

The Purpose of the Christian Life is the Acquisition of the Holy Spirit*

May this truly compunction-evoking Divine Liturgy give us strength! Glorified be the Name of our Lord. I thank our Lord, the *Panagia*, and the Holy Angels, who granted us such great spiritual joy, here, in their Church. May the blessing of our *Patera* [Metropolitan Cyprian] be with you in this New Year of 2008, and may St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Sylvester, and all of the Saints of the day be our companions in our struggles and our great journey.



On the occasion of the commemoration of St. Seraphim of Sarov, it would perhaps not be wearisome to discuss, in a few words, the central message drawn from the life and teaching of this great contemporary Saint, who is among the three leading Saints of Russian Orthodoxy. The first, as you know, is St. Theodosios of Kiev; the second, St. Sergey of Radonezh; and the third, St. Seraphim of Sarov.

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As you may recall, St. Seraphim taught—and not only taught, but first and foremost *put into practice* this great message, which is ever living and timely for our Church, and for the world in general—that the *purpose of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit*.

Within these few words are hidden our entire struggle and yearning as monastics—all of our sighs and toils. Herein is hidden that great leap that a monastic makes, by the Grace of God—and perhaps, at times, without being fully aware of it—when he or she is suddenly mystically transported, by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, from one side of the world to the other. To the side, that is, of the monastic life, which is antipodal to the world.

The world and monasticism are two incompatible regions. By

“world,” we mean a mindset in which one does not live in Christ, does not live according to God, and has other goals and objectives.

A monastic makes this tremendous leap and finds himself on the other side without himself being conscious how this leap came about in the first place. Another world opens before him—a completely different life and entirely different mentality. And it is truly shameful when a monastic, forgetting why he made the leap, brings the world with him to the other side. He should have left the world, as a mentality and mindset, on the other side, without giving it any thought whatsoever.

For this reason, we must place anew all of our thoughts, words, and actions within the context of St. Seraphim’s so very significant saying: “The purpose of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit”; we must intensely make our own the well-known prayer of the Church to the Holy Comforter.

This is not an individualistic prayer. It is not simply somebody’s invention. It is a prayer of the Church. Daily—and not just once, but repeatedly—, we pray: “Heavenly King... come and dwell in us.” I do not know to what extent we fathom the meaning of the words “come and dwell in us.” Herein is hidden the full meaning of St. Seraphim of Sarov’s saying.

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When we say: “O Comforter, come and dwell in us,” if we open the ears of our soul, we will hear the Holy Spirit answering us: “I will come and dwell in you if you first clear the terrain, that I might be able to dwell within you.”

“Come and dwell in us”!

I will not come if you do not demolish the wall of your pride and your egotism, self-centeredness, self-satisfaction, self-praise, your pre-occupation with your appearance, your desire to be pleasing to others, your self-complacency, and all of the types, kinds, and expressions of this tremendous passion of pride, from which we all, to a greater or lesser extent, suffer.

“Divine Comforter, come and dwell in us”!

I will not come to dwell in you if you do not knock down the wall separating you from your brother. For you do not have love for your brother: love, not with words alone, but first and foremost with deeds and with sentiments of love.

“Come and dwell in us”!

I will not come if you do not open your heart and do not include therein not only those whom you know and love, but all of mankind, living and dead, enemies and friends, insignificant and important, believers and unbelievers, and all those known and unknown to you.

“O Comforter, come and dwell in us”!

I will not come to dwell in your heart, if you do not take the leap and make the great sacrifice of crucifying yourself for the sake of your brother, just as He, the Son of God, was crucified for you.

“Come and dwell in us”!

I will not come to dwell in you if you do not take upon yourself the sins of your brother, without ever judging or condemning him, while bearing the responsibility for his sins before God and repenting for him, for his sake and for Christ’s sake, just as He was crucified for your sake.

“Divine Comforter, come and dwell in us”!

I will not come to dwell in you, in your hearts, if you do not acquire a pure heart, free not only from various carnal movements, feelings, or thoughts, but one that has been purified so thoroughly and minutely that the only pure, only virgin Christ, your Bridegroom, might be able to dwell therein.

“Divine Comforter, come and dwell in us”!

I will not come to dwell in you if you—at least you, monastics—do not acquire humility, love, purity, unquestioning obedience to your Elder or Eldress, sacrificial love for your brother, and a decisive and brave mindset, by which you may bar from your heart even the slightest stain or hint of a thought against your brother. For purity is not a condition of the heart wherein it is merely freed from carnality, but also from every passion that defiles your soul and renders it a place into which I cannot enter and grant you My Grace.

“Divine Comforter,”—I will close with this, so as not to weary you. I believe all of this is well known to you; I am simply reminding you of it, and beg your forgiveness— *“Divine Comforter, come and dwell in us”!*

I will not come to dwell in you until you resolve to become intoxicated with the spiritual inebriation of love for the Bridegroom, Christ: with love for Christ and the Father and the Holy Spirit. A sober inebri-

ation that does not cause confusion or agitation, containing nothing carnal therein—an inebriation that inflames one’s being and renders it a fiery throne of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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May these humble thoughts, offered somewhat extemporaneously, ignite a more profound self-examination; for we must finally make resolutions in order to become true monastics. We are true monastics, by the Grace of God, and not simply in appearance, when the Holy Spirit will have come to dwell in us. Then we will be able to talk about monasticism and the Grace of God. Angels will be a light for us, and we, humble and unworthy monastics, will be the earthly vessels in which the Holy Spirit comes to dwell. We will become the light of the world. Angels are the light for monastics, and the monastic life is the light for those in the world.

Hence, through the prayers of our *Patera*, with the help of our *Panagia*, through the intercession of our saintly Eldress, Mother Kypriane, with the protection of the Holy Angels and the aid of St. Seraphim of Sarov, let us make it our objective to acquire the Grace of the Holy Spirit, to become intoxicated with the inebriation of the Holy Spirit. Then, indeed, we will be able to speak about a genuine monasticism—that we are, at least, on the right path to the Kingdom of Heaven, by means of repentance, purification, and enlightenment, to the glory of God.

May our *Panagia* be with you!



* Homily delivered at the *Agrypnia* to St. Seraphim of Sarov, January 2, 2008 (Old Style), at the Convent of the Holy Angels, Aphidnai, Attica.