

CONTENTS

Foreword

ix

Saint Silouan the Athonite and his Disciple the Elder Sophrony

I

Man's Birth into Eternal Life

27

"Keep Thy Mind in Hell and Despair Not"

62

God's Work of Salvation and Man

92

Prayer: The Way of Creation

114

On the Jesus Prayer

138

Spiritual Fatherhood as a Ministry of Reconciliation
Between Man and God

164

The Presentation of Christ that Justified God and Man

192

Appendix

On Monasticism I

199

On Monasticism II

222

word was perfect, for it was given by the Holy Spirit, similarly, the word of his disciple was from God. He would always ask God in prayer for a word, and would conceive in his heart a word pleasing to God and salutary to his brethren. *Aside:* You know, whenever I went to accompany him for the few minutes' walk from his house to the monastery, in order to receive someone who had come to see him, I would look to profit by asking him something about myself, but he would not let me, saying, "Ask me no questions now. Now my mind is in that person." He was praying all the time for the meeting with that person to be blessed. He did not want to be distracted for a moment. *End of aside.*

Fr. Sophrony had only one desire, that through repentance all may be saved in Christ and by Christ. He was inspired by the aim and grandeur of the service of Spiritual Fatherhood, and desired in a spirit of repentance and humility to be a "fellow worker with God" in the creation of immortal gods (*cf.* 1 Cor. 3:9). *Aside:* He found the work of a spiritual father a most creative work, because man collaborates with God in the creation of gods.³⁶ When I became a spiritual father he would often say, "Do not put your trust in something you have read or in something you once said which was of help to someone. Before you say anything, always bring your mind to your heart, ask God's blessing, and then speak. Ask for God's word, and then utter. You must learn this way, otherwise it will be reduced to a blind human service." He would often say that if we prayed before meeting one another – a priest with a priest, or a person with his spiritual father, a believer with his priest, or a priest with his bishop – then the meeting can be a prophetic one, because God will give utterance. He said, "If there is prayer especially from both sides, from the one who comes and the one who receives, surely then God will speak." *End of aside.*

Elder Sophrony is fit to interpret St. Silouan because he has the same spirit. Through his own personal experience, he *re*-reads, that is to say, he *re*-cognizes the spiritual life of the saint. In other words, his experience was the repetition of that of the saint. In the life of the saints, "repetition" or "copying" is the most creative act: it is the mystery of the Tradition of the Holy Spirit. The way

to the acquisition of this holy Tradition was first indicated by the great Apostle Paul, “Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Forgive me, Fathers. Forgive me, Bishop.

Bishop Basil's Afterword: You know, we are all sons of the twentieth century, we are all born in the twentieth century and if you noticed, a few moments ago, Fr. Zacharias very calmly spoke one sentence in which he mentioned *four* saints: Elder Sophrony, asking another saint, St. Nikolai Velimirovich, what he thought about his own book about another saint, Silouan, in which he quoted another saint, Justin Popovich, all sons of the twentieth century, commenting on St. Silouan. You bring great gifts to us, Father, and this is not to praise you; this is to say that you are a faithful son of Fr. Sophrony, and for that we are most grateful. You know how the Church's understanding of Tradition comes from that Greek word, *paradosis* – “a passing on” – one person passing on something unchanged, something very valuable and precious and important, utterly important, from one generation to the next. And we have just received something precious; we are participating in Tradition in a very “existential” way. And we ask God's blessing upon Fr. Zacharias, and we thank God who is “wondrous in His saints” (Ps. 67:36 Lxx).

NOTES

1. Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Tolleshunt Knights, Essex: Patriarchal Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991; repr. ed. Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), p. 11.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
7. *Ibid.*

and this inner perception is installed in us through the pain of the heart. That is why the monk is happy when his heart is painful. And the heart experiences pain from the prayer of repentance, from fasting, from vigil, and from bearing shame in confession. All these things make the heart painful, and when the heart is painful, assuredly, man is able to discern the thoughts. St. Barsanuphius the Great assures us that without contrition of heart we cannot discern the thoughts. Therefore, with contrition of heart we are able to discern the thoughts because, as we said, contrition leads to humility, humility attracts grace, and grace does the work for us. St. Paul says, "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). So it is very precious for the monk always to have even a little pain in his heart. Woe unto him, if he ceases to feel his heart! He would be exposed to danger, and to falling. But when the heart is "circumcised" with the pain of repentance, then he can stand against all the wiles of the enemy. That is the "circumcision of the heart" that St. Paul was preaching to the first Christians (Rom. 2:29), encouraging them to know *only* Christ, and Him crucified (*cf.* 1 Cor. 2:2), that is to say, His way of going down.

Question 2: How can we cut off the passions?

Answer 2: This is what I have just said. Fr. Sophrony was always of the same mind as St. Barsanuphius. I remember the first year I went to the monastery, he said to me, "If you want to cut off the passions, if you want to uproot the passions, learn to weep before God." Spiritual weeping is the most efficacious prayer; it immediately "crushes" the heart, not in a destructive way, but in a healing way: it brings spiritual pain to the heart. I remember when I first went to the monastery, Fr. Sophrony kept repeating this to me, "If you want to uproot the passions, learn to weep". I tried, but I could not. I thought to myself, "How is this done?" I would keep trying, forcing myself. But that was not the way. Then I happened to read the *Catechism* of St. Symeon the New Theologian, and when I read *Catechesis XXX*, "On Penitence",¹⁴ having also in mind all that Fr. Sophrony had told me, I began to grasp how this is done.

receive such destructive advice that, if in the beginning there was a “little crack” in their home, now there is a complete demolition of it. But the goal of marriage is selfless love. Through marriage, we are taught selfless love, which is an image of the Love of God. Not to care for ourselves, but for the other – that is selfless love. Of course there must be obedience, and a competition: who will do the will of the other more? Then, truly, even marriage becomes a paradise, when there is this competition: “What does she want? That is what I will do!” “What does he want? That is what I will do!” In the end it will turn out that the will of both of them is done. It is essential not to keep any secrets from one another, to be transparent before one another. When one does something, the other should know about it as well. This protects them. Just as in the monastery, we refer everything to our spiritual father, in order to be protected, so also in marriage, if we refer our life to one another, as a couple, we are protected. And we must learn to see our own fault, when we fall into some argument, for example. I remember that a couple came to Fr. Sophrony – they were in strife – and it was obvious that the one was more at fault than the other. And Fr. Sophrony asked the wife, “What percentage do you think you are at fault?” She replied, “Only five percent, and my husband is ninety-five percent at fault”. And Fr. Sophrony said to her, “Then correct that five percent, and let us see if the ninety-five percent remains!” This is what so often makes the work of a spiritual father a thankless task: time and again he has to point out the negative aspect, the wrong, of someone, in order to bring that person to an understanding of the wrong, so that he is able to take the blame upon himself. Because only then will there be healing. Unless we take the blame upon ourselves, we shall find no rest, as the monks of the fourth century say.

Question 5: What is the status of a person who becomes a monk, and then for some reason goes back into the world?

Answer 5: You are living a natural life now, a life “according to nature” (*kata physin*). When you become a monk, you try to live a “supernatural life” (*hyper physin*). When you fall, and go back into the world, you live a life that is against nature, an “unnatural

life” (*para physin*), because the covenant made with the Lord at one’s monastic profession has been broken, and therefore one remains bereft of grace. Of course, there is always repentance. But you know, when we sin voluntarily we may seek for repentance and not find it. We must not take it easy, and say, “Ah, I will sin and repent later”, because if we sin voluntarily, we may not find repentance afterwards. Like Esau, we may seek repentance “with tears”, and yet not find the “place of repentance”, as St. Paul says (*cf.* Heb. 12:17).

You see, that is why the Lord said that we enter the kingdom through the “strait gate”, through the “narrow way” (Matt. 7:14). Monasticism tries to create this “narrow way” for us to go through, and to leave behind the “old skin”, like the snake. The snake goes through a narrow hole in order to leave behind its old skin, and it comes out with a new one. Monasticism tries to organize life in a way that will give the monk opportunities to endure certain hardships, so that he may thereby leave behind the “old skin”. But this does not apply only to monasticism. St. Paul says to Timothy, “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). That is to say, every soldier of Christ, all Christians, should endure hardship in order to overcome the old man.

NOTES

* First published in English as “Fidelity to the Monastic Vows Heals the Estrangement Brought About by Original Sin”, in *Christ, Our Way and Our Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 132–141.

1. *Cf. Principles of Orthodox Asceticism*, trans. Rosmary Edmonds, published in *The Orthodox Ethos: Studies in Orthodoxy*, Vol. 1, edited by A. J. Philipou (Oxford: Holywell Press, 1964), p. 271.

2. *Cf. ibid.* p. 270.

3. *Cf. On Prayer*, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

4. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.”