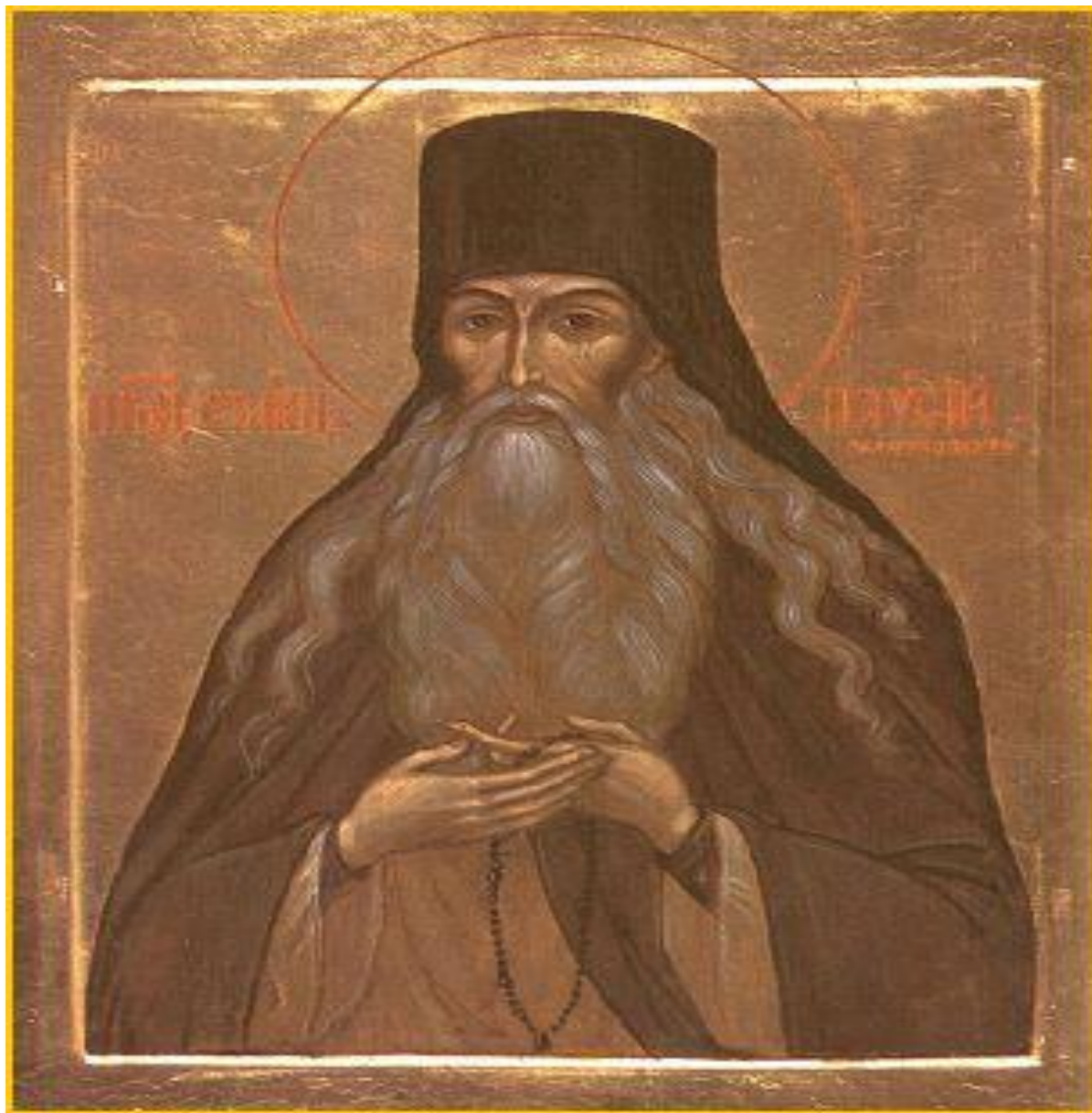


# MONASTIC REBIRTH

Paisii Velichovski, Seraphim of Sarov, the  
Elders of Optina Monastery, John of  
Kronstadt, Matthew the Poor

Kenneth Alonso, MD, PhD



Paisii Velichkovskii

# Paisii Velichkovskii

- 1722-1794 AD. Little Russia.
- Formed in Mt. Athos. From his monastery in Romania, sparked monastic reform in the East with return to patristic study and emphasis on the Prayer of Jesus. Optina, Valaam, Rosval, Glinsk monasteries in Russia were prominent spiritual centers until the Revolution.
- Lived in a period of persecution by the Ottomans (Muslims) and by the Poles (Roman Catholics).

- Do not judge those near to you, even though you see with your own eyes they are sinning.
- Do not hate anyone.
- Forgive any insults or abuses with your whole heart.
- It is better to remain in the world than to deny oneself worldly pleasures rather than to live affectedly in a monastery, misleading the laity, and thereby securing eternal condemnation on the Day of Judgment. The root and foundation of a Christian life is obedience and detachment with lamentation for one's sins.

- “Beware of envy. Wherever there is envy, God’s spirit does not exist. Control the tongue, so that it will not utter empty words. Whoever preserves his tongue, preserves his soul from grief. Life and death both come from the tongue. The (more experienced) should teach the young and the inexperienced. Everyone should have humility, kindness, and love. It is necessary to strengthen oneself by the fear of God and by the memory of death and eternal sufferings...Offer your labors and your bloody sweat as a burnt sacrifice...Endure as the martyrs.”

- “It is essential that one laboriously search for a knowledgeable guide, but if there is no such man, then the Holy Fathers order us to learn from the Sacred Scriptures and the teachings of the God-bearing Fathers, according to the very teaching of Our Savior Himself who said, ‘Search the Scriptures, for in them you have eternal life.’” Nilus of Sora

- “St. John Chrysostom says that it is impossible for a man to save another if he himself does not delight in reading spiritual literature. St. Basil the Great says that a starets should instruct his disciples in the wisdom of Sacred Scripture, and that if he does not he will be a false witness to God...for otherwise we are deceived by human actions and motivations and then we fall from the true way...Furthermore, when studying Sacred Scripture, we have to fear and love God and to imbue ourselves and others with the remembrance of the word of God. This is what the saints teach us...

- One who reads the writings of the Fathers...will be guided in faith and wisdom by one Father, in silence and prayer by another, in obedience, humility, and patience by another, and in self-reproach and love for God and one's neighbors by yet another. One is taught how to live the evangelic life by reading many Fathers."
- "On mental prayer, the following Holy Fathers must be read: John Chrysostom, Patriarch Callistus II of Constantinople, Metropolitan Symeon of Thessalonica, Bishop Diodochus of Cotica, Hesychius of Jerusalem, Nilus of Sinai, John of Sinai, Maximus the Confessor, Peter Damascene, Symeon the New Theologian, and Gregory of Sinai."
- "The Jesus Prayer is to be repeated constantly."

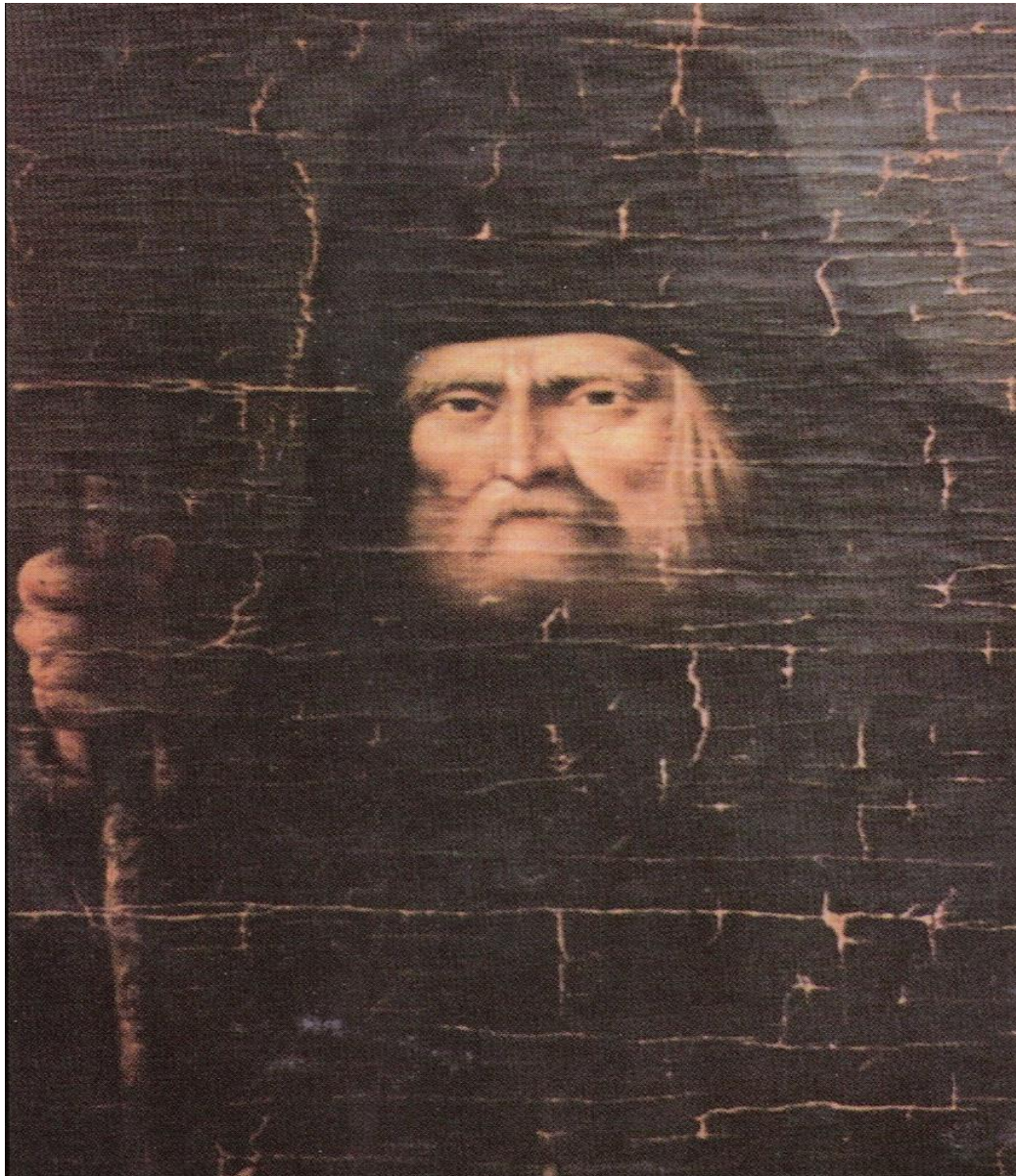


- “Let none...say that it is impossible to weep each day, for those who say this also say that it is impossible to repent each day.”
- “With an unquestionably firm faith and warm love, you ought to approach God and decidedly renounce the world with all its beauties and pleasures and your will and reasoning, and resolve to be poor in spirit and in body....then through Christ’s grace a holy zeal will be kindled...Hunger and thirst for righteousness shall appear (humility, patience, mercy, and love for everyone, particularly those who mourn, who are ill, who suffer from evil, and for the aged; bear the infirmity of one’s neighbor ...

- lay down one's soul for one's brother, to endure various types of temptations, offenses, abuse, and reproaches, to forgive each other from the heart for causing each other unhappiness, to love your enemies, to bless those who curse you, to do good to those who hate you, and to pray for those who hurt and persecute you; to endure with fortitude and thankfulness...afflictions, infirmities... maladies, and temporary suffering for eternal salvation)."

- “The aim of mental prayer is the unification with God who is the Spirit...As far as external methods used by certain spiritual warriors while practicing this prayer are concerned, these undoubtedly have secondary significance...The silence of the soul ought to be preceded by the silence of the body... but it would be erroneous to think that the feat of growth in spiritual prayer can depend on external conditions and methods. One thing is certain...our mind should also be directed toward the heart”

Bishop Feofan of Poltava



Seraphim of Sarov

# Seraphim of Sarov

- 1759-1833. Russia. Radiant with light.
- “For the preservation of peace and soul (in addition to controlling the tongue), it is also necessary by all means to avoid criticizing others...And in order to deliver oneself from criticism, it is necessary to attend to oneself (self-examination).”
- Obedience without murmuring is the sure foundation to a spiritual life.
- There is no need to be despondent. “Christ has vanquished everything, raised Adam, released Eve, and slain death.”

- From solitude and silence are born contrition and meekness.
- “Never, God forbid, not for anything, nor for anyone should one speak in the Sanctuary, even if one were to have to suffer for it (for) the Lord Himself is present there! And in fear and trembling all the Cherubim and Seraphim and all the powers of God stand before Him. Who then will speak before His face!”

- “One should not lose an opportunity of using as often as possible the grace granted through the Communion of Christ’s Holy Mysteries. While trying as far as possible to concentrate on the humble realization of one’s utter sinfulness, one should approach the Holy Sacrament which redeems everything and everyone with hope and firm faith in the unutterable mercy of God, saying with contrition, ‘I have sinned, O Lord, with my soul, with my heart, in word, in thought, and with all my senses.’”
- “If anyone gives you a box on the ears (a reproof)... that is the spiritual and heaviest kind of chain...And if anyone spits in your eyes...that is the spiritual and most salutary hair shirt. Only you must wear them with gratitude.”

- “And the fulfilling of Christ’s commandments is an easy burden, as our Savior said Himself; it is only necessary to keep them always in memory; and to this end we use the Prayer of Jesus, and meditate upon the life and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who out of love for the human race suffered even death on a Cross. At the same time it is necessary to cleanse our conscience through the confession of our sins and through the Communion of the most pure Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ.”



- “Acquire a peaceful spirit, and then thousands of souls will be saved around you.”
- “Without sorrows there is no salvation. On the other hand, the Kingdom of God awaits those who have patiently endured.”
- “Let every Christian on rising from sleep, stand before the Icons and read the Lord’s prayer ... three times in honor of the Most Holy Trinity, then the song to the Mother of God...also three times, and finally the Creed...once...(These) are the foundation of Christianity.”

- Repeat the prayers at midday and at bedtime, always saying the Jesus prayer mentally during the day. “At bedtime...let him go to sleep, having protected himself with the sign of the Cross. By keeping this simple rule it is possible to reach a measure of Christian perfection and divine love.”
- “Communion with God and the indwelling of God, the final aim of the human spirit, has been attained when the man is in God and God in him. At last the will of God has been fulfilled (cf Jo 17:21)...Such souls are the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16; Rom 8:9).”

- “Prayer, fasting, vigil, and all other Christian activities, however good they may be in themselves, do not constitute the aim of our Christian life, although they serve as the indispensable means of reaching this end. The true Christian life consists in 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 only means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. 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.”

- “At the present time 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...we have almost abandoned the true Christian life. The testimonies of Holy Scripture now seem strange to us... Under the pretext of education we have reached such a darkness of ignorance that what the ancients understood so clearly seems to us almost inconceivable.”

- “The grace of the Holy Spirit is the light which enlightens man...’Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’ (Ps 119:105) and ‘unless Your Law had been my meditation, I should have died in my humiliation.’ (Ps 119:92)... 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. And if this grace of the Holy Spirit (which I try to acquire so carefully and zealously that I meditate on Your righteous judgments seven times a day) did not enlighten me amidst the darkness of the cares which are inseparable from (my calling), 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?”

- Seraphim's disciple, N. A. Motovilov, a married layman, conversing with Seraphim outdoors in winter in the snow, received a demonstration of the fullness of the Holy Spirit that he related to the world:
- "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 of his figure, but only a blinding light spreading far around ...

- and illumining with its glaring sheen both the snow blanket that covered the forest glade and the snowflakes which besprinkled me and the great Elder. You can imagine the state I was in!” (calm, peace, sweetness, joy, warmth)
- Seraphim read the entire Psalter and the entire New Testament every week of his life.
- He recited the Rosary daily.



Elders of Optina Monastery



# Rule of Prayer of the Elder Joseph of Optina

- Blessed be our God now and always and unto the ages.
- O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, come dwell within us and save us, O Gracious One.
- Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us. (3)
- Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages.
- All Holy Trinity, have mercy on me. Lord, cleanse me of my sins. Master, pardon my sins. Holy One, visit me and heal my infirmities for your Name's sake.

- Lord, have mercy. (3)
- Glory to the Father...
- Our Father...
- Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.
- Lord, have mercy. (12)
- Glory to the Father...
- Come, let us worship our King and our God. Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God. Come, let us worship and fall down before Him, Christ the King and our God.

- Psalm 51.
- Creed. Amen.
- Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner. (100)
- My Most Holy Lady Theotokos, by your holy and all-powerful entreaties, dispel from me, you humble, wretched servant, despondency, forgetfulness, folly, carelessness, and all impure, evil, and blasphemous thoughts out of my wretched heart and my darkened mind. And quench the flame of my passions, for I am poor and wretched, and deliver me from my many cruel memories and deeds, and free me from all evil actions: for blessed are you by all generations, and glorified is your most honorable name unto the ages of ages. Amen

- Lord Jesus Christ, Son... (100)
- My Most Holy Theotokos...
- Lord Jesus Christ, Son... (100)
- My Most Holy Theotokos...
- My Most Holy Lady Theotokos, save me a sinner. (100)
- My Most Holy Theotokos...
- O holy angel of God, my guardian, pray to God for me, a sinner. (50)
- My Most Holy Theotokos...
- All Saints, pray to God for me a sinner. (50)
- My Most Holy Theotokos...

- It is truly right to call you blessed, the Theotokos, ever blessed and all immaculate and Mother of our God. Higher in honor than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, who gave birth to God the Word in virginity, Theotokos, you do we exalt.
- Glory to You, Christ God, our Hope, glory to You.
- Glory to the Father...
- Lord, have mercy. (3)
- Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

- When praying for separated brethren: “Have mercy, O Lord, if possible, on the soul of your servant N., departed to eternal life in separation from your holy Church. Unsearchable are Your Judgments. Account not this my prayer as sin. But may Your holy will be done.”



John of Kronstadt

# John of Krondstadt

- 1829-1908 AD. Russia. Parish priest.
- People should be taught with faith and love. Concern for the poor is to find them work. To this end he formed workshops and sponsored small business in his parish, a poor area outside the St. Petersburg naval base.
- God cannot refuse insistent prayer accompanied by the oblation of the self. One must pray for one's neighbor.



- John urged the presence at daily Liturgy. Those attending should come to communion. As he could not hear the confession of all his parishioners, he instituted public confession between parishioners at the Liturgy followed by general absolution. (In a vision granted to laymen, Jesus was seen standing over a radiant John as he blessed the congregation, blessing the congregation through John.)

- Man is engaged in spiritual warfare. The foremost weapons are the sacraments. But they are not magic. To partake of them fruitfully, one must make oneself as fit as one can, by prayer, mortification, and good works. And these in turn cannot be accomplished without the grace of God, and of that one cannot avail oneself without faith, a divine gift. Faith is the absolute prerequisite to all else, the absolutely indispensable foundation to all prayer and good works. Faith must be prayed for.

- “The means to confirm and strengthen Christian hope are prayer, especially frequent and sincere prayer, confession of our sins, frequent reading of the Word of God, and, above all, frequent communion of the holy and life-giving sacraments of the Body and Blood of Christ.”
- “The best moments on Earth are those in which we meditate upon Heavenly things, or when we recognize and defend the truth, which is of, and from” Heaven.
- Pray upon arising and never go to sleep without praying.

- “With sincere Christians prayer is continual because we continually sin; gratitude is perpetual because every day, every moment, we receive fresh mercies from God... Praise is also perpetual because we perpetually see the glory of God’s works in ourselves and in the world...his infinite love for us.”
- “Pray for the departed as though your own soul were in Hell, in the flame; as though you yourself were in torment...pray most ardently that they may rest in peace...”

- “Humility destroys all the snares of the enemy. How much secret pride, how much sophistry, there is in us!”
- ‘If foes surround you, and you are in spiritual distress, call at once upon our most holy Lady...the very time to pray fervently to her” is when you “feel yourself to be an ungodly, impure, wicked, blasphemous sinner...unworthy to draw near...”
- “Trust in the intercession of the Mother of God, and of the angels and saints, is a form of Christian hope...by the grace of Christ...”

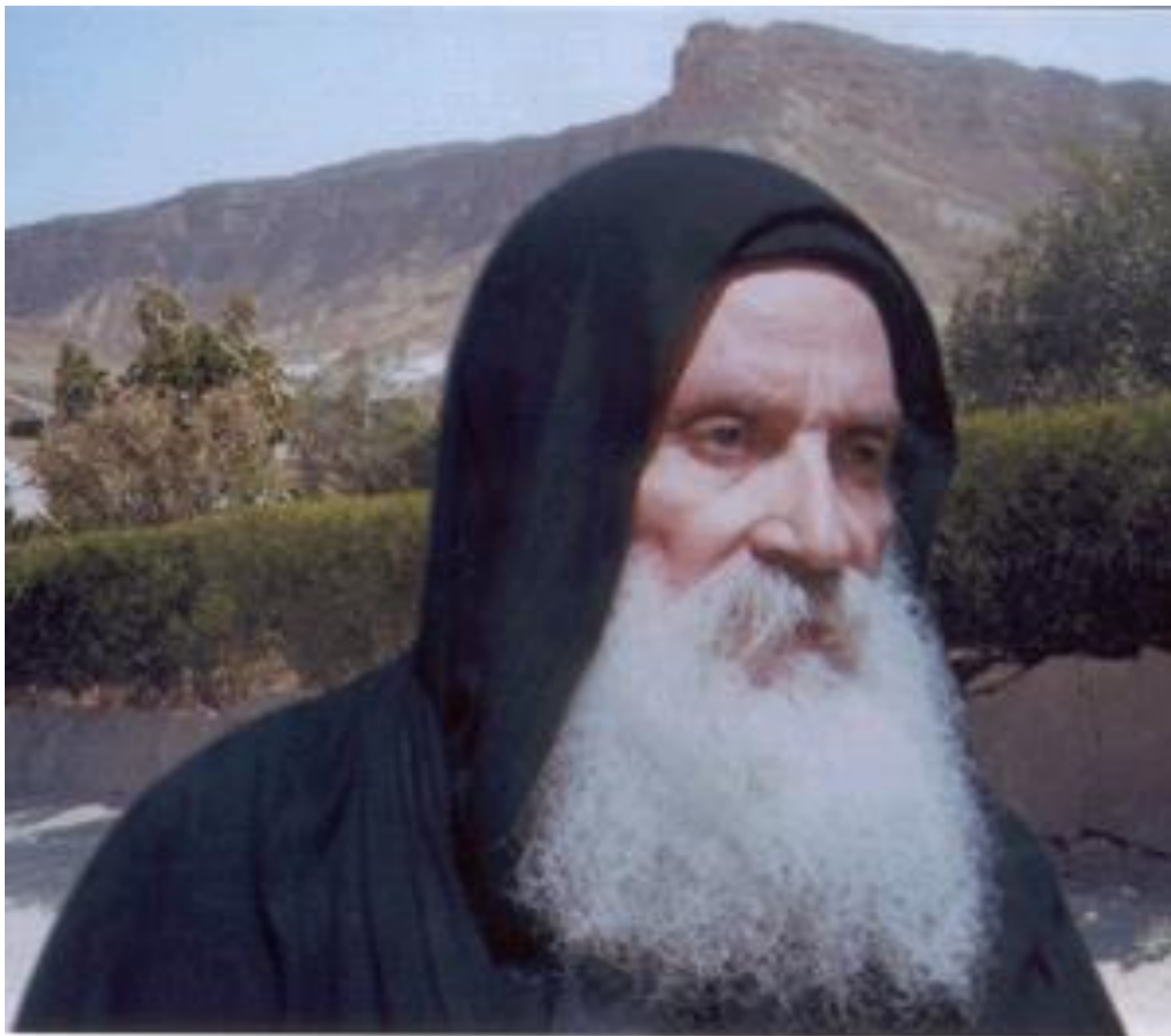
- “When you pray, attend steadfastly to the words of the prayer, feeling them in your heart. Do not withdraw your mind from them to any other thoughts. When praying during the celebration of the Sacraments, lay surely to your heart the very words of the Church’s prayers.”
- “The Holy Scripture is the realm of Wisdom, Word, and Spirit, of God in Trinity; in it He clearly manifests Himself... In the Holy Scripture we see God face to face, and ourselves as we are...know thyself through the Scriptures...”

- “Considering our bodily nature, the Lord binds His presence ... to some visible and tangible sign – for instance, in the ... Eucharist (He) wholly takes up His abode in the bread and wine which are His Body and Blood; in that of penitence He acts through the visible person of the priest; in that of Baptism, through the water; in that of Chrismation, through the Chrism, in that of Orders, through the bishop; in matrimony, through the priest and the crowns He Himself crowns the bride and bridegroom; in the Sacrament of Unction, through the Oil. He unites His presence to the church, to the images, to the cross ...”

- “I am an infirm, carnal, sinful man. I am not always able to bring to my Lord a heart burning with faith and love – but at least I bring, as a carnal, material man, a material gift as a gift to Heaven, a lighted candle.”
- “If the Lord gives us Himself, in His divine Mysteries, every day, ought we not absolutely to give freely, for nothing, perishable goods such as money, food, drink, clothes, to those who ask them of us?”
- “God is not a god of torments and punishments. Our torments are the product of our own sins, and the work of the incorporeal fallen spirits.”



- “The root of every evil is a self-loving heart, or self-pity, self-sparing; it is from self-love ... that all vices proceed...”
- “Never pity yourself in anything, crucify yourself ... and you will strike at the root of all your vices.”
- “If you wish to be truly humble, then consider yourself lower than all...”
- “The priests will witness before the Saving Judge on the terrible Day of Judgment concerning sinners, whether they did or did not repent of these or those sins, and they who were penitent will be forgiven.”



Matta All-Miskin

# Matthew the Poor

- 1919-2006 AD. Copt.
- Sparked major monastic reform in Egypt. As with St. Anthony, he left everything behind to go into the desert. Nominated to be Pope of Alexandria, but declined.
- “How do I make God the center of my life?”
- “Although it may appear outwardly that we may make our way to God, the joyful and wonderful truth is that it is God who comes to us, as a lover and a ... loving Father.”

- “To seek (Christian) unity before arriving at a state of complete abandonment of heart and soul and mind to God is to enter into either an emotional conflict, so that we seek unity for our own sake, or else into an intellectual illusion – seeking unity as an exigency with the logic of faith necessitates.”
- “Union is to encounter each other in the presence of God and not just in the presence of one another.”

- “In reading the Bible, we aim at understanding and not at research, investigation, or study, for the Bible is to be understood, not investigated... Spiritual understanding centers on the acceptance of divine truth... It is ...futile and foolish for us to try to ‘investigate’ the things of God in an attempt to grasp them and make them yield to our intellectual powers. On the contrary, it is we who must yield to the love of God so that our minds may be open to receive divine truth.”

- “Many ... have entered into the mystery of the Gospel through one of the many commandments, such as voluntary poverty and simplicity of life ... putting their faith in God before all other considerations... They have understood how a man lives more than by food and medicines... Yet others have entered... through secret acts of sacrifice, giving their money, energy, or time to serve the poor, the deprived, the afflicted, and those bowed down by various tragedies... Such as these have acquired knowledge, perception, and understanding of the Gospel and the commandments of the Lord ...that springs from experience and is transformed into eternal life, forming a living relationship with Christ.”

- “The early communities, burning with love for Christ, had no creeds, no patrology, no expositions of Scripture, but the few words of Christ....:”
- “When they heard, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit,’ they sold everything and laid their money at the feet of the Apostles.”
- “When they heard, ‘Blessed are those who mourn now,’ they despised all suffering and weariness in the service of the Lord.”
- “When they heard, ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,’ they bore the cruelest humiliations and insults and attacks.”

- “When they heard, ‘Watch and pray,’ they met in the catacombs to watch and pray all night.”
- “When they heard, ‘Love your enemies,’ history recorded no resistance put up by Christians ... against their persecutors. And they bowed their necks to the sword in humility and obedience to honor the words of Christ.”
- “This was for them the meaning of reading the Gospel and understanding it.”
- “Be doers of the word and not hearers only.” (Jas 1:21)



- “The priest never reads the Gospel in church before offering a special prayer, so that he and the congregation can be made worthy to hear the Holy Gospel...the whole congregation (stands) in fear of God to hear the Gospel, and...glorifies God. Also the priest takes his shoes off to read the Gospel for he is standing in the presence of God. Then, after the reading, the whole congregation files past to kiss the Gospel...with joy and tears...”
- “There are those who always fast to read the Gospel. There are those who, when they read the Gospel alone, always kneel. There are those who always read it with weeping and tears.”

- “A people led by a divinely anointed king, served by a divinely anointed priest, and inspired by a prophet who spoke by the Holy Spirit may be summarized as God’s desire to reveal Himself to the world through this living body that progressed through time and over many generations.”
- (The Incarnation) is actually a commencement of a post historic era, the history of eternal salvation, the history of divine joy which will be poured out on Earth and will never be taken away from the human heart.”

- “The newborn Christ in the manger reveals to us the other face of the Kingdom and how it is in that great simplicity and humility and in supreme divine kindness, salvation was to be worked out in that Kingdom.
- “”Because Christ united in Himself the will of the Father with the will of humankind and made of them His own single will, He was able to grant us the great grace by which we become able to fulfill the will of God in our life on Earth, and receive constantly in the depth of our hearts, through the mystery of the Body and Blood, and according to the extent to which we pray, the Kingdom of God that we are always praying to come.”

- “By His submission, which supersedes all the logic of priesthood, Christ established a righteousness ...on which a successful ministry must be based, ‘the bowed head.’”
- “Repentance (is) as a complete way of life, life with God.”
- “The soul that does not practice inner change through a repentance built on contrition before God cannot enter into grace or perceive it.”

- “It is no business of ours to justify the ungodly, for we cannot.”
- “If we are in Christ, no matter how much we suffer, and no matter how severe our pain, our suffering is in no way related to whether we deserve that pain, Suffering is no longer a penalty for anything, nor is it a means of atoning for anything, or a punishment for suffering...Christ eliminated sin after paying its penalty, atoning for it, and bearing its punishment. It is now...as if man suffers for no reason; this is the type of suffering Christ bore!”

- “The Holy Spirit abides within us by virtue of the Sacrament according to our faith and doctrine; we are commanded by God in the Gospel to be filled with the Spirit in deed.”
- “Union is not an emotional surrender but rather an ascent free of personal feelings, an ascent which one does not accomplish by oneself...The road to union with God is not a one-way street ending solely in God; on the return journey it leads back to one’s neighbor, the stranger, one’s enemy, and toward all creation...This road that leads to God and from Him is found within man.”



Panagia of Mt. Athos

- “The power given by the Lord to His seventy disciples is given to all Christians. (Mk 16:17) Use, it Christians! With the name of Jesus cut off ...the first appearances of sin in ... thoughts, fancies, and feelings. Destroy within you the devil’s rule over you; destroy all his influence over you; acquire spiritual freedom. The foundation for your struggle is the grace of Holy Baptism; your weapon is prayer in the name of Jesus.”

Ignatius Brianchaninov



- “I must not attempt to control God’s actions. I must not count the stages in the journey He would have me make. I must not desire a clear perception of my advance along the road; nor know precisely where I am on the way to holiness. I ask Him to make a saint of me; yet I must leave to Him the choice of the means which lead to it.”

Mother Teresa of Calcutta



Kyriakion at Esfigmenou Monastery  
<http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/Athos/>

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