commands: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of

the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him " (James 5:14 -15). The mystic John saw an angel who had " a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand " (Revelation 8:3-4). There are many examples in the Lives of the Saints when the Lord, for the sake of His holy men and women, pours forth all manner of mercies to those who beseech Him in faith.

Whom among us does not know how a mother prays for her child, then teaches her to pray for those dear to their hearts? Who among you has not asked his spiritual father for prayers; and what of these touching handwritten notes for the living and the dead which we submit during Liturgy; O, if only you knew how important this is for them! Portions of prosphoras are cut out for each of the living and dead by the clerygmen, who then immerses them into the Holy Chalice with the words: " Wash away, Lord, by Your holy Blood, the sins of all those commemorated through the intercessions of the Theotokos and all Your saints."

Pray, o brethren, pray for each other, pray for the living and for the dead, and the Lord God, beholding your profound faith with knowledge of the greatness of God and your own unworthiness, your faith, accompanied by love, united with humility and hope for mercy, will say "Make bold, My children, as I had mercy upon the palsied man by the faith of those who brought him, so now I grant salvation to those for whom you ask."

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