LIFE FOR GOD

On the Purpose of the Christian Life

Seraphim of Sarov

Russian Spiritual Classics

A conversation recorded by Nikolai Motovilov

1831 · 1903



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About this edition

The complete conversation recorded by Nikolai Motovilov. A new English translation from Russian.

Seraphim of Sarov (1754–1833). Recorded by Nikolai Alexandrovich Motovilov (1809–1879), published by Sergei Nilus in 1903. Independent English translation and editorial notes prepared for Life for God with AI assistance, 2026.

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This is a reading edition, not a critical edition; a full facsimile collation has not been undertaken. Theological judgments and testimonies are preserved as part of the historical text. Section headings, paragraph numbers, and all notes are editorial. Biblical paraphrases are retained rather than replaced with verbatim quotations; significant discrepancies are explained.

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Contents

About this edition 2
Sources 2
Contents 3
The Question of Life’s Purpose 4
Acquiring the Spirit and Doing Good 7
Prayer and Spiritual Gain 11
Recognizing the Working of the Spirit 17
The Breath of Life and the History of Salvation 19
Grace, Repentance, and Light 25
Light, Peace, and Joy 31
A Heart Open to God 38
Notes 43

The Question of Life’s Purpose

1 It was a Thursday. The day was overcast. About a quarter of an arshin of snow lay on the ground, and fairly thick snow pellets were falling from above when Father Seraphim began to speak with me in his little clearing near his nearby hermitage, opposite the Sarovka River, beside the hill that comes close to its banks. [1] [2]

2 He seated me on the stump of a tree he had just cut down, and squatted opposite me.

3 “The Lord has revealed to me,” said the great elder, “that in your childhood you earnestly wished to know what the purpose of our Christian life is, and that you repeatedly asked many distinguished spiritual persons about it.”

4 I must say here that this thought had troubled me persistently from the age of twelve. I really had approached many members of the clergy with this question, but their answers had not satisfied me. The elder knew nothing of this. “Yet no one,” Father Seraphim continued, “gave you a definite answer. They told you: go to church, pray to God, keep God’s commandments, do good—and there you have the purpose of the Christian life.

5 “Some were even indignant with you for occupying yourself with curiosity that was not pleasing to God, and told you not to inquire into things beyond you. But they did not speak as they should have. Now I, poor Seraphim, shall explain to you what this purpose really is.

6 “Prayer, fasting, keeping vigil, and every other Christian activity, however good they are in themselves, do not constitute the purpose of our Christian life merely by being

performed, although they serve as necessary means of attaining it. The true purpose of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. Fasting, keeping vigil, prayer, almsgiving, and every good deed performed for Christ's sake are means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. [3]

7 "Notice, my dear, that only a good deed done for Christ's sake brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Everything done without being done for Christ's sake, even if it is good, provides us with no reward in the life of the age to come, nor does it give us God's grace in this life. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ said: 'Whoever does not gather with Me scatters.' A good deed can only be called a gathering, because even if it is not done for Christ's sake, it is nevertheless good.

8 "Scripture says: 'In every nation, whoever fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him.' As we see from the course of the sacred narrative, this person who 'does what is right' is so acceptable to God that an angel of the Lord appeared to Cornelius, the centurion who feared God and did what was right, while he was praying, and said: 'Send to Joppa, to Simon the tanner. There you will find Peter, and he will speak to you the words of eternal life, through which you and your whole household will be saved.'

9 "Thus the Lord employs all His divine means to give such a person the opportunity not to lose the reward for his good deeds in the life of regeneration. But for this one must begin here with right faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came into the world to save sinners. Through our acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit, He brings the Kingdom of God into our hearts and opens the way for us to attain the blessedness of the life of the age to come.

10 “Yet this is the limit of the acceptability to God of good deeds done without being done for Christ’s sake: the Creator provides the means of bringing this about. It remains for the person to make use of them or not. That is why the Lord said to the Jews: ‘If you had not seen, you would have had no sin. But now you say, “We see,” and your sin remains upon you.’

11 “If, like Cornelius, a person takes advantage of the fact that his deed, though not done for Christ’s sake, is acceptable to God, and believes in His Son, such a deed will be reckoned to him as though it had been done for Christ’s sake, solely because of his faith in Him. Otherwise, a person has no right to complain that his goodness has come to nothing.

12 “This can never happen when some good is done for Christ’s sake. Good done for Him not only obtains a crown of righteousness in the life of the age to come, but even in this life fills a person with the grace of the Holy Spirit. And this is without measure, as it is said: ‘God does not give the Holy Spirit by measure. For the Father loves the Son, and gives all things into His hand.’ That is how it is, my God-loving friend. [4]

13 “So the true purpose of our Christian life consists in acquiring this very Spirit of God. Prayer, keeping vigil, fasting, almsgiving, and the other virtues practiced for Christ’s sake are only the means of acquiring the Spirit of God.”

Acquiring the Spirit and Doing Good

1 “What do you mean by acquisition?” I asked Father Seraphim. “I do not quite understand.” “Acquisition means obtaining something,” he answered me. “You understand what acquiring money means, do you not? It is the same with acquiring the Spirit of God. Surely you understand, my God-loving friend, what acquisition means in the worldly sense. The purpose of ordinary people’s worldly life is the acquisition, or accumulation, of money; for the nobility, there is also the obtaining of honors, distinctions, and other rewards for service to the state.

2 “The acquisition of the Spirit of God is also capital, but capital of grace and eternity. Like monetary, official, and temporal capital, it is obtained by the same kinds of means, which closely resemble one another. God the Word, our Lord and God-man Jesus Christ, likens our life to a marketplace. He calls the business of our life on earth trading, and says to us all: ‘Trade until I come, redeeming the time, for the days are evil.’ That is, make good use of time to obtain heavenly goods through earthly merchandise.

3 “Earthly merchandise means the virtues practiced for Christ’s sake, which bring us the grace of the All-Holy Spirit. In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, when the foolish lacked oil, it was said to them: ‘Go and buy it in the marketplace.’ But when they had bought it, the doors of the wedding chamber were already shut, and they could not enter. Some say that the foolish virgins’ lack of oil signifies their lack of good deeds during their lives. This understanding is not entirely correct.

4 “How could they have lacked good deeds when, though called foolish, they are nevertheless called virgins? Virginity is a most exalted virtue, a condition equal to that of the angels, and could in itself serve in place of all other virtues. I, poor as I am, think that what they lacked was precisely the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God. In practicing virtues, these virgins, in their spiritual lack of understanding, supposed that the whole business of Christianity consisted merely in performing virtuous deeds.

5 “‘We have performed a virtue,’ they thought, ‘and thereby have done God’s work.’ Whether they had received the grace of the Spirit of God, whether they had attained it, did not concern them. It is of this way of life, which relies only on the practice of virtues without carefully examining whether, and to what extent, it brings the grace of the Spirit of God, that the books of the Fathers say: ‘There is a way that seems good at the beginning, but its ends lead to the depths of hell.’

6 “Anthony the Great, in his letters to monks, says of such virgins: ‘Many monks and virgins have no understanding of the differences between the wills acting in a person. They do not know that three wills act within us: first, God’s will, perfect in every way and entirely directed to salvation; second, our own human will, which, though it may not be destructive, is not saving either; and third, the demonic will, which is wholly destructive. [5]

7 “‘This third, hostile will teaches a person either to practice no virtues at all, or to practice them out of vanity or simply for goodness itself, rather than for Christ’s sake. The second, our own will, teaches us to do everything to gratify our desires, or, as the enemy also teaches, to do good for goodness’ sake without attending to the grace obtained through it.

8 “‘The first will, God’s will that leads wholly to salvation, consists solely in doing good for the acquisition of the Holy Spirit as an eternal, inexhaustible treasure, whose full worth nothing can adequately measure.’ This acquisition of the Holy Spirit is properly called the oil that the foolish virgins lacked.

9 “They are called foolish precisely because they forgot the necessary fruit of virtue, the grace of the Holy Spirit, without which no one has salvation, nor can have it. For ‘by the Holy Spirit every soul is given life, is exalted through purity, and is illumined by the unity of the Trinity in sacred mystery.’

10 “The Holy Spirit Himself takes up His dwelling in our souls. This indwelling in our souls of Him, the Almighty, and the abiding of His Trinitarian Unity with our spirit, are granted to us only through our utmost effort to acquire the Holy Spirit. This prepares in our soul and body a throne for God’s all-creating presence with our spirit, according to God’s unalterable word: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’

11 “This is the oil in the lamps of the wise virgins, which could burn brightly and continually, and with those burning lamps the virgins could await the Bridegroom when He came at midnight and enter with Him into the chamber of joy. The foolish virgins, seeing that their lamps were going out, went to the marketplace to buy oil, but did not manage to return in time, for the doors had already been shut.

12 “The marketplace is our life; the closed doors of the wedding chamber, which barred access to the Bridegroom, are human death; the wise and foolish virgins are Christian souls. The oil is not deeds, but the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God received through them. This transforms our being from one condition into another: from corruption into

incorruption, from the soul’s death into spiritual life, from darkness into light, from the cave of our being, where passions are tethered like cattle and wild beasts, into a temple of the Godhead, into a radiant chamber of everlasting rejoicing in Christ Jesus, our Lord, Creator, Redeemer, and the eternal Bridegroom of our souls.

13 “How great is God’s compassion for our misery—that is, our heedlessness of His care for us—when He says: ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock,’ meaning by the door the course of our life, not yet closed by death! Oh, how I wish, my God-loving friend, that in this earthly life you might always be in the Spirit of God. ‘In whatever state I find you, in that state shall I judge you,’ says the Lord. Woe, great woe, if He finds us weighed down by worldly cares and sorrows! For who can endure His wrath, and who can stand before the face of His anger? [6]

Prayer and Spiritual Gain

1 “That is why it is said: ‘Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation’—that is, that you may not lose the Spirit of God, for vigilance and prayer bring us His grace. Of course, every virtue practiced for Christ’s sake gives the grace of the Holy Spirit. But prayer gives it above all, because it is, as it were, always in our hands as a weapon for acquiring the grace of the Spirit.

2 “You might, for example, wish to go to church, but either there is no church or the service is over. You might wish to give to a poor person, but either there is no poor person or you have nothing to give. You might wish to preserve virginity, but lack the strength to accomplish it because of your constitution or because of the force of the enemy’s wiles, which in your human weakness you cannot withstand. You might wish to practice some other virtue for Christ’s sake, but again lack the strength or find no opportunity.

3 “But none of this applies to prayer. There is an opportunity for everyone to pray at all times: rich and poor, noble and ordinary, strong and weak, healthy and sick, righteous and sinful alike.

4 “Judge how great is the power of prayer, even in a sinful person, when it rises from the whole soul, from the following example in Holy Tradition. A desperate mother had lost her only son, whom death had snatched away. At her request, a prostitute whom she met on the road, not yet cleansed even of the sin she had just committed, was moved by the mother’s desperate grief and cried to the Lord: ‘Not for my sake, a wretched sinner, but for the tears of this mother who mourns

her son and firmly trusts in Your mercy and almighty power, O Christ our God, raise him up.

5 "'Lord, raise up her son.' And the Lord raised him. Such, my God-loving friend, is the great power of prayer. It brings the Spirit of God more than anything else, and it is the easiest practice for everyone to undertake. 'Blessed shall we be if the Lord God finds us watchful, in the fullness of the gifts of His Holy Spirit. Then we may confidently hope to be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, as He comes with glory and great power to judge the living and the dead and to repay each according to his deeds.'

6 "Now, my God-loving friend, you consider it a great happiness to speak with poor Seraphim, being assured that he too is not without the Lord's grace. What, then, shall we say of the Lord Himself, the ever-inexhaustible source of every heavenly and earthly blessing? In prayer we are counted worthy to converse with Him Himself, our all-good and life-giving God and Savior. Yet even here we must pray only until God the Holy Spirit descends upon us in the measures of His heavenly grace known to Him.

7 "And when He is pleased to visit us, we must then cease praying. Why should we pray to Him, 'Come and dwell in us, cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One,' when He has already come to save us who hope in Him and call upon His holy name in truth—that is, in order to welcome Him, the Comforter, humbly and lovingly within the chambers of our souls, which hunger and thirst for His coming?

8 "I shall explain this to you, my God-loving friend, by an example. Suppose you invited me to visit you, and I came at your invitation and wished to talk with you. But you kept

inviting me: ‘Do come, please come to me.’ I should inevitably have to say: ‘Has he lost his mind? I have come to him, and he is still calling me.’ It is the same with the Lord God the Holy Spirit.

9 “That is why it is said: ‘Be still, and know that I am God; I shall be exalted among the nations, I shall be exalted upon the earth.’ That is, I shall reveal Myself, and shall continue to reveal Myself to everyone who believes in Me and calls upon Me. I shall converse with him, as once I conversed with Adam in Paradise, with Abraham and Jacob, and with My other servants, Moses, Job, and those like them. Many interpret this stillness as referring only to worldly affairs: during prayerful conversation with God one must cease from worldly business.

10 “But I tell you before God that, although one must indeed cease from worldly business during prayer, when through the almighty power of faith and prayer the Lord God the Holy Spirit is pleased to visit us and comes to us in the fullness of His ineffable goodness, we must cease from prayer as well. The soul speaks and is occupied with speech when it prays. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon it, one must be in complete silence, hearing distinctly and intelligibly all the words of eternal life that He then deigns to proclaim.

11 “At the same time, one must be fully watchful in soul and spirit and chaste in bodily purity. So it was at Mount Horeb, when the Israelites were told not to approach even their wives for three days before God’s appearance on Sinai. For our God is ‘a fire consuming all that is unclean,’ and no one defiled in flesh and spirit can enter into communion with Him.”

12 “But, Father, what about the other virtues practiced for Christ’s sake to acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit? You have been speaking to me only about prayer.”

13 “Acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit through all the other virtues practiced for Christ’s sake as well. Trade spiritually with them; trade in those that bring you the greatest return.

14 “Accumulate capital from the abundant gifts of God’s grace. Deposit it in God’s eternal treasury at immaterial interest—not four or six per hundred, but a hundred for one spiritual ruble, and indeed countless times more than that. For example, if prayer and keeping vigil give you more of God’s grace, keep vigil and pray. If fasting gives much of the Spirit of God, fast. If almsgiving gives more, give alms. Reason in this way about every virtue practiced for Christ’s sake.

15 “I shall tell you something about myself, poor Seraphim. I come from a merchant family in Kursk. Before I entered the monastery, we used to trade in goods that gave us the most profit. You should do the same, my dear. Just as in commerce the point is not merely to trade, but to make the greatest profit, so in the business of Christian life the point is not merely to pray or to perform some other good deed.

16 “Although the Apostle says, ‘Pray without ceasing,’ he also adds, as you remember: ‘I would rather speak five words with understanding than thousands with my tongue.’ And the Lord says: ‘Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will be saved, but whoever does the will of My Father’—that is, whoever does God’s work, and does it reverently, for ‘cursed is everyone who does the Lord’s work negligently.’ And God’s work is this: ‘That you believe in God and in Jesus Christ whom He has sent.’

17 “If we consider the commandments of Christ and the Apostles correctly, our Christian task consists not in increasing the number of good deeds, which serve only as means to the purpose of our Christian life, but in drawing greater benefit from them: in acquiring still more abundantly the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

18 “How I wish, my God-loving friend, that you too might acquire this ever-inexhaustible source of God’s grace, and always examine whether or not you are in the Spirit of God. If you are in the Spirit, blessed be God! There is nothing to grieve about—you could go this very moment before Christ’s dread judgment. For ‘in whatever state I find you, in that state shall I judge you.’

19 “But if you are not, you must examine why, and for what reason, the Lord God the Holy Spirit has chosen to leave us. Seek Him again, search diligently, and do not give up until the Lord God the Holy Spirit whom you seek is found and is with us once more by His grace. We must attack the enemies who drive us away from Him until even their dust is scattered, as the prophet David said: ‘I shall pursue my enemies and overtake them, and shall not turn back until they are destroyed. I shall crush them, and they will be unable to stand; they will fall beneath my feet.’

20 “That is how it is, my dear. So trade spiritually in virtue. Distribute the gifts of the grace of the Holy Spirit to those in need, following the example of a lighted candle. It shines as it burns with earthly fire, and lights other candles to give light to everyone elsewhere without diminishing its own flame.

21 “If this is true of earthly fire, what shall we say of the fire of the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God? Earthly wealth, for example, diminishes when it is distributed. But the heavenly

wealth of God’s grace increases in the person who distributes it the more he gives it away. So the Lord Himself was pleased to say to the Samaritans: ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become within him a spring flowing continually into eternal life.’”

Recognizing the Working of the Spirit

1 “Father,” I said, “you keep speaking of acquiring the grace of the Holy Spirit as the purpose of the Christian life. But how and where can I see it? Good deeds are visible, but can the Holy Spirit be seen? How shall I know whether He is with me or not?”

2 “In our time,” the elder replied, “because of our almost universal coldness toward holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and our inattention to the workings of His divine providence for us and to human communion with God, we have reached a point where we may be said to have almost completely withdrawn from the truly Christian life.

3 “The words of Holy Scripture now seem strange to us when the Spirit of God says through Moses, ‘And Adam saw the Lord walking in Paradise,’ or when we read in the Apostle Paul, ‘We went into Achaia, and the Spirit of God did not go with us; we turned toward Macedonia, and the Spirit of God went with us.’ Elsewhere in Holy Scripture, too, it repeatedly speaks of God appearing to human beings. [7]

4 “So some people say, ‘These passages are incomprehensible. Could people really see God so plainly?’ Yet there is nothing incomprehensible here. This failure to understand has come about because we have departed from the simplicity of the original Christian knowledge, and under the pretext of enlightenment have entered such a darkness of ignorance that what now seems beyond our understanding was understood so clearly by the ancients that even in ordinary conversation the idea of God appearing among people did not seem strange to them.

[5] “Thus Job, when his friends reproached him for blaspheming God, answered them, ‘How can that be, when I feel the breath of the Almighty in my nostrils?’ That is, how can I blaspheme God when the Holy Spirit abides with me? If I were blaspheming God, the Holy Spirit would withdraw from me; yet here I am, feeling His breath in my nostrils. In exactly the same way it is said of Abraham and Jacob that they saw the Lord and conversed with Him, and Jacob even wrestled with Him.

[6] “Moses saw God, and all the people with him, when he was granted the tablets of the Law from God on Mount Sinai. A pillar of cloud and fire—or, what amounts to the same thing, the manifest grace of the Holy Spirit—guided God’s people in the wilderness. People saw God and the grace of His Holy Spirit not in sleep, not in dreams, and not in the frenzy of a disordered imagination, but truly, while awake.

[7] “We have become exceedingly inattentive to the work of our salvation, and as a result we also take many other words of Holy Scripture in a sense other than the one we should. This is all because we do not seek the grace of God, because the pride of our minds prevents us from allowing it to dwell in our souls, and because we therefore lack the true enlightenment from the Lord that is sent into the hearts of those who hunger and thirst with all their hearts for God’s righteousness.

The Breath of Life and the History of Salvation

1 “Many interpret the biblical words, ‘God breathed the breath of life into the face of Adam, the first-created man, whom He had made from the dust of the earth,’ to mean that until then Adam had neither a soul nor a human spirit, but was supposedly flesh alone, made from the dust of the earth. This interpretation is wrong, for God created Adam from the dust of the earth with the constitution of which our father the holy Apostle Paul affirms, ‘May your spirit, soul, and body be wholly perfect at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ [8]

2 “All three parts of our nature were created from the dust of the earth, and Adam was created not dead, but as an active living creature, like God’s other animate creatures living on earth.

3 “But here is the point: if the Lord God had not afterward breathed this breath of life into his face—that is, the grace of the Lord God the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father, rests in the Son, and is sent into the world for the Son’s sake—then, however perfectly Adam had been created above God’s other creatures as the crown of creation on earth, he would still have remained without the Holy Spirit within him, who raises him to a Godlike dignity. He would have resembled all the other creatures, which, although they have flesh, soul, and spirit, each according to its kind, do not have the Holy Spirit within them.

4 “But when the Lord God breathed the breath of life into Adam’s face, then, in the words of Moses, ‘Adam became a living soul’—that is, a soul entirely like God in all things, and, like Him, immortal forever and ever. Adam was created so

free from the action of any of the elements God had made that water could not drown him, fire could not burn him, the earth could not swallow him in its abysses, and the air could not harm him by any of its workings.

5 “Everything was subject to him as God’s beloved, as the king and master of creation. Everything delighted in him as the all-perfect crown of God’s creatures. Through this breath of life, breathed into Adam’s face from the all-creating mouth of God, the Creator of all and the Almighty, Adam became so wise that never from the beginning has there been, nor is there now, nor is there likely ever to be on earth a person wiser or more knowledgeable than he.

6 “When the Lord commanded him to give names to every creature, he gave each a name in his language that fully signified all the qualities, all the power, and all the properties it possessed through God’s gift bestowed upon it at its creation.

7 “It was through this gift of God’s supernatural grace, sent to him with the breath of life, that Adam could see and understand the Lord walking in Paradise, comprehend His words and the conversation of the holy angels, understand the language of all the beasts, birds, and creeping things living on earth, and grasp everything that is now hidden from us in our fallen and sinful condition but was so clear to Adam before his fall.

8 “The Lord God bestowed the same wisdom, power, omnipotence, and all the other good and holy qualities upon Eve, creating her not from the dust of the earth but from Adam’s rib in the Eden of delight, in the Paradise He had planted in the midst of the earth. So that they might readily and always sustain within themselves the immortal,

God-graced, and all-perfect properties of this breath of life, God planted the tree of life in the midst of Paradise, enclosing in its fruits the whole substance and fullness of the gifts of this divine breath of His.

9 “Had they not sinned, Adam and Eve themselves and all their descendants could always, by eating the fruit of the tree of life, have sustained within themselves the eternally life-giving power of God’s grace, the immortal and ever-youthful fullness of the strength of flesh, soul, and spirit, and the unceasing freedom from aging of their infinitely immortal and all-blessed state—a state that even our imagination can scarcely comprehend today.

10 “But when, by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—prematurely and against God’s commandment—they learned the difference between good and evil and became subject to all the calamities that followed their transgression of God’s commandment, they lost this priceless gift of the grace of the Spirit of God. Thus, until the very coming into the world of the God-man Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God ‘was not yet in the world, because Jesus was not yet glorified.’

11 “This does not mean, however, that the Spirit of God was entirely absent from the world. Rather, His presence was not as full as in Adam or in us Orthodox Christians, but manifested itself only from without, and the signs of His presence in the world were known to the human race. Thus, for example, after the fall Adam, and Eve together with him, were shown many mysteries relating to the future salvation of the human race.

12 “Even Cain, despite his wickedness and his crime, could readily understand the voice of God’s gracious, though

reproving, conversation with him. Noah conversed with God. Abraham saw God and His day and rejoiced. The grace of the Holy Spirit, working from without, was also reflected in all the Old Testament prophets and saints of Israel.

13 “Later, special prophetic schools were established among the Jews, where people were taught to recognize the signs of an appearance of God or of angels and to distinguish the workings of the Holy Spirit from ordinary occurrences in the natural course of earthly life without grace. Simeon the God-receiver, Joachim and Anna, the ancestors of God, and countless other servants of God experienced constant and varied divine manifestations while awake, voices of revelation confirmed by unmistakable miraculous events.

14 “The manifestation of the Spirit of God was at work among the pagans who did not know the true God, though not with the same power as among God’s people, because God found chosen people for Himself among them as well. Such, for instance, were the virgin prophetesses, the sibyls, who dedicated their virginity to a God unknown, yet still to God, the Creator of the universe, the Almighty and Ruler of the world, as even the pagans understood Him to be.

15 “The pagan philosophers, too, although they wandered in the darkness of ignorance of divine things, could, in seeking the truth beloved of God, partake of the Spirit of God through this very seeking that was pleasing to Him. For it is said, ‘The nations that do not know God do by nature the things of the law and accomplish what is pleasing to God.’ And the Lord so blesses truth that He Himself declares of it through the Holy Spirit, ‘Truth has sprung up from the earth, and righteousness has looked down from heaven.’ Thus, my God-loving friend, both among the holy Jewish people— [9]

16 “the people beloved of God—and among the pagans who did not know God, knowledge of God was nevertheless preserved: that is, my dear, a clear and intelligent understanding of how the Lord God the Holy Spirit works within a person, and precisely how, and by what outward and inward perceptions, one may be certain that it is the Lord God the Holy Spirit at work, and not a deception of the enemy. This is how things were from the fall of Adam until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world in the flesh.

17 “Without this perceptible understanding of the workings of the Holy Spirit, my God-loving friend, which was always preserved within the human race, people would have had no possibility at all of knowing with certainty whether the fruit of the Woman’s seed, promised to Adam and Eve and able to crush the serpent’s head, had come into the world.

18 “But consider Simeon the God-receiver. After the mystery of Christ’s ever-virginal conception and birth from the Most Pure Ever-Virgin Mary had been foretold to him in the sixty-fifth year of his life, he was preserved by the Holy Spirit and lived for three hundred years by the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God. Then, in the three hundred and sixty-fifth year of his life, he declared plainly in the Lord’s temple that through the gift of the Holy Spirit he had perceptibly recognized that this was the very One: Christ, the Savior of the world, whose supernatural conception and birth by the Holy Spirit an angel had foretold to him three hundred years before. [10]

19 “Likewise the holy prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, who had served the Lord God in His temple for eighty years from the beginning of her widowhood, and who was known through the special gifts of God’s grace as a

righteous widow and a pure servant of God, announced that this truly was the Messiah promised to the world: the true Christ, God and man, the King of Israel, who had come to save Adam and the human race.

20 “When He, our Lord Jesus Christ, willed to accomplish the whole work of salvation, after His resurrection He breathed upon the apostles, renewing the breath of life lost by Adam, and bestowed upon them that very grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God that Adam had possessed.

21 “But that was not all. He had also told them, ‘It is better for them that He should go to the Father; for if He does not go, the Spirit of God will not come into the world. But if He, Christ, goes to the Father, He will send Him into the world, and He, the Comforter, will guide them and all who follow their teaching into all truth, and will remind them of everything He said to them while He was still with them in the world.’ Here He had already promised them grace upon grace.

22 “And so, on the day of Pentecost, He solemnly sent down the Holy Spirit upon them in a mighty rushing breath, in the form of tongues of fire that rested upon each of them, entered into them, and filled them with the power of fiery divine grace, breathing like refreshing dew and working joyfully in the souls that partake of its power and workings.

Grace, Repentance, and Light

1 “When this very fire-breathing grace of the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon all of us who are faithful to Christ in the sacrament of Holy Baptism, it is sacredly sealed by chrismation upon the principal parts of our flesh appointed by the Holy Church, our flesh being the lifelong guardian of this grace. The words are spoken: ‘The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ [11]

2 “And upon what, my dear, my God-loving friend, do we poor people place our seals, if not upon vessels containing some treasure we prize highly? What could be higher than anything else in the world, and more precious than the gifts of the Holy Spirit sent down to us from above in the sacrament of Baptism? For this baptismal grace is so great, so necessary, and so life-giving to a person that it is not taken away even from a heretic until his very death—that is, until the term appointed from above by God’s providence for a person’s lifelong trial on earth: what he will prove fit for, and what he will be able to accomplish during this God-given time through the power of grace bestowed upon him from above.

3 “If we never sinned after our Baptism, we would remain forever holy, blameless, and free from every defilement of flesh and spirit, people pleasing to God. But our misfortune is precisely that, as we advance in age, we do not advance in grace and in the knowledge of God as our Lord Jesus Christ did. On the contrary, becoming corrupted little by little, we deprive ourselves of the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God and become sinful, and deeply sinful, in many different degrees.

4 “But when someone is stirred by the wisdom of God, which seeks our salvation and passes through all things, and resolves for its sake to rise early toward God and keep vigil to obtain his eternal salvation, then, obedient to its voice, he must turn to true repentance for all his sins and practice virtues opposed to the sins he has committed. Through virtues performed for Christ’s sake, he must acquire the Holy Spirit, who works within us and establishes the Kingdom of God within us.

5 “The word of God does not say without reason, ‘The Kingdom of God is within you, and it is taken by force, and those who exert themselves seize it.’ That is, those people who, despite the bonds of sin that bind them and whose violence and incitement to fresh sins hold them back, can come to Him, our Savior, in complete repentance to plead their cause with Him, disregarding all the strength of these sinful bonds and forcing themselves to break them—such people afterward truly appear before the face of God, made whiter than snow by His grace.

6 “‘Come,’ says the Lord, ‘and though your sins be like scarlet, I will make them white as snow.’

7 “Thus the holy seer of mysteries, John the Theologian, once saw such people in white garments—that is, garments of justification—with ‘palm branches in their hands’ as a sign of victory. They sang to God the wondrous song ‘Alleluia.’ ‘No one could imitate the beauty of their singing.’

8 “Of them the angel of God said, ‘These are they who have come out of great tribulation, who have washed their robes and made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb.’ They washed them through sufferings and made them white by partaking of the Most Pure and Life-giving Mysteries of the

Flesh and Blood of the spotless and most pure Lamb, Christ, slain by His own will before all ages for the salvation of the world; always, and to this day, sacrificed and broken, yet never consumed, given to us for our eternal and unfailing salvation, as provision for eternal life, for a favorable answer at His dread judgment, and as a most precious replacement, surpassing all understanding, for that fruit of the tree of life of which the enemy of humanity, the morning star fallen from heaven, had sought to deprive our human race. [12] [13]

9 "Although the enemy, the devil, deceived Eve, and Adam fell with her, the Lord not only gave them a Redeemer in the fruit of the Woman's seed, who trampled down death by death, but also gave all of us, in the Woman, the Ever-Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, who crushed the serpent's head within herself and crushes it throughout the human race, an unceasing intercessor before her Son and our God, an unfailing and invincible advocate even for the most desperate sinners.

10 "For this very reason the Mother of God is called 'the scourge of demons,' for a demon cannot destroy a person so long as that person does not cease to seek the help of the Mother of God.

11 "Furthermore, my God-loving friend, I, poor Seraphim, must explain the difference between the workings of the Holy Spirit, who mystically dwells in the hearts of those who believe in our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, and the workings of sinful darkness, which steals its way into us through demonic prompting and provocation. [14]

12 "The Spirit of God reminds us of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and works in unity with Him, always with solemn majesty, filling our hearts with joy and directing our feet onto

the path of peace. The deceitful, demonic spirit, on the other hand, thinks in opposition to Christ, and its workings within us are turbulent, perverse, and filled with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.’

13 “One who has the grace of the Holy Spirit through right faith in Christ, even if through human weakness he should die spiritually through some sin, will nevertheless not die forever, but will be raised by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who takes away the sins of the world and freely gives grace upon grace. It is of this grace, revealed to the whole world and to our human race in the God-man, that the Gospel says, ‘In Him was life, and the life was the light of human beings,’ adding, ‘The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.’

14 “This means that the grace of the Holy Spirit, given in Baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, despite human falls into sin, despite the darkness surrounding our soul, still shines in the heart with the divine light, present from the beginning, of Christ’s priceless merits.

15 “When the sinner remains unrepentant, this light of Christ says to the Father, ‘Abba, Father! Do not be angry to the end with this lack of repentance!’ Then, when the sinner turns to the path of repentance, it completely effaces even the traces of the offenses committed, clothing the former offender once again in a garment of incorruption woven from the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is of acquiring this grace as the purpose of the Christian life that I have been speaking to you, my God-loving friend, for so long.

16 “I will tell you more, so that you may understand still more clearly what is meant by God’s grace, how to recognize it, and how its working is especially manifested in those whom it enlightens. The grace of the Holy Spirit is the light that enlightens a person. All Holy Scripture speaks of this. Thus David, the ancestor of God, said, ‘Your law is a lamp to my feet and a light to my paths; and had Your law not been my instruction, I would have perished in my affliction.’

17 “That is, the grace of the Holy Spirit, expressed in the Law through the words of the Lord’s commandments, is my lamp and my light. If this grace of the Holy Spirit—which I acquire so carefully and diligently that seven times a day I meditate upon the judgments of Your righteousness—did not enlighten me amid the darkness of the cares attached to the great calling of my royal office, where could I find even a spark of light to illuminate my way along the road of life, darkened by the ill will of my enemies?

18 “And indeed, the Lord has repeatedly manifested before many witnesses the working of the grace of the Holy Spirit upon those whom He sanctified and enlightened through His great visitations. Remember Moses after his conversation with God on Mount Sinai. People could not look at him, so brightly did the extraordinary light surrounding his face shine. He was even compelled to appear before the people only with a veil over his face. Remember the Lord’s Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

19 “A great light surrounded Him, and ‘His garments shone like snow, and His disciples fell face down in fear.’ When Moses and Elijah appeared to Him in that same light, in order to conceal the radiance of the light of divine grace that was dazzling the disciples’ eyes, ‘a cloud,’ it says, ‘overshadowed them.’ In this way the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God

appears in ineffable light to all those to whom God reveals its working.”

Light, Peace, and Joy

1 “How, then,” I asked Father Seraphim, “am I to know that I am in the grace of the Holy Spirit?”

2 “It is very simple, my God-loving friend,” he answered me. “That is why the Lord says, ‘All things are plain to those who find understanding.’ Our whole trouble is that we ourselves do not have this divine understanding, which does not puff up or make arrogant, for it is not of this world. This understanding, filled with love for God and one’s neighbor, builds up every person toward salvation. Of this understanding the Lord said, ‘God desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.’

3 “To His apostles He said, concerning their lack of this understanding, ‘Are you also without understanding? Have you not read the Scriptures? Do you not understand this parable?’ Again, concerning this understanding, the Gospel says of the apostles that ‘the Lord then opened their understanding to comprehend the Scriptures.’ Possessing this understanding, the apostles always saw whether the Spirit of God was abiding in them or not. Filled with it, and seeing that the Spirit of God was present with them, they declared with certainty that their work was holy and entirely pleasing to the Lord God.

4 “This explains why they wrote in their epistles, ‘It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.’ Only on these grounds did they offer their epistles as unalterable truth for the benefit of all the faithful: the holy apostles were thus perceptibly conscious of the presence of the Spirit of God within themselves… So, my God-loving friend, you see how simple it is.”

5 I replied, “Still, I do not understand how I can be firmly certain that I am in the Spirit of God. How can I recognize within myself His true manifestation?”

6 Father Seraphim answered:

7 “I have already told you, my God-loving friend, that it is very simple, and have explained to you in detail how people come to be in the Spirit of God and how we should understand His manifestation within us… What more do you need, my dear?”

8 “I need,” I said, “to understand it properly.”

9 Then Father Seraphim took me very firmly by the shoulders and said to me:

10 “We are both now in the Spirit of God, my dear, you and I. Why do you not look at me?” I answered:

11 “I cannot look, Father, because lightning is pouring from your eyes. Your face has become brighter than the sun, and my eyes ache with pain.”

12 Father Seraphim said:

13 “Do not be afraid, my God-loving friend. You yourself have now become as radiant as I am. You yourself are now in the fullness of the Spirit of God; otherwise you could not see me as I am.”

14 And, inclining his head toward me, he said quietly in my ear:

15 “Thank the Lord God for His ineffable mercy toward you. You saw that I did not even make the sign of the cross, but only prayed inwardly to the Lord God in my heart and said within myself, ‘Lord, grant him to see clearly, with bodily eyes, that descent of Your Spirit which You grant to Your

servants when You are pleased to appear in the light of Your magnificent glory.’

16 “And see, my dear, the Lord instantly fulfilled the humble request of poor Seraphim… How can we not thank Him for this ineffable gift to us both? The Lord God does not always show His mercy in this way even to great hermits, my dear. This grace of God has been pleased to comfort your contrite heart like a mother who loves her child, through the intercession of the Mother of God herself… Why, my dear, do you not look into my eyes? Look simply, and do not be afraid: the Lord is with us.”

17 After these words I looked into his face, and an even greater reverent awe came over me. Imagine, in the midst of the sun, in the most brilliant brightness of its midday rays, the face of a person speaking to you. [15]

18 You see the movement of his lips, the changing expression of his eyes, hear his voice, and feel that someone is holding you by the shoulders with his hands. Yet not only do you not see those hands: you see neither yourself nor his figure, but only a dazzling light, spreading far around for several sazhen and illuminating with its bright radiance both the snowy covering of the clearing and the snow pellets falling from above upon me and upon the great elder.

19 Can one possibly imagine the state I was in at that moment? “What do you feel now?” Father Seraphim asked me.

20 “Extraordinarily well,” I said. “But in what way well? What exactly?” I answered:

21 “I feel such stillness and peace in my soul that I cannot express it in any words.” “This, my God-loving friend, is the peace of which the Lord told His disciples, ‘My peace I give

you; not as the world gives do I give to you. For if you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you. Nevertheless, take courage, for I have overcome the world.’

22 “To these very people, hated by this world but chosen by the Lord, the Lord gives the peace you now feel within yourself: the peace that, in the apostle’s words, ‘surpasses all understanding.’ The apostle calls it this because no words can express the well-being of soul it produces in those into whose hearts the Lord God plants it.

23 “Christ the Savior calls it a peace from His own bounty, and not from this world, for no temporary earthly prosperity can give it to the human heart. It is bestowed from above by the Lord God Himself, and that is why it is called the peace of God…”

24 “What else do you feel?” Father Seraphim asked me.

25 “An extraordinary sweetness,” I answered. And he continued:

26 “This is the sweetness of which Holy Scripture says, ‘They shall be filled with the abundance of Your house, and You will give them drink from the river of Your delight.’ This sweetness now fills our hearts and flows through all our veins with ineffable delight. From this sweetness our hearts seem to melt, and we are both filled with a blessedness that no tongue can express… What else do you feel?” “An extraordinary joy throughout my whole heart.”

27 And Father Seraphim continued: “When the Spirit of God descends upon a person and overshadows him with the fullness of His visitation, the human soul is filled with ineffable joy, for the Spirit of God brings joy to everything He touches. This is the very joy of which the Lord speaks in His

Gospel: ‘When a woman gives birth she is in sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she has delivered the child, she no longer remembers the sorrow, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

28 “‘In the world you will have sorrow, but when I see you, your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you!’ Yet however comforting this joy you now feel in your heart may be, it is still as nothing compared with the joy of which the Lord Himself said through His apostle that ‘eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the human heart, what good things God has prepared for those who love Him.’

29 “Pledges of this joy are given to us now. If these make our souls feel so sweet, so well, and so glad, what can we say of the joy prepared there, in heaven, for those who weep here on earth? You too, my dear, have wept quite enough during your life on earth; and look at the joy with which the Lord comforts you even in this present life.

30 “What remains for us now, my dear, is to add labor to labor, to ascend from strength to strength, and to reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that the Lord’s words may be fulfilled in us: ‘Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall take wing like eagles, they shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not hunger; they shall go from strength to strength, and the God of gods shall appear to them in the Zion of understanding and heavenly visions…’ Then our present joy, which appears to us in small measure and briefly, will appear in all its fullness, and no one will take it from us as we are filled with inexpressible heavenly delights… What else do you feel, my God-loving friend?” I answered:

31 “An extraordinary warmth.” “What do you mean, my dear, warmth? We are sitting in the forest. It is winter outdoors; there is snow beneath our feet, more than a vershok of snow upon us, and snow pellets are falling from above… What warmth could there be here?” I answered:

32 “A warmth like that in a bathhouse when water is poured over the heated stones and the steam rises from them in a column…” “And the smell,” he asked me, “is it the same as in a bathhouse?”

33 “No,” I answered, “there is nothing on earth like this fragrance. When my mother was still alive, I used to enjoy dancing and went to balls and dancing parties. My mother would sprinkle me with perfume that she bought in the best shops in Kazan, but those perfumes do not give off such a fragrance.”

34 And Father Seraphim, smiling pleasantly, said:

35 “I know this myself, my dear, just as you do, but I am asking deliberately whether this is how you feel it. It is the very truth, my God-loving friend. No pleasant earthly fragrance can be compared with the fragrance we now perceive, because the fragrance of the Holy Spirit of God now surrounds us. What earthly thing could be like it? Notice, my God-loving friend: you told me that it is warm around us, as in a bathhouse; yet look—the snow is not melting either on you or on me, nor beneath us.

36 “So this warmth is not in the air, but within ourselves. It is precisely that warmth of which the Holy Spirit, through the words of prayer, makes us cry out to the Lord, ‘Warm me with the warmth of the Holy Spirit.’ Warmed by it, men and women living as hermits did not fear the winter frost, being

clothed, as though in warm fur coats, in the garment of grace woven by the Holy Spirit.

37 “This is how it ought to be, because the grace of God should dwell within us, in our heart, for the Lord said, ‘The Kingdom of God is within you.’ By the Kingdom of God the Lord meant the grace of the Holy Spirit. This Kingdom of God is now within us, and the grace of the Holy Spirit also shines upon us and warms us from without. Filling the air around us with manifold fragrance, it delights our senses with heavenly sweetness and fills our hearts with inexpressible joy.

38 “Our present state is the very one of which the apostle says, ‘The Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace in the Holy Spirit.’ Our faith consists ‘not in persuasive words of earthly wisdom, but in the manifestation of power and spirit.’ This is the state in which you and I now find ourselves. It is precisely of this state that the Lord said, ‘There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God come in power.’

39 “See, my dear, my God-loving friend, what ineffable joy the Lord God has now granted us! This is what it means to be in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, of which Saint Macarius of Egypt writes, ‘I myself was in the fullness of the Holy Spirit…’ With this very fullness of His Holy Spirit the Lord has now filled us poor people… Surely now, my God-loving friend, there is no need to ask any further how people come to be in the grace of the Holy Spirit… Will you remember this present manifestation of God’s ineffable mercy that has visited us?”

A Heart Open to God

1 “I do not know, Father,” I said, “whether the Lord will grant me to remember it forever as vividly and distinctly as I now feel this mercy of God.”

2 “But I believe,” Father Seraphim answered me, “that the Lord will help you to retain it in your memory forever. Otherwise His goodness would not have inclined so instantly toward my humble prayer and hastened so quickly to hear poor Seraphim. All the more so because this understanding has been given to you not for yourself alone, but through you for the whole world, so that, having yourself been strengthened in the work of God, you may also be of use to others.

3 “As for the fact, my dear, that I am a monk and you a layman, there is no need to dwell on that. What God requires is right faith in Him and in His Only-begotten Son. For this the grace of the Holy Spirit is abundantly bestowed from above. The Lord seeks a heart filled with love for God and one’s neighbor: this is the throne on which He loves to sit, and on which He appears in the fullness of His heavenly glory.

4 “‘My son, give Me your heart,’ He says, ‘and I Myself will add everything else to you,’ for the human heart can contain the Kingdom of God. The Lord commands His disciples, ‘Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.’

5 “The Lord God does not reproach us for enjoying earthly blessings, for He Himself says that in our condition in earthly life we need all these things—that is, everything that brings

comfort to our human life on earth and makes our journey toward our heavenly homeland more convenient and easier. On this basis the holy Apostle Peter said that, in his opinion, there is nothing better in the world than godliness joined with contentment. [16]

6 “And the Holy Church prays that the Lord God may grant us this. Although sorrows, misfortunes, and various needs are inseparable from our life on earth, the Lord God did not and does not wish us to be in nothing but sorrows and calamities. That is why He commands us through the apostles to bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

7 “The Lord Jesus Christ personally gives us the commandment to love one another and, finding comfort together in this mutual love, to ease the sorrowful and narrow path of our journey toward our heavenly homeland. Why else did He come down to us from heaven, if not to take our poverty upon Himself and enrich us with the riches of His goodness and His ineffable bounty? For He came not to be served, but to serve others Himself and to give His life as a ransom for many.

8 “Do likewise, my God-loving friend, and, having seen the mercy of God plainly shown to you, tell of it to everyone who desires salvation. ‘The harvest is plentiful,’ says the Lord, ‘but the laborers are few.’ The Lord God has brought us out to labor and has given us the gifts of His grace so that, reaping the ears of our neighbors’ salvation through the greatest possible number of people we bring into the Kingdom of God, we may bear Him fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold.

9 “Let us therefore guard ourselves, my dear, lest we be condemned with that wicked and lazy servant who buried his

talent in the earth. Let us strive to imitate those good and faithful servants of the Lord who brought their master, one, four talents instead of two, and the other, ten instead of five. There is no reason to doubt the mercy of the Lord God. You yourself, my God-loving friend, see how the Lord's words spoken through the prophet have been fulfilled in us: 'I am not a God far away, but a God nearby, and your salvation is at your lips.'

10 "I, poor as I am, had not even had time to cross myself, but had only wished in my heart that the Lord would grant you to see His goodness in all its fullness, when He was already pleased to hasten at once to fulfill my wish in deed. I say this neither to boast, nor to show you my importance and make you envious, nor so that you should think that I am a monk and you a layman. No, my God-loving friend, no.

11 "'The Lord is near to all who call upon Him in truth, and with Him there is no partiality; for the Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand'—if only we ourselves love Him, our heavenly Father, truly as children. The Lord listens equally to the monk and to the layman, the ordinary Christian, provided both are Orthodox, both love God from the depths of their souls, and both have faith in Him, even 'like a mustard seed'; and both will move mountains. 'One pursues a thousand, and two, ten thousand.'

12 "The Lord Himself says, 'All things are possible to the believer,' and our father the holy Apostle Paul cries out in a loud voice, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.' Does not our Lord Jesus Christ say something even more wondrous about those who believe in Him? 'Whoever believes in Me will do not only the works that I do, but greater works than these, because I go to My Father and will pray to Him for you, that your joy may be complete.

13 “‘Until now you have asked nothing in My name; now ask, and you will receive…’ So, my God-loving friend, whatever you ask of the Lord God, you will receive it all, provided only that it is for God’s glory or for your neighbor’s benefit. For He also counts the benefit of our neighbors toward His glory, and therefore says, ‘Everything you have done to one of the least of these, you have done to Me.’

14 “So have no doubt that the Lord God will fulfill your requests, provided only that they concern either God’s glory or the benefit and edification of your neighbors.

15 “But even if you should need something for your own need, benefit, or advantage, the Lord God will be pleased to send you all of this just as swiftly and graciously, provided there is an urgent and pressing necessity for it. For the Lord loves those who love Him: the Lord is good to all; He shows mercy and gives even to those who do not call upon His name, and His mercies are in all His works. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him, hear their prayer, and accomplish their whole purpose; the Lord will fulfill all your requests.

16 “Beware of only one thing, my God-loving friend: do not ask the Lord for something of which you have no urgent need. The Lord will not refuse you even that, because of your Orthodox faith in Christ the Savior, for ‘the Lord will not give the rod of the righteous over to the lot of sinners’ and ‘will unfailingly fulfill the desire of His servant David.’ Yet He will call him to account for troubling Him without special need, asking Him for something he could quite readily have done without. [17]

17 “And so, my God-loving friend, I have now told you everything and shown you in deed what the Lord and the Mother of God were pleased to tell and show you through me,

poor Seraphim. Go, then, in peace. May the Lord and the Mother of God be with you always, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen. Go in peace…”

[18] And throughout this entire conversation, from the very moment when Father Seraphim’s face became radiant, the vision did not cease. He said everything related from the beginning of this account up to this point while remaining in one and the same state. The ineffable radiance of light that proceeded from him I saw myself with my own eyes, and I am prepared to confirm it on oath.

Notes

1. Life for God editorial note. The conversation is traditionally dated to November 1831 and transmitted as the record of Nikolai Alexandrovich Motovilov (1809–1879). It became widely known after Sergei Nilus published it in 1903. It is a testimony in literary transmission, not a verbatim transcript or a text written by Seraphim himself. This edition follows the Wikisource transcription; it has not been collated line by line against the 1903 facsimile. The eight sections and paragraph numbers are editorial aids. ↑

2. Historical measures: a quarter of an arshin is about 18 cm (7 in); a sazhen is about 2.13 m (7 ft); a vershok is about 4.45 cm (1¾ in). The “little clearing” is a small meadow or mowing ground; “hermitage” here means a secluded dwelling. ↑

3. “Acquisition” translates styazhanie, literally obtaining or gaining. The commercial images explain spiritual effort and growth in grace; they do not mean purchasing God. ↑

4. “My God-loving friend” renders vashe bogolyubie, literally “your God-lovingness,” an affectionate and respectful address. Batyushka becomes “Father” when Motovilov addresses the monk, and “my dear” when Seraphim addresses the layman. ↑

5. The words attributed to Antony the Great and other patristic sayings are retained as this source transmits them. Their exact authorship and textual history have not been independently established for this edition. ↑

6. “As I find you, so shall I judge you” is a traditional extracanonical saying, not a verbatim quotation from the four canonical Gospels. Throughout the conversation, biblical and liturgical words are often combined with paraphrase. The English renders the Russian wording rather than substituting a modern Bible translation. ↑

7. This freely recalls Genesis 3:8 and Acts 16:6–10. Acts speaks of Asia and Bithynia, then the call to Macedonia, rather than the journey to Achaia stated here. The historical wording is retained. ↑

8. The account of human creation and the Spirit’s action is a theological interpretation within the recorded conversation. The reference to spirit, soul, and body corresponds to 1 Thessalonians 5:23. ↑

9. Wikisource reads “could be… without participation in the Spirit of God,” reversing the argument. “Could… partake of the Spirit of God” is restored

from the parallel Russian transcription at Azbyka. This is an explicitly identified editorial correction, not a claim of full collation of early editions. ↑

10. Simeon's age of 365 years belongs to church tradition; Luke 2:25–35 does not give this age. The following paragraph's account of Anna should be compared with Luke 2:36–38. ↑

11. Chrismation is anointing with consecrated chrism, administered after Baptism in Orthodox practice. "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" is its liturgical formula. ↑

12. The damaged reading "the morning star who saved from heaven" is corrected to "the morning star fallen from heaven," following the parallel Russian text and the context. The morning star here is an image of Satan. The paragraph begins with Revelation 7:14 and continues in Eucharistic liturgical language; the whole paragraph is not a single biblical quotation. ↑

13. Obvious transcription errors and broken words have also been repaired: "Снятый" to "Святый"; split words such as "возра довался," "возлюб-ленной," "Анна-про рочица," "ищу щею," "действия ми," "неизре ченной," and "шестьде- сять"; "истинну" to "истину" and "разжению" to "разжжению." A stray quotation mark after "а вот я" was removed. Corrections affecting meaning are documented separately. ↑

14. In ascetic usage, prelest means spiritual self-deception or delusion. "Poor Seraphim" renders a conventional monastic expression of humility. ↑

15. The account of light, warmth, peace, and joy that follows is presented as Motovilov's personal testimony. This edition does not make it a required pattern of experience or a measure of every reader's spiritual state. ↑

16. The source names the Apostle Peter. "Godliness… with contentment" corresponds to 1 Timothy 6:6, an epistle traditionally attributed to Paul. The source's attribution is retained and the discrepancy noted. ↑

17. The wording about "the rod of the righteous" is retained from the source. Psalm 124:3 (125:3 in most English Bibles) speaks of the rod of the wicked over the lot of the righteous. This is another imprecise rendering of biblical words in the recorded conversation. ↑

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