



A JOURNAL OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND CULTURE

ROAD TO EMMAUS

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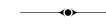
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IN HIS OWN WORDS: ST. JOHN OF KRONSTADT ON PRAYER AND WARMTH OF HEART

There is nothing impossible unto those who believe; lively and unshaken faith can accomplish great miracles in the twinkling of an eye. Besides, even without our sincere and firm faith, miracles are accomplished, such as the miracles of the sacraments; for God's Mystery is always accomplished, even though we were incredulous or unbelieving at the time of its celebration. "Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" (Rom. 3:3). Our wickedness shall not overpower the unspeakable goodness and

mercy of God; our dullness shall not overpower God's, nor our infirmity God's omnipotence.



Oh, what great happiness and bliss, what exaltation it is to address oneself to the Eternal Father. Always, without fail, value this joy which has been accorded to you by God's infinite grace and do not forget it during your prayers; God, the angels and God's holy men listen to you.



Do not be despondent when fighting against the incorporeal enemy, but even in the midst of your afflictions and oppression praise the Lord, Who has found you worthy to suffer for Him, by struggling against the subtlety of the serpent, and to be wounded for Him at every hour; for had you not lived piously, and endeavored to become united to God, the enemy would not have attacked and tormented you.



Do not fear the conflict, and do not flee from it; where there is no struggle, there is no virtue. Our faith, trust, and love are proved and revealed in adversities, that is, in difficult and

grievous outward and inward circumstances, during sickness, sorrow, and privations.



Prayer for others is very beneficial to the man himself who prays; it purifies the heart, strengthens faith and hope in God, and arouses love for God and our neighbor.



During prayer there sometimes occur moments of deadly darkness and spiritual anguish arising from unbelief of the heart (for unbelief is darkness). Do not let your heart fail you at such moments, but remember that if the Divine light has been cut off from you, it always shines in all its splendour and greatness in God Himself, in God's Church, in heaven and on earth, and in the material world in which "His eternal power also and divinity" are visible. Do not think that truth has failed, because truth is God Himself, and everything that exists has its foundation and reason in Him. Only your own weak, sinful and darkened heart can fail in the truth, for it cannot always bear the strength of the light of truth, and is not always capable of containing its purity, but only if it is being, or has been,

purified from its sins, as the first cause of spiritual darkness. The proof of this you may find in yourself. When the light of faith or God's truth dwells in your heart, only then is it tranquil, firm, strong, and living; but when this is cut off, then your heart becomes uneasy, weak as a reed shaken by the wind, and lifeless. Do not pay any attention to this darkness of Satan. Drive it away from your heart by making the sign of the life-giving Cross!



When praying, keep to the rule that it is better to say five words from the depth of your heart than ten thousand words with your tongue only. When you observe that your heart is cold and prays unwillingly, stop praying and warm your heart by vividly representing to yourself either your own wickedness, your spiritual poverty, misery, and blindness, or the great benefits which God bestows every moment upon you and all mankind, especially upon Christians, and then pray slowly and fervently. If you have not time to say all the prayers, it does not matter, and you will receive incomparably greater benefit from praying fervently and not hur-

riedly than if you had said all your prayers hurriedly and without feeling: “I had rather speak five words with my understanding ... than ten thousand words in a tongue.

As after having unworthily communicated, so also after having prayed unworthily and coldly, our soul feels equally ill at ease. This means that God does not enter our heart, being offended at its unbelief and coldness, and allows the evil spirit to nestle in our hearts, in order to make us feel the difference between His own presence and its yoke.

Sometimes during prayer you feel a kind of estrangement from God, and despair. Do not be carried away by such a feeling; it proceeds from the Devil. Say in your heart: “I despair not of salvation, reprobate as I am; and emboldened by Thine immeasurable compassion, I come unto Thee. If there is any hope of salvation for me, if Thy loving mercy can overcome the multitude of my transgressions, be Thou my Saviour.

When praying with people, we sometimes have to pierce through with our prayer as if it were the hardest wall – human souls, hardened and petrified by earthly passions – to penetrate the Egyptian darkness, the darkness of passions and worldly attachments. This is why it is sometimes difficult to pray. The simpler the people one prays with, the easier it is.

When you are praying alone, and your spirit is dejected, and you are wearied and oppressed by your loneliness, remember then, as always, that God the Trinity looks upon you with eyes brighter than the sun; also all the angels, your own Guardian Angel, and all the Saints of God. Truly they do; for they are all one in God, and where God is, there are they also. Where the sun is, thither also are directed all its rays.

