



**Our Righteous Father Sergius of Radonezh
Whom the Holy Church Celebrates
On July 5 and September 25.**

THE LIFE, ACTS, AND MIRACLES OF OUR REVERED AND HOLY FATHER ABBOT SERGIUS

1. CHILDHOOD

Our holy Father Sergius was born of noble, Orthodox, devout parents. His father was named Cyril and his mother Mary. They found favour with God; they were honourable in the sight of God and man, and abounded in those virtues which are well-pleasing unto God. Cyril had three sons, Stephen, Bartholomew, and Peter, whom he brought up in strict piety and purity. Stephen and Peter quickly learned to read and write, but the second boy did not so easily learn to write, and worked slowly and inattentively; his master taught him with care, but the boy could not put his mind to his studies, nor understand, nor do the same as his companions who were studying with him. As a

result he suffered from the many reproaches of his parents, and still more from the punishments of his teacher and the ridicule of his companions. The boy often prayed to God in secret and with many tears: "O Lord, give me understanding of this learning. Teach me, Lord, enlighten and instruct me." His reverence for God prompted him to pray that he might receive knowledge from God and not from men.

One day his father sent him to seek for a lost foal. On his way he met a monk, a venerable elder, a stranger, a priest, with the appearance of an angel. This stranger was standing beneath an oak tree, praying devoutly and with much shedding of tears. The boy, seeing him, humbly made a low obeisance, and awaited the end of his prayers. The venerable monk, when he had ended his orisons, glanced at the boy and, conscious that he beheld the chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit, he called him to his side, blessed him, bestowed on him a kiss in the name of Christ, and asked: "What art thou seeking, or what dost thou want, child?" The boy answered, "My soul desires above all things to understand the Holy Scriptures. I have to study reading and writing, and I am sorely vexed that I cannot learn these things. Will you, holy Father, pray to God for me, that he will give me understanding of book-learning?" The monk raised his hands and his eyes toward heaven, sighed, prayed to God, then said, "Amen." Taking out from his satchel, as it were some treasure, with three fingers, he handed to the boy what appeared to be a little bit of white wheaten bread of the Holy Mysteries, saying to him: "Take this in thy mouth, child, and eat; this is given thee as a sign of God's grace and for the understanding of Holy Scriptures. Though the gift appears but small, the taste thereof is very sweet." The boy opened his mouth and ate, tasting a sweetness as of honey, wherefore he said, "Is it not written, How sweet are Thy words to my palate, more than honey to my lips, and my soul doth cherish them exceedingly?" The monk answered and said, "If thou believest, child, more than this will be revealed to thee; and do not vex thyself about reading and writing; thou wilt find that from this day forth the Lord will give thee learning above that of thy brothers and others of thine own age." Having thus informed him of divine favour, the monk prepared to proceed on his way. But the boy flung himself, with his face to the ground, at the feet of the monk, and besought him to come and visit his parents, saying, "My parents dearly love persons such as you are, Father." The monk, astonished at his faith, accompanied him to his parents' house. At the sight of the stranger, Cyril and Mary came out to meet him, and bowed low before him. The monk blessed them, and they offered him food, but before accepting any food, the monk went into the chapel, taking with him the boy whose consecration had been signified even before birth, and began a recitation of the Canonical Hours, telling the boy to read the Psalms. The boy said, "I do not know them,

Father." The monk replied, "I told thee that from today the Lord would give thee knowledge in reading and writing; read the Word of God, nothing doubting." Whereupon, to the astonishment of all present, the boy, receiving the monk's blessing, began to recite in excellent rhythm; and from that hour he could read. His parents and brothers praised God, and after accompanying the monk to the house, placed food before him. Having eaten, and bestowed a blessing on the parents, the monk was anxious to proceed on his way. But the parents pleaded, "Reverend Father, hurry not away, but stay and comfort us and calm our fears. Our humble son, whom you bless and praise, is to us an object of marvel. While he was yet in his mother's womb three times he uttered a cry in church during the Divine Liturgy. Wherefore we fear and doubt of what is to be, and what he is to do." The holy monk, after considering and becoming aware of that which was to be, exclaimed, "O blessed pair, O worthy couple, giving birth to such a child! Why do you fear where there is no place for fear? Rather rejoice and be glad, for the boy will be great before God and man, thanks to his life of godliness." Having thus spoken the monk left, pronouncing a dark saying that their son would serve the Holy Trinity and would lead many to an understanding of the divine precepts. They accompanied him to the doorway of their house, when he became of a sudden invisible. Perplexed, they wondered if he had been an angel, sent to give the boy knowledge of reading.

After the departure of the monk, it became evident that the boy could read any book, and was altogether changed; he was submissive in all things to his parents, striving to fulfill their wishes, and never disobedient. Applying himself solely to glorifying God, and rejoicing therein, he attended assiduously in God's church, being present daily at Matins, at the Divine Liturgy and at Vespers. He studied the Holy Scriptures, and at all times, in every way, he disciplined his body and preserved himself in purity of body and soul. Cyril, devout servant of God, led the life of a wealthy and renowned boyar, in the province of Rostov, but in later years he was reduced to poverty. He, like others, suffered from the invasions of Tatar hordes into Russia, from the skirmishes of troops, the frequent demands for tribute, and from repeated bad harvests, in conjunction with the period of violence and disorder which followed the great Tatar war. When the principality of Rostov fell into the hands of the Grand Duke Ivan Danilovich of Moscow, distress prevailed in the town of Rostov, and not least among the princes and boyars. They were deprived of power, of their properties, of honours and rank, of all of which Moscow became the possessor. By order of the Grand Duke they left Rostov, and a certain noble, Vasilii Kochev, with another called Mina, were sent from Moscow to Rostov as voyvodas. On arrival in the town of Rostov these two governors imposed a

levy on the town and on the inhabitants. A severe persecution followed, and many of the remaining inhabitants of Rostov were constrained to surrender their estates to the Muscovites, in exchange for which they received wounds and humiliations, and went forth empty-handed and really as beggars. In brief, Rostov was subjected to every possible humiliation, even to the hanging, head downward, of their governor, Averkii, one of the chief boyars of Rostov. Seeing and hearing of all this, terror spread among the people, not only in the town of Rostov but in all the surrounding country. Cyril, God's devout servant, avoided further misfortune by escaping from his native town. He assembled his entire household and family and with them removed from Rostov to Radonezh, where he settled near the church dedicated to the Nativity of Christ, which is still standing to this day.

II. THE HERMITAGE

Cyril's two sons, Stephen and Peter, married, but his second son, Bartholomew, would not contemplate marriage, being desirous of becoming a monk. He often expressed this wish to his father, but his parents said to him, "My son, wait a little and bear with us; we are old, poor and sick, and we have no one to look after us, for both your brothers are married." The wondrous youth gladly promised to care for them to the end of their days, and from henceforth strove for his parents' well-being, until they entered the monastic life and went one to a monastery, and the other to a convent. They lived but a few years, and passed away to God. Blessed Bartholomew laid his parents in their graves, mourned for them forty days, then returned to his house. Calling his younger brother Peter, he bestowed his share of his father's inheritance on him, retaining nothing for himself. The wife of his elder brother, Stephen, died also, leaving two sons, Clement and Ivan. Stephen soon renounced the world and became a monk in the Holy Mother of God Monastery at Kharkov. Blessed Bartholomew now came to him, and begged him to accompany him in the search for some desert place. Stephen assented, and he and the saint together explored many parts of the forest, till finally they came to a waste space in the middle of the forest, near a stream. After inspecting the place they obeyed the voice of God and were satisfied.

Having prayed, they set about chopping wood and carrying it. First they built a hut, and then constructed a small chapel. When the chapel was finished and the time had come to dedicate it, Blessed Bartholomew said to Stephen, "Now, my lord and eldest brother by birth and by blood, tell me, in honour of whose feast shall this chapel be, and to which saint shall we dedicate it?" Stephen answered: "Why do you ask me, and why put me to the test? You were chosen of God while you were yet in your mother's womb,

and he gave a sign concerning you before ever you were born, that the child would be a disciple of the Holy Trinity, and not he alone would have devout faith, for he would lead many others and teach them to believe in the Holy Trinity. It behooves you, therefore, to dedicate a chapel above all others to the Holy Trinity." The favored youth gave a deep sigh and said, "To tell the truth, my lord and brother, I asked you because I felt I must, although I wanted and thought likewise as you do, and desired with my whole soul to erect and dedicate this chapel to the Holy Trinity, but out of humility I inquired of you." And he went forthwith to obtain the blessing of the ruling hierarch for its consecration. From the town came the priest sent by Feognost, Metropolitan of Kiev and all Russia, and the chapel was consecrated and dedicated to the Holy Trinity in the reign of the Grand Duke Semion Ivanovich, we believe in the beginning of his reign. The chapel being now built and dedicated, Stephen did not long remain in the wilderness with his brother. He realized soon all the labours in this desert place, the hardships, the all-pervading need and want, and that there were no means of satisfying hunger and thirst, nor any other necessity. As yet no one came to the saint, nor brought him anything, for at this time, nowhere around was there any village, nor house, nor people; neither was there road or pathway, but everywhere on all sides were forest and wasteland. Stephen, seeing this, was troubled, and he decided to leave the wilderness, and with it his own brother the saintly desert-lover and desert-dweller. He went from thence to Moscow, and when he reached this city he settled in the Monastery of the Epiphany, found a cell, and dwelt in it, exercising himself in virtue. Hard labour was to him a joy, and he passed his time in ascetic practices in his cell, disciplining himself by fasting and praying, refraining from all indulgence, even from drinking beer. Alexei, the future metropolitan, who at this time had not been raised to the rank of bishop, was living in the monastery, leading a quiet monastic life. Stephen and he spent much time together in spiritual exercises, and they sang in the choir side by side. The Grand Duke Semion came to hear of Stephen and the godly life he led and commanded the Metropolitan Theognost to ordain him priest and, later, to appoint him abbot of the monastery. Aware of his great virtues, the Grand Duke also appointed him as his confessor.

Our saint, Sergius, had not taken monastic vows at this time for, as yet, he had not enough experience of monasteries, and of all that is required of a monk. After a while, however, he invited a spiritual elder, who held the dignity of priest and abbot, named Mitrophan, to come and visit him in his solitude. In great humility he entreated him, "Father, may the love of God be with us, and give me the tonsure of a monk. From childhood have I loved God and set my heart on him these many years, but my parents'

needs withheld me. Now, my lord and father, I am free from all bonds, and I thirst, as the hart thirsteth for the springs of living water." The abbot forthwith went into the chapel with him, and gave him the tonsure on the 7th day of October on the feast day of the blessed martyrs Sergius and Bacchus. And Sergius was the name he received as monk. In those days it was the custom to give to the newly tonsured monk the name of the saint whose feast day it happened to be. Our saint was twenty-three years old when he joined the order of monks. Saint Sergius, the newly tonsured monk, partook of the Holy Mysteries and received the uncreated grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. From one whose witness is true and sure, we are told that when Sergius partook of the Holy Mystery the chapel was filled with a sweet odour; and not only in the chapel, but all around was the same fragrant smell. The Saint remained in the chapel seven days, touching no food other than one consecrated loaf given him by the abbot, refusing all else and giving himself up to fasting and prayer, having on his lips the Psalms of David. When Mitrophan bade farewell, St. Sergius in all humility said to him: "Give me your blessing, and pray regarding my solitude; and instruct one living alone in the wilderness how to pray to the Lord God; how to remain unharmed; how to wrestle with the evil and with his own temptations to pride, for I am but a novice and a newly tonsured monk." The abbot was astonished and almost afraid. He replied, "You ask of me concerning that which you know no less well than we do, O Reverend Father." After discoursing with him for a while on spiritual matters, and commending him to God, Mitrophan went away, leaving Saint Sergius alone to silence and the wilderness. Who can recount his labours? Who can number the trials he endured living alone in the wilderness? Under different forms and from time to time the devil wrestled with the Saint, but the demons beset Saint Sergius in vain; no matter what visions they evoked, they failed to overcome the firm and fearless spirit of the ascetic. At one moment it was Satan who laid his snares; at another, incursions of wild beasts took place, for many were the wild animals inhabiting this wilderness. Some of these remained at a distance; others came near the saint, surrounded him and even sniffed him. In particular a bear used to come to the holy man. Seeing the animal did not come to harm him, but in order to get some food, the Saint brought a small slice of bread from his hut, and placed it on a log or stump, so the bear learned to come for the meal thus prepared for him, and having eaten it went away again. If there was no bread, and the bear did not find his usual slice, he would wait about for a long while and look around on all sides, rather like some moneylender waiting to receive payment of his debt. At this time Sergius had no variety of foods in the wilderness, only bread and water from the spring, and a great scarcity of these. Often, bread was not to be found; then both he and the bear went

hungry. Sometimes, although there was but one slice of bread, the saint gave it to the bear, being unwilling to disappoint him of his food.

He diligently read the Holy Scriptures to obtain knowledge of all virtue, in his secret meditations training his mind in a longing for eternal bliss. Most wonderful of all, none knew the measure of his ascetic and godly life which he spent in solitude. God, the beholder of all hidden things, alone saw it. Whether he lived two years or more in the wilderness alone we do not know; God knows only. The Lord, seeing his very great faith and patience, took compassion on him and, desirous of relieving his solitary labours, put into the hearts of certain god-fearing monks to visit him. The Saint inquired of them, "Are you able to endure the hardships of this place, hunger and thirst, and every kind of want?" They replied, "Yes, Reverend Father, we are willing with God's help and by your holy prayers." Holy Sergius, seeing their faith and zeal, marveled, and said: "My brethren, I desired to dwell alone in the wilderness and, furthermore, to die in this place. If it be God's will that there shall be a monastery in this place, and that many brethren will be gathered here, then may God's holy will be done. I welcome you with joy, but let each one of you build himself a cell. Furthermore, let it be known unto you, if you come to dwell in the wilderness, the beginning of righteousness is the fear of the Lord."

To increase his own fear of the Lord he spent day and night in the study of God's word. Moreover, young in years, strong and healthy in body, he could do the work of two men or more. The devil now strove to wound him with the darts of concupiscence. The saint, aware of these enemy attacks, disciplined his body and exercised his soul, mastering it with fasting, and thus was he protected by the grace of God. Although not yet raised to the office of priesthood, dwelling in company with the brethren, he was present daily with them in church for the reciting of the offices, Compline, Matins, the Hours, and Vespers. For the Divine Liturgy a priest, who was an abbot, came from one of the villages. At first Sergius did not wish to be raised to the priesthood and especially he did not want to become an abbot; this was by reason of his extreme humility. He constantly remarked that the beginning and root of all evil lay in pride of rank, and ambition to be an abbot. The monks were but few in number, about a dozen. They constructed themselves cells, not very large ones, within the enclosure, and put up gates at the entrance. Sergius built four cells with his own hands, and performed other monastic duties at the request of the brethren; he carried logs from the forest on his shoulders, chopped them up and carried them into the cells. The monastery, indeed, came to be a wonderful place to look upon. The forest was not far distant from it as now

it is; the shade and the murmur of trees hung above the cells; around the church was a space of trunks and stumps; here many kinds of vegetables were sown. But to return to the exploits of Saint Sergius: He flayed the grain and ground it in the mill, baked the bread and cooked the food, cut out shoes and clothing and stitched them; he drew water from the spring flowing nearby, and carried it in two pails on his shoulders, and put water in each cell. He spent the night in prayer, without sleep, feeding only on bread and water, and that in small quantities; and never spent an idle hour.

III. THE HUMBLE ABBOT

Within the space of a year the abbot who had given the tonsure to St. Sergius fell ill, and after a short while, he passed out of this life. Then God put it into the hearts of the brethren to go to blessed Sergius, and to say to him: "Father, we cannot continue without an abbot. We desire you to be the guide of our souls and bodies." The saint sighed from the bottom of his heart, and replied, "I have had no thought of becoming abbot, for my soul longs to finish its course here as an ordinary monk." The brethren urged him again and again to be their abbot; finally, overcome by his compassionate love, but groaning inwardly, he said: "Fathers and brethren, I will say no more against it, and will submit to the will of God. He sees into our hearts and souls. We will go into the town, to the bishop." Alexei, the Metropolitan of all Russia, was living at this time in Constantinople, and he had nominated Bishop Afanasii of Volynia in his stead in the town of Pereiaslavl. Our blessed Sergius went, therefore, to the bishop, taking with him two elders; and entering into his presence made a low obeisance. Afanasii rejoiced exceedingly at seeing him, and kissed him in the name of Christ. He had received good tidings of the saint and of his beginning of good deeds, and he spoke to him of the workings of the Spirit. Our Blessed Father Sergius begged the bishop to give them an abbot, and a guide of their souls. The venerable Afanasii replied, "Thyself, son and brother, God called in thy mother's womb. It is thou who wilt be father and abbot of thy brethren." Blessed Sergius refused, insisting on his unworthiness, but Afanasii said to him, "Beloved, thou hast acquired all virtue save obedience." Saint Sergius, bowing low, replied, "May God's will be done. Praised be the Lord forever and forever." They all answered, "Amen." Without delay the holy bishop, Afanasii, led blessed Sergius to the church, and ordained him subdeacon and then deacon. The following morning the saint was raised to the dignity of priesthood, and was told to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and to offer the bloodless Sacrifice. Later, taking him to one side, the bishop spoke to him of the teachings of the Apostles and of the holy fathers, for the edification and guidance of souls. After bestowing on him a kiss in the name of Christ, he sent him

forth, in very deed an abbot, pastor, and guardian, and physician of his spiritual brethren. He had not taken upon himself the rank of abbot; he received the leadership from God; he had not sought it, nor striven for it; he did not obtain it by payment, as do others who have pride of rank, chasing hither and thither, plotting and snatching power from one another. God himself led his chosen disciple and exalted him to the dignity of abbot.

Our revered father and abbot Sergius returned to his monastery, to the abode dedicated to the Holy Trinity, and the brethren, coming out to meet him, bowed low to the ground before him. He blessed them, and said: "Brethren, pray for me. I am altogether ignorant, and I have received a talent from the Highest, and I shall have to render an account of it, and of the flock committed to me." There were twelve brethren when he first became abbot, and he was the thirteenth. And this number remained, neither increasing nor diminishing, until Simon, the archimandrite of Smolensk, arrived among them. From that time onward their numbers constantly increased. This wondrous man, Simon, was chief archimandrite, excellent, eminent, abounding in virtue. Having heard of our Reverend Father Sergius' way of life, he laid aside honours, left the goodly city of Smolensk, and arrived at the monastery where, greeting our Reverend Father Sergius with the greatest humility, he entreated him to allow him to live under him and his rules in all submission and obedience: and he offered the estate he owned as a gift to the abbot for the benefit of the monastery. Blessed Sergius welcomed him with great joy. Simon lived many years, submissive and obedient, abounding in virtue, and died in advanced old age. Stephen, the saint's brother, came with his younger son, Ivan, from Moscow and, presenting him to Abbot Sergius, asked him to give him the tonsure. Abbot Sergius did so, and gave him the name of Theodore; from his earliest years the boy had been taught abstinence, piety, and chastity, following his uncle's precepts; according to some accounts he was given the tonsure when he was ten years old, others say twelve. People from many parts, towns and countries, came to live with Abbot Sergius, and their names are written in the book of life. The monastery bit by bit grew in size.

It is recorded in the Paterikon—that is to say, in the book of the early fathers of the Church—that the holy fathers in assembly prophesied about later generations, saying that the last would be weak. But, of the later generations, God made Sergius as strong as one of the early fathers. God made him a lover of hard work, and to be the head over a great number of monks. From the time he was appointed abbot, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated every day. He himself baked the holy bread; first he flayed and ground the

wheat, sifted the flour, kneaded and fermented the dough; he entrusted the making of the holy bread to no one. He also cooked the grains for the "kutia," or "kollyva" and he also made the candles. Although occupying the chief place as abbot, he did not alter in any way his monastic rules. He was lowly and humble with all people, and was an example to all. He never sent away anyone who came to him for the tonsure, neither old nor young, nor rich nor poor; he received them all with fervent joy; but he did not give them the tonsure at once. He who would be a monk was ordered, first, to put on a long, black cloth garment and to live with the brethren until he got accustomed to all the monastic rules; then, later, he was given the complete attire monastic attire of cloak and hood. Finally, when he was deemed worthy, he was allowed the "schema," the mark of the fullness of the monastic life.

After Vespers, and late at night, especially on long dark nights, the saint used to leave his cell and make the rounds of the monk's cells. If he heard anyone saying his prayers, or making genuflections, or busy with his own handiwork, he was gratified and gave thanks to God. If, on the other hand, he heard two or three monks chatting together, or laughing, he was displeased, rapped on the door or window, and kept moving. In the morning he would send for them and, indirectly, quietly and gently, by means of some parable, reprove them. If he was a humble and submissive brother he would quickly admit his fault and, bowing low before St. Sergius, would beg his forgiveness. If, instead, he was not a humble brother, and stood erect thinking he was not the person referred to, then the saint, with patience, would make it clear to him, and order him to do a public penance. In this way they all learned to pray to God assiduously; not to chat with one another after Vespers, and to do their own handiwork with all their might; and to have the Psalms of David all day on their lips. In the beginning, when the monastery was first built, many were the hardships and privations. A main road lay a long way off, and wilderness surrounded the monastery. Here the monks lived, it is believed, for fifteen years. Then, in the time of the Grand Duke Ivan Ivanovich Christians began to arrive from all parts and to settle in the vicinity. The forest was cut down; there was no one to prevent it; the trees were hewn down, none were spared, and the forest was converted into an open plain as we now see it. A village was built, and houses; and visitors came to the monastery bringing their countless offerings. But in the beginning, when they settled in this place, they all suffered great privations. At times there was no bread or flour, and all means of subsistence was lacking; at times there was no wine for the Eucharist, nor incense, nor wax candles. The monks sang Matins at dawn with no lights save that of a single birch or pine torch. One day there was a great scarcity of bread and salt in the whole monastery. The saintly abbot gave

orders to all the brethren that they were not to go out, nor beg from the laity, but to remain patiently in the monastery and await God's compassion. He himself spent three or four days without any food. On the fourth day, at dawn, taking an axe, he went to one of the elders, by name Daniela, and said to him: "I have heard tell that you want to build an entrance in front of your cell. See, I have come to build it for you, so that my hands shall not remain idle." Daniela replied, "Yes, I have been waiting it for a long while, and am awaiting the carpenter from the village; but I am afraid to employ you, for you will require a large payment from me." Sergius said to him: "I do not require a large sum of money. Have you any mildewed loaves? I very much want to eat some such loaves. I do not ask from you anything else. Where will you find another carpenter like me?" Daniela brought him a few mildewed loaves, saying, "This is all I have." Sergius said: "That will be enough, and to spare. But bide it until evening. I take no pay before work is done." Saying which, and tightening his belt, he chopped and worked all day, cut planks and put up the entrance. At the close of day, Daniela brought him the sieveful of the promised loaves. Sergius, offering a prayer and grace, ate the bread and drank some water. He had neither soup nor salt; the bread was both dinner and supper. Several of the brethren noticed something in the nature of a faint breath of smoke issuing from his lips, and turning to one another they said, "Oh, brother, what patience and self-control has this man!" But one of the monks, not having had anything to eat for two days, murmured against Sergius, and went up to him and said: "Why this mouldy bread? Why should we not go outside and beg for some bread? If we obey you we shall perish of hunger. Tomorrow morning we will leave this place and go hence and not return; we cannot any longer endure such want and scarcity." Not all of them complained, only one brother, but because of this one, Sergius, seeing they were enfeebled and in distress, convoked the whole brotherhood and gave them instruction from Holy Scriptures: "God's Grace cannot be given without trials; after tribulations comes joy. It is written, at evening there shall be weeping but in the morning gladness. You, at present, have no bread or food, and tomorrow you will enjoy an abundance of food."

And as he was yet speaking there came a rapping at the gates. The porter, peeping through an aperture, saw that a store of provisions had been brought; he was so overjoyed that he did not open the gates but ran first to Saint Sergius to tell him. The saint gave the order at once, "Open the gates quickly, let them come in, and let those persons who have brought the provisions be invited to share the meal"; while he himself, before all else, directed that the bell should be sounded, and with the brethren he went into the church to sing the Doxology. Returning from church, they went into

the refectory, and the newly arrived, fresh bread was placed before them. The bread was still warm and soft, and the taste of it was of an unimaginable strange sweetness, as it were honey mingled with juice of barley and spices. When they had eaten, the saint remarked: "And where is our brother who was murmuring about mouldy bread? May he notice that it is sweet and fresh. Let us remember the prophet who said, 'Ashes have I eaten for bread and mixed my drink with tears.'" Then he inquired whose bread it was, and who had sent it. The messengers announced, "A pious layman, very wealthy, living a great distance away, sent it to Sergius and his brotherhood." Again the monks, on Sergius' orders, invited the men to sup with them, but they refused, having to hasten elsewhere. The monks came to the abbot in astonishment, saying, "Father, how has this wheaten bread, warm and tasting of butter and spices, been brought from far?" The following day more food and drink were brought to the monastery in the same manner. And again on the third day, from a distant country. Abbot Sergius, seeing and hearing this, gave glory to God before all the brethren, saying, "You see, brethren, God provides for everything, and neither does he abandon this place." From this time forth the monks grew accustomed to being patient under trials and privations, enduring all things, trusting in the Lord God with fervent faith, and being strengthened therein by their holy Father Sergius. According to an account by one of the elders of the monastery, Blessed Sergius never wore new clothing, nor any made of fine material, nor coloured, nor white, nor smooth and soft; he wore plain cloth or caftan; his clothing was old and worn, dirty, patched. Once they had in the monastery an ugly, stained, bad bit of cloth, which all the brethren threw aside; one brother had it, kept it for a while and discarded it, so did another, and a third and so on to the seventh. But the saint did not despise it, he gratefully took it, cut it out and made himself a habit, which he wore, not with disdain but with gratitude, for a whole year, till it was worn out and full of holes. So shabby were his clothes, worse than that of any of the monks, that several people were misled and did not recognise him.

One day a Christian from a nearby village, who had never seen the saint, came to visit him. The abbot was digging in the garden. The visitor looked about and asked, "Where is Sergius? Where is the wonderful and famous man?" A brother replied, "In the garden, digging; wait a while, until he comes in." The visitor, growing impatient, peeped through an aperture, and perceived the saint wearing shabby attire, patched, in holes, and face covered with sweat; and he could not believe that this was he of whom he had heard. When the saint came from the garden, the monks informed him, "This is he whom you wish to see." The visitor turned from the saint and mocked at him: "I came to see a prophet and you point out to me a needy-looking beggar. I see no glory, no

majesty and honour about him. He wears no fine and rich apparel; he has no attendants, no trained servants; he is but a needy, indigent beggar." The brethren, reporting to the abbot, said, "We hardly dare tell you, Reverend Father, and we would send away your guest as a good-for-nothing rude fellow; he has been discourteous and disrespectful about you, reproaches us, and will not listen to us." The holy man, fixing his eyes on the brethren and seeing their confusion, said to them: "Do not do so, brethren, for he did not come to see you. He came to visit me." And, since he expected no obeisance from his visitor, he went toward him, humbly bowing low to the ground before him, and blessed and praised him for his right judgement. Then, taking him by the hand, the saint sat him down at his right hand, and bade him partake of food and drink. The visitor expressed his regret at not seeing Sergius, whom he had taken the trouble to come and visit; and his wish had not been fulfilled. The saint remarked, "Be not sad about it, for such is God's Grace that no one ever leaves this place with a heavy heart." As he spoke a neighbouring prince arrived at the monastery, with great pomp, accompanied by retinue of boyars, servants, and attendants. The armed attendants, who preceded the prince, took the visitor by the shoulders and removed him out of sight of the prince and of Sergius. The prince then advanced and, from a distance, made a low obeisance to Sergius. The saint gave him his blessing and, after bestowing a kiss on him, they both sat down while everyone else remained standing. The visitor thrust his way through, and going up to one of those standing by, asked, "Who is the monk sitting on the prince's right hand? Tell me." The man turned to him and said, "Are you then a stranger here? Have you indeed not heard of the holy Father Sergius? It is he speaking with the prince." Upon hearing this, the visitor was overcome with remorse, and after the prince's departure, taking several of the brethren to intercede for him, and making a low obeisance before the abbot, he said: "Father, I am but a sinner and a great offender. Forgive me and help my unbelief." The saint readily forgave, and with his blessing and some words of comfort, he took leave of him. From henceforth, and to the end of his days, this man held a true, firm faith in the Holy Trinity and in St. Sergius. He left his village a few years later, and came to the saint's monastery, where he became a monk, and there spent several years in repentance and amendment of life before he passed away to God.

IV. THE MIRACLES

We shall now turn to the miracles God performs through his elect. Owing to lack of water near the monastery, the brotherhood suffered great discomfort, which increased with their numbers and having to carry water from a distance. Some of the monks even

complained to the abbot, "When you set out to build a monastery on this spot, why did you not observe that it was not near water?" They repeated this query with vexation, often. The saint told them: "I intended to worship and pray in this place alone. But God willed that a monastery such as this, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, should arise." Going out of the monastery, accompanied by one of the brethren, he made his way through a ravine below the monastery, and finding a small pool of rainwater, he knelt down and prayed. No sooner had he made the sign of the cross over the spot, than a bubbling spring arose, which is still to be seen to this day, and from whence water is drawn to supply every need of the monastery. Many cures have been granted to the faithful from the waters; and people have come from long distances to fetch the water and carry it away and to give it to their sick to drink. From the time it appeared, and for a number of years, the spring was called after Sergius. The wise man, not seeking renown, was displeased, and remarked: "Never let me hear that a well is called by my name. I did not give this water; God gave it to us unworthy men."

A certain devout Christian living close by the monastery, who believed in St. Sergius, had a child, an only son, who fell ill. The father brought the boy to the monastery, and entreated the saint to pray for him: but while the father was yet speaking the boy died. The man, with his last hope gone, wept and bemoaned, "It would have been better had my son died in my own house." While he went to prepare a grave, the dead child was laid in the saint's cell. The saint felt compassion for this man, and falling on his knees prayed over the dead child. Suddenly the boy came to life, and moved. His father, returning with preparations for the burial, found his son alive, whereupon, flinging himself at the feet of God's servant, he gave him thanks. The saint said to him, "You deceive yourself, man, and do not know what you say. While on your journey hither your son became frozen with cold, and you thought he had died. He has now thawed in the warm cell, and you think he has come to life. No one can rise again from the dead before the Day of Resurrection." The man however insisted, saying, "Your prayers brought him to life again." The saint forbade him to say this; "If you noise this abroad you will lose your son altogether." The man promised to tell no one and, taking his son, now restored to health, he went back to his own home. This miracle was made known through the saint's disciples. Living on the banks of the Volga, a long distance away from the Lavra, was a man who owned great possessions, but who was afflicted incessantly, day and night, by a cruel and evil spirit. Not only did he break iron chains, but ten or more strong men could not hold him. His relatives, hearing about the saint, journeyed with him to the monastery, where dwelt the servant of the Lord. When they came to the monastery the madman broke loose from his bonds, and flung himself

about, crying, "I will not go, I will not. I will go back from whence I came." They informed the saint, who gave the order to sound the bell and when the brethren were assembled they sang the Supplicatory Canon for the sick. The madman grew calmer little by little, and when he was led into the monastery, the saint came out of church, carrying a cross, whereupon the sufferer, with a loud cry, fled from the spot, and flung himself into a pool of rainwater standing nearby, exclaiming, "O horrible, O terrible flame." By the grace of God and the saint's prayers he recovered, and was restored to his right mind. When they inquired what he meant by his exclamation, he told them, "When the saint wanted to bless me with the cross, I saw a great flame proceeding from him, and it seized hold of me. So I threw myself into the water, fearing that I should be consumed in the flame." One day the saint, in accordance with his usual rule, was keeping vigil and praying for the brotherhood late at night when he heard a voice calling, "Sergius!" He was astonished, and opening the window of the cell he beheld a wondrous vision. A great radiance shone in the heavens; the night sky was illumined by its brilliance, exceeding the light of day. A second time the voice called: "Sergius! Thou prayest for thy children; God has heard thy prayer. See and behold great numbers of monks gathered together in the name of the Everlasting Trinity, in thy fold, and under thy guidance." The saint looked and beheld a multitude of beautiful birds, flying, not only on to the monastery, but all around; and he heard a voice saying, "As many birds as thou seest by so many will thy flock of disciples increase; and after thy time they will not grow less if they will follow in thy footsteps." Anxious to have a witness of this vision the saint called aloud for Simon, he being the nearest. Simon ran to him with all haste, but he was not found worthy to behold this vision; he saw no more than a ray of its light, but even so was greatly astonished. Filled with awe and wonder at this glorious vision, they rejoiced together.

V. THE PATRIARCHAL CHARTER

One day some Greeks arrived from Constantinople, sent by the patriarch to visit the saint. Making a deep obeisance they said to him, "The all-powerful Patriarch of Constantinople, Philotheus¹, sends you his blessing," and they presented him with gifts

¹ This is the Patriarch of Constantinople Philotheus Kokkinos 1300-1379 who glorified Saint Gregory Palamas, wrote the Acts of the Council of the Palace of Blachernae held in 1351 which upheld the Saint's Orthodox teaching on the Divine, participatable, uncreated energies and the Divine, uncreated, imparticipatable Essence, Saint Gregory's Life, and the Service to the Saint in *The Menaion* for November 14th. The teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas is the teaching of the Church: "God, unapproachable in His

from the patriarch, a cross and a "paraman," or monastic cross, and also handed him a letter from him. The saint asked: "Are you sure you have not been sent to someone else? How can I, a sinner, be worthy of such gifts from the most illustrious patriarch? They replied, "We have indeed been sent to you, holy Sergius." The elder went then to see the metropolitan, Alexei and took with him the missive brought from the patriarch. The metropolitan ordered the epistle to be read to him. It reads: "By the Grace of God, the Archbishop of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarch Philotheus, by the Holy Spirit, to our son and fellow servant Sergius. Divine grace and peace, and our blessing be with you. We have received reports of your godly life dedicated to God, wherefore we greatly praise and glorify God. One thing, however, has not been established: you have not formed a community. Take note, Blessed One, that even the great prophet and our father in God, David, embracing all things with his mind, could not bestow higher praise than when he said, 'But now, however good and however perfect things may be, yet, above all, is abiding together in brotherly love.' Wherefore I counsel you to establish a community. That God's blessing and his grace be always upon you." The elder inquired of the metropolitan, "Reverend teacher, what would you have us do?" The metropolitan replied, "With all our heart we approve, and return thanks." From henceforth life on the basis of community was established in the monastery. The saint, wise pastor, appointed to each brother his duties, one to be cellarer, others to be cooks and bakers, another to care for the sick, and for church duties, an ecclesiarch, and a subecclesiarch, and sacristans, and so forth. He further announced that the ordinances of the holy fathers were to be strictly observed; all things were to be possessed in common, no monk was to hold property of his own. His community having been established with much wisdom, the numbers of his followers soon increased. Also, the larger the supply of offerings to the monastery, the more hospitality, was extended. No person in need ever left the monastery empty-handed; and the saint gave orders that the poor and all strangers were to be allowed to rest in the monastery, and no suppliant to be refused, adding, "If you will follow my precepts and continue in them faithfully, God will reward you, and when I leave this life our monastery will prosper and continue to stand with the Lord's blessing for many years." And to the present day it remains standing.

Divine Essence, reveals Himself through His Divine Energies, which are directed towards the world and may be perceived, like the light of Mount Tabor, but which are neither material nor created." Thus the holy Church not only participates in "all the fullness of the Godhead" through canonical Holy Baptism and the Church's many other Holy Mysteries, but she is also drawn away from and out of this world wounded with love for Christ in adoration of what St. Dionysius the Areopagite calls "the Hidden God."

VI. THE DISSENSIONS

Before long dissension arose; the devil, hating goodness, put about the idea of disputing the authority of Sergius. One Saturday, white Vespers were being served, and the Abbot Sergius, wearing his vestments, was at the altar, his brother, Stephen, who was standing by the choir, on the left, asked the canonarch, "Who gave you that book?" The canonarch replied, "The abbot gave it to me." The other said, "What has the abbot to do with it? Did not I sit in that place before?" and adding other silly remarks. Although the saint was standing by the altar, he heard what was said, but he kept silence. When they all came out of church he did not go to his cell; he walked away from the monastery, unknown to all. When he arrived at the monastery of Makrish, he asked the abbot, Stephen, if one of his monks could lead him to some desert place. Together they searched and finally discovered a beautiful spot close to a river called the Kerzhach. The brotherhood, hearing about the saint, took to visiting him, in twos and threes, and more. Our Father Sergius sent two of his followers to the Metropolitan Alexei, with the request for his blessing and permission to erect a church. Aided by divine favour, a church was erected in a short while, and many brethren gathered there. Soon several monks from the Holy Trinity Monastery, unable any longer to bear the separation from their spiritual father, went to the metropolitan and said: "Holy Lord, we are living like sheep without a shepherd. Command our abbot to return to his monastery, that he may save us from perishing and dying of grief without him." The metropolitan dispatched two archimandrites, Gerasim and Paul, to the abbot with the message: "Your father, Alexei the Metropolitan, sends you his blessing. He has rejoiced exceedingly to hear that you are living in a distant wilderness. But, return now to the monastery of the Holy Trinity; those persons who were dissatisfied with you shall be removed from the monastery." Whereupon, hearing this, the saint sent reply, "Tell my lord the metropolitan, all the words from his lips, as from those of Christ, I receive with joy and do disobey in nothing." The metropolitan, glad at his prompt obedience, instantly dispatched a priest to consecrate the church to the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary. Sergius selected one of his followers, called Roman, to be the abbot of the new monastery, and sent him to the metropolitan to be raised to the priesthood. The saint then returned to the monastery of the Holy Trinity. When the news reached the monastery that the saint was returning, the brethren went out to meet him. On beholding him it appeared as if a second sun were shining; and they were so filled with joy that some of the brethren kissed the Father's hands, others his feet, while others seized his clothing and kissed that, too. There was loud rejoicing and glorifying

God for the return of their father. And what of the Father? He rejoiced with his whole heart at seeing this gathering of his flock.

VII. SAINT STEPHEN OF PERM²

Now Bishop Stephen, a god-fearing and devout man, had for Saint Sergius a deep spiritual affection. One day he was travelling from his episcopacy of Perm to the capital, Moscow. The road along which the bishop journeyed lay about seven miles from St. Sergius' monastery. When the godly bishop came opposite the saint's monastery, he stopped and said, bowing low toward the direction of the saint, "Peace be with thee, brother in God!" The saint, at this hour, was seated at table with his brethren. Perceiving in spirit what Bishop Stephen was doing, he rose from the supper table, stood for an instant in prayer, then bowing said aloud, "Be joyful, thou shepherd of Christ's flock; the peace of God be always with thee." At the end of supper his disciples inquired of him what he meant. He openly told them, "At that hour Bishop Stephen, going on his way to Moscow, did reverence to the Holy Trinity, and blessed us humble folk." He pointed out to them, also, where this had taken place. One time, when Theodore, son of Stephen, was with Blessed Sergius in the monastery, he was taking part in the Divine Liturgy which was being served by the saint, and with the above mentioned Stephen, the saint's brother. Of a sudden Isaac, who had taken the vow of silence, saw a fourth person serving at the altar with them, of a bright, shining appearance, and in dazzling apparel. Isaac inquired of Father Makarii, who was standing by his side, "What miraculous apparition is this?" Makarii replied: "I do not know, brother; I see a fearful

² Saint Stephen of Perm reposed as a young man in his 50's April 26, 1396. Saint Prokopy of Ustuig, who reposed July 8, 1303, prophesied the birth of Saint Stephen. "Once as the righteous Procopius of Ustuig fell at the feet of Mary, a three year-old girl, he exclaimed, 'Here is the mother of the great Stephen, Bishop and Teacher of Perm.'"

We witness here, in the life of Saint Sergius of Radonezh, the conjunction of three other most radiant stars of the spiritual firmament who are Gods after God: *Saint Gregory Palamas*, whose chronicler Philotheus, as Patriarch of Constantinople, advised Saint Sergius to gather his monks into a Coenobium; *Saint Stephen of Perm*, who greeted Saint Sergius from afar, and The First Russian Fool-for-the-Sake-of-Christ *Saint Prokopy of Ustuig* who prophesied Saint Stephen's birth of his then three-year old mother Mary. Wondrous is God in His Saints. May the work of the Lord God which continues in the world today through our Most Holy Despina, His Saints and through His own Divine Energies which are God Himself, working through the Christians in love (Gal. 5:6), be evident to all so that we may render Him praise and send up glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

and ineffable vision. But I think, brother, that someone came with the prince." (Prince Vladimir was at this time in the monastery.) One of the prince's attendants was asked whether a priest had come with him; but, no, they knew of no one. When the divine Liturgy was at an end, seizing a favourable moment, one of the brethren approached St. Sergius and questioned him. But he, anxious not to disclose the secret, asked, "What wonder did you see, brother? My brother, Stephen, was serving the Divine Liturgy; also his son, Theodore and I, unworthy as I am. No other priest whatever was serving with us." His disciples insisted, entreating the saint to reveal the mystery to them, whereupon he said, "Beloved brethren, what the Lord God has revealed can I keep secret? He whom you beheld was an angel of the Lord, and not only this time but every time I, unworthy as I am, serve with this messenger of the Lord. That which you have seen tell no one, so long as I am on this earth." And his disciples were astonished beyond measure.

VIII. ST. SERGIUS AND RUSSIA

A rumour spread that Khan Mamai was raising a large army as a punishment for our sins and that with all his heathen Tatar hordes he would invade Russian soil. Very great fear prevailed among the people at this report. The puissant and reigning prince, who held the sceptre of all Russia, great Dmitri having a great faith in the saint, came to ask him if he counseled him to go against the heathen. The saint, bestowing on him his blessing, and strengthened by prayer, said to him: "It behoveth you, Lord, to have a care for the lives of the flock committed to you by God. Go forth against the heathen; and upheld by the strong arm of God, conquer; and return to your country sound in health, and glorify God with loud praise." The grand duke replied, "If indeed God assist me, Father, I will build a monastery to the Immaculate Mother of God." And with the saint's blessing he hurriedly went on his way.

Saint Sergius blesses Grand Duke Dmitri

Assembling all his armies, he marched against the heathen Tatars; but, seeing the multitudes of them, he began to doubt; and many of his followers, not knowing what to do, were overwhelmed with fear. Of a sudden, a courier from the saint arrived, in all haste, with the message. "Be in no doubt, Lord; go forward with faith and confront the enemy's ferocity; and fear not, for God will be on your side." Forthwith the Grand Duke Dmitri and all his armies were filled with a spirit of godly audacity and launched a

fierce assault against the pagans. They fought; many fell; but God was with them, and helped the great and invincible Dmitri, who vanquished the ungodly Tatars.³

In that same hour the saint was engaged with his brethren before God in prayer for victory over the pagans. Within an hour of the final defeat of the ungodly, the saint, who was a seer, announced to the brotherhood what had happened, the victory, the courage of the Grand Duke Dmitri, and the names, too, of those who had died at the hands of the pagans; and he made intercession for them to all-merciful God.

The Grand Duke Dmitri returned to his country with great joy in his heart, and hastened to visit holy, venerable Sergius. Rendering thanks for the prayers of the saint and of the brotherhood, he gave a rich offering to the monastery and, in fulfillment of his vow, expressed his wish to build at once the monastery of the Immaculate Mother of God. After searching for a favourable place, venerable Sergius fixed upon one by the banks of the river Dubenka, and with the consent of the grand duke a church to the Dormition of our Most Holy Theotokos was consecrated by St. Sergius. As abbot, the saint appointed one of his followers, Sabbas by name, a man of exceeding great virtue. A community was formed, and many brethren joined it. Once again the Grand Duke Dmitri entreated St. Sergius to come to Colomna, to consecrate a site for the building of a monastery to be dedicated to the Holy Theophany. It was the saint's custom to go everywhere on foot. Obedient to the grand duke, he went to Colomna, consecrated the site, and a church was erected and, at the grand duke's request, he sent him one of his disciples for the founding of the monastery, a priest-monk, Gregory, a devout man and of great virtue. In time a stone church was built, which is standing to this day. Another time the illustrious Prince Vladimir begged St. Sergius, likewise, to come to his part of the country, to the town of Serpukhov, and consecrate a place by the river Nar, and dedicate a church to the Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God. Once again the saint obeyed the request. This god-fearing prince also begged him to send one of his disciples, Afanasii by name. Although the saint found it hard to grant this request, love prevailed, and he consented. Afanasii being a man of rare virtue, exceedingly learned in Holy Scriptures—many valuable writings by his hand bear witness to him to the present day—the saint loved him dearly. To him the saint entrusted the founding of the

³ This is the battle of Kulikovo Field September 8, 1380. The outcome was a decisive victory of the Orthodox Russians over the pagans. The historical record indicates that almost the entire army of the Tatars (the Golden Horde) was killed. Mamai escaped to the Crimea where he was assassinated by his enemies.

monastery, and the forming of the community. Aided by the prayers of the saint, the monastery was built, wonderful and beautiful, and named "On the Height." But why pursue further the saint's planting of ecclesiastical fruit? It is well known how many monasteries were founded by God's own chosen servant. And, offspring of his offspring, burning bright as stars, they are everywhere radiating a serene and wondrous life, and a blessing to all. The Metropolitan Alexei, being old, and seeing his weakness increasing, sent for St. Sergius. While they conversed, the metropolitan asked to have the cross with the "paraman" adorned with gold and precious stones brought to him, to give it to the saint; but he, bowing low in great humility, refused it, saying, "Forgive me, Lord, I have worn no gold ornaments since childhood, wherefore all the more do I wish in old age to continue in poverty." The bishop insisted, and said I know, beloved, that thou art fulfilling a vow, but be obedient, and take this which we offer thee with a benediction." Further, he said to the saint: "Dost know why I sent for thee? I desire, while I yet live, to find a man able to feed Christ's flock. I have doubted of them all; thee alone have I chosen as worthy. I know with all certainty that, from the powerful prince to the lowliest of his people, thou art the one they want." On hearing this the saint was deeply grieved, regarding honour for himself as a thing of naught, and he pleaded with the bishop: "Forgive me, Lord, but this of which you speak is beyond my powers, and you never will find it in me. What am I but a sinner, and the least of men?" The bishop quoted many sayings from Holy Scriptures, but the saint, unyielding in his humility, said, "Gracious Lord, if you do not wish to drive away my poverty from your Holiness, speak no more about my poor self, nor permit anyone else, for no one can make me otherwise." The bishop, understanding that the saint would not yield, allowed him to return to his monastery. Before long the Metropolitan Alexei left this life, in the year 1378 (6885); and once more the princes implored the saint to accept the rank of bishop; but, firm as adamant, he would in no way consent. Then a certain archimandrite, Michael, was raised to the bishopric; but this man, with great presumption, not only invested himself with the episcopal robes but also proceeded to plot against the saint, in the belief that the venerable Sergius would put a check on his audacity, wishing to occupy the episcopal throne himself. Blessed Sergius, hearing of Michael's threats against him, remarked to his disciples that Michael, vaunting himself of his sacred appointment, would not obtain his wish, for, overcome by pride, he would not reach the imperial city. The saint's prophecy was fulfilled. On his way by boat to Constantinople, Michael fell ill and died. Thereupon everyone regarded St. Sergius as one of the prophets.

IX. THE LAST MIRACLES AND THE REPOSE OF SAINT SERGIUS

One day the blessed father was praying, as was his wont, before the image of the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Having sung the "My Soul Doth Magnify the Lord" of the Blessed Virgin, he sat down to rest a while, saying to his disciple, Micah, "Son, be calm and be bold, for a wonderful and fearful event is about to happen." Instantly a voice was heard, "The Blessed Virgin is coming." Hearing this the saint hurried from his cell into the corridor. A dazzling radiance shone upon the saint, brighter than the sun, and he beheld the Blessed Virgin, with the two Apostles Peter and John, in ineffable glory. Unable to bear so resplendent a vision, the saint fell to the ground. Our Most Holy Theotokos, touching the saint with her hand, said: "Be not afraid, mine own elect, I have come to visit thee. Thy prayers for thy disciples for whom thou prayest, and for thy monastery, have been heard. Be not troubled; from henceforth it will flourish, not only during thy lifetime but when thou goest to the Lord, I will be with thy monastery, supplying its needs lavishly, providing for it and protecting it." Having thus spoken, she vanished. The saint, in ecstasy, stood in trembling awe and wonder. Returning slowly to his senses, he saw his disciple, terror-struck, lying on the ground, whereupon he raised him up; but the other flung himself down at the feet of the elder, saying, "Tell me, Father, for God's sake what miraculous vision was this? For my spirit almost loosed its bonds with the flesh from so resplendent a vision." The saint, so filled with ecstasy that his face glowed therewith, was unable to answer other than a few words, "Wait a while, son, for I, too, am trembling with awe and wonder at this miraculous vision." They continued in silent adoration until, finally, the saint said to his disciple, "Son, call hither Isaac and Simon." When these two came, he recounted to them all that had happened, how he had beheld the Blessed Virgin with the Apostles, and what a wonderful promise she had given him. Hearing this, their hearts were filled with indescribable joy, and they all sang the "My Soul Doth Magnify the Lord," and glorified God. All night long the saint remained in meditation on this ineffable vision.

After a while, a Greek bishop came from Constantinople to Moscow, but, although he had heard a great deal about the saint, his doubt about him prevailed, for, he reasoned, "How can such a light have appeared in this savage land, more especially in these latter days?" He therefore resolved to go to the monastery and see the saint. When he drew near to the monastery, fear entered his soul, and as soon as he entered the monastery and beheld the saint, blindness fell upon him. The venerable Sergius took him by the hand and led him to his cell. The bishop, with tears, confessed his doubts to the saint, and prayed for the recovery of his sight. The gentle lover of humility touched his

blinded pupils, and, as it were, scales fell from his eyes, and instantly he recovered his sight. The bishop proclaimed to all that the saint was indeed a man of God and that in God's mercy he himself had been deemed worthy to behold a celestial man and an earthly angel.

A moneylender, living near the saint's monastery, and who, like the strong in all ages, oppressed the poor, ill-treated a certain poor orphan, and, moreover, carried off his pig which was being fattened, and without paying for it had it killed. The ill-used orphan went to the saint in great distress and, weeping, begged for help. The saint, moved by compassion, sent for the offender, convicted him of wrongdoing, and said, "My son, do you believe that God is a judge of the righteous and of sinners; a father to widows and orphans; that he is quick to avenge and that it is a fearful thing to come under the wrath of God?" Having reproached him and told him he must pay what he owed to the orphan, he added, "Above all, do not oppress the poor." The man, overcome by fear, promised to amend and to pay the orphan, then returned to his own house. Little by little the effect of the saint's rebuke grew faint, and he decided not to pay his debt to the orphan. And, thinking it over in his mind, he went as usual into his larder, where he found the pig half devoured and swarming with maggots, although it was midwinter. He was stricken with fear, and without delay paid the debt; and ordered the pig to be thrown to the dogs and birds to eat, but they would not touch it and clear the usurer of his offence. Now, again, one day, the saint was celebrating the Divine Liturgy with one of his disciples, venerable Simon, the ecclesiarch, of whom we have already spoken, when a wonderful vision was vouchsafed to Simon. While the saint was serving the Divine Liturgy, Simon saw a flame pass along the holy table, illuminating it and surrounding the holy table; as the saint was about to partake of the Holy Mysteries the glorious flame coiled itself and entered the sacred chalice; and the saint thus partook of the Blood. Simon, who saw this, trembled with fear. The saint, when he moved away from the holy table, understood that Simon had been deemed worthy of this miraculous vision, and telling him to approach, asked, "Son, why are you fearful?" The other replied, "Master, I beheld a miraculous vision; the grace of the Holy Spirit was operating with you." The saint forbade him to speak of it: "Tell no one of this which you have seen, until the Lord calls me away from this life."

The saint lived a number of years, continually chastening himself with fasting, and working unceasingly. He performed many unfathomable miracles, and reached an advanced age, never failing from his place at divine service; the older his body grew, the stronger grew his fervour, in no way weakened by age. He became aware of his

approaching end six months before, and assembling the brotherhood he appointed his dearest disciple to take his place, one perfect in all virtue, following his master in all things, small of stature, but in mind a 'continual blossoming', whose name was Nikon. The saint exhorted him to guide Christ's flock with patient care and justice. The great ascetic soon began to lose strength and in September was taken seriously ill. Seeing his end, he again assembled his flock and delivered a final exhortation. He made them promise to be steadfast in the Orthodox Faith and to preserve amity among men; to keep pure in body and soul; to love truth; to avoid all evil and carnal lusts; to be moderate in food and drink; above all, to be clothed with humility; not to forget love of their neighbour; to avoid controversy, and on no account to set value on honour and praise in this life, but rather to await reward from God for the joys of heaven and eternal blessings. Having instructed them in many things, he concluded, "I am, by God's will, about to leave you, and I commit you to Almighty God and the Most Holy Virgin and Mother of God, that they may be to you a refuge and rock of defense against the snares of your enemies." As his soul was about to leave his body, he partook of the most holy Body and Blood, supported in the arms of his disciples raising his hands to heaven, with a prayer on his lips, he surrendered his pure, holy soul to the Lord, in the year 1393 (6900), September 25th, probably at the age of seventy-eight. After his death an ineffable sweet odour flowed from the saint's body. The entire brotherhood gathered around him and, weeping and sobbing, laid on its bier the body of him who in life had been so noble and unresting, and accompanied him with psalms and funeral orisons. The saint's face, unlike that of other dead, glowed with the life of the living, or as one of God's angels, witnessing to the purity of his soul, and God's reward for all his labours. His body was laid to rest within the monastery of his own creation. Many were the miracles that took place at his death and after, and still are taking place, giving strength to weaker members of the community, deliverance from the crafts and wiles of evil spirits, and sight to the blind. The saint had no wish during his life for renown, neither in death, but by God's Almighty Power he was glorified. Angels were present at his passing into the heavens, opening for him the gates of paradise and leading him toward the longed-for blessings, into the peace of the righteous, the ever-looked-for glory of the Holy Trinity.⁴

And to our God be glory.

⁴ To this day — September 25, 2009 — Saint Sergius' relics are incorrupt and continue to emit a sweetness which is far beyond any fragrance that this world is able to offer.