

## ST. THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE [1815 – 1894]

Born central Russia, studied at the Kiev Theological Academy. He took monastic vows, at the Kiev Caves Lavra (monastery). Spent years abroad in Jerusalem, Constantinople, Mount Athos. He was appointed dean of the Theological Academy of St. Petersburg; then Bishop. After seven years he resigned and retired to a monastery where he spent his remaining 28 years in prayer and silence. He read and replied to many letters every day. These were collected and published. Quotations from *The Art of Prayer, an Orthodox Anthology*, compiled by Igumen Charlton of Valamo (London 1966). *Italics mine LH.*

### PRAYER IN THE HEART

“In order to keep the mind on one thing by means of a short prayer, it is necessary to preserve attention and so lead it into the heart; for so long as the mind remains in the head, where thoughts jostle one another, it has no time to concentrate on one thing. But *when attention descends into the heart, it attracts all the powers of the soul and body into one point there.* This concentration of all human life in one place is immediately reflected in the heart by a special sensation that is the beginning of future warmth.

The question now arises whether this warmth is spiritual. No, it is *not* spiritual. It is ordinary physical warmth. But since it keeps the attention of the mind in the heart, and thus helps the development there of the spiritual movements described earlier, it is called spiritual – provided however, that it is not accompanied by sensual pleasure, however slight, but keeps the soul and body in sober mood.” 94 – 95

“*Mistakes occur chiefly from the attention being in the head and not in the heart.* He who keeps his attention in the heart is safe. Safer still is he who at all times clings to God in contrition, and prays to be delivered from illusion.” 97

“*The most important thing in prayer is to stand before the Lord in reverence and fear, with the mind in the heart* 128

### THE JESUS PRAYER

“Stand with the mind in the heart before the Lord and pray to Him: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me.'” 113

“One can recite the Jesus Prayer *with the mind in the heart* without movement of the tongue. This is better than oral prayer. Use oral prayer as a support to inner prayer. Sometimes it is required to strengthen inner prayer.” 100

“Hold *no intermediate image* between the mind and the Lord when practising the Jesus Prayer. The words pronounced are merely a help, and are not essential. The principal thing is to *stand before the Lord with the mind in the heart.*” 100

“If you truly wish to put your thoughts to shame, to be serenely silent, and to live in the effortless enjoyment of a sober and quiet heart, *let the Jesus Prayer cleave to your breathing,* and in a few days you will see all this realized.” 103

“There is a technique suggested by one of the early Fathers, *rhythmic breathing in time with the Jesus Prayer* in place of the use of a rosary.” 103

“The Jesus Prayer is not some talisman. Its power comes from faith in the Lord, and from a deep union of the mind and heart with Him. With such a disposition, the invocation of the Lord's Name becomes very effective in many ways. But a mere repetition of the words does not signify anything.” 99

“... thoughts continue to jostle in your head like mosquitoes. To stop this jostling, you must *bind the mind with one thought*, or the thought of One only. An aid to this is *a short prayer*, which helps the mind to become simple and united.” 97

### BRING YOUR THOUGHTS BACK

“Make yourself a rule always to be with the Lord, keeping your mind in the heart, and do not let your thoughts wander; *as often as they stray, turn them back again and keep them at home in the closet of your heart*, and delight in converse with the Lord.” 119

### BEWARE

“For yourself, act always in great humility and with the utmost simplicity, not ascribing any success to yourself. Know that true success is achieved within, unconsciously, and happens as imperceptibly as the growth of the human body. Therefore when you hear an inner voice saying 'Ah! Here it is!' you should realize that this is the voice of the enemy, showing you a mirage rather than the reality. This is the beginning of self-deception.” 116

“Every struggle in the soul's training, whether physical or mental, that is not accompanied by suffering, that does not require the utmost effort, will not bear fruit.” 117

“Prayer according to the rule is one thing, and this state of prayer is another. The way to it is to attain the habit of the constant remembrance of God, of the last hour and the judgement that follows it. Accustom yourself to this, and all will go well.” 122

“Beware lest in ceaselessly remembering God you forget also to kindle fear, and awe, and the desire to fall down as dust before the face of God – our most merciful Father, but also our dread Judge. Frequent recollection of God without reverence blunts the feeling of the fear of God, and thereby deprives us of the saving influence which this sense of fear – and it alone – can produce in our spiritual life.” 123

### EXPECT TROUBLE IN LIFE

“Make the following a rule – first of all, anticipate trouble at every moment and when it comes encounter it as something expected. Secondly, when something happens that conflicts with your will and is on the point of irritating or upsetting you, *hasten to bring your attention into your heart* and strive with all you might to prevent such feelings from arising: steel yourself against them and pray. If you succeed in preventing feelings of irritation and disturbance from arising within you, then you are finished with your trouble, for these feelings are its starting point....

In the third place, put out of your mind all expectations that the nature of things will change, and resign yourself to life-long friction.” 228 - 229