

# Spiritual Peace

## **No man is peaceful without rejoicing.**

No man has understanding if he is not humble, and he who lacks humility is devoid of understanding. No man is humble if he is not peaceful, and he who is not peaceful is not humble. And no man is peaceful without rejoicing. In all the paths upon which men journey in this world they will find no peace, until they draw nigh to hope in God. The heart finds no peace from toil and from stumbling-blocks, until hope enters it, makes it peaceful, and pours joy into it. That worshipful and all-holy mouth spoke of this when it said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Draw, nigh, He says, and hope in Me, and find rest from labor and fear.

St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 51

## **Freedom from anger leads to spiritual peace.**

It is important to strive to preserve one's spiritual peace by all possible means. Do not be upset by the insults of others. Strive in every possible way to keep from anger and to guard attentively both your heart and mind from improper emotions. Therefore, tolerate the insults of others with equanimity and try to preserve your disposition as if they were not directed at you. Such an exercise will bring peace to your heart and prepare it as an abode for God Himself.

We see an example of such forbearance in the life of St. Gregory the Wonderworker. When a certain prostitute publicly demanded that he compensate her for an alleged sinful encounter. Becoming not in the least angry, he meekly told his friend to quickly give her the money she was demanding. The woman had no sooner taken the money than she fell subject to an attack of a demon. Then the holy one prayed and drove the demon from her.

If, on the other hand, you find it impossible not to become offended, then at least you should try to hold your tongue, for as the Psalmist said, *I was troubled and spake not* (Ps. 76:4). In this, we can take examples from St. Spyridon and the venerable St. Ephraim:

Once, by imperial command, St. Spyridon went to see the Emperor. One of the servants, mistaking him for a beggar, began to mock him and would not let him enter into the palace. The servant then struck St. Spyridon on the face. Being full of meekness and true to the command of the Lord, the Saint then turned his other cheek to him also.

And once, when St. Ephraim was fasting in the wilderness, one of his disciples decided to bring him some food; but along the way, he accidentally dropped and broke the plate. Seeing his disciple's sorrow, St. Ephraim said, "Don't be sad, brother. If the food decided that it did not want to come to us, then instead, we will go to it." Then the Saint sat down beside the broken dish and began to eat the food from the ground. See how forbearing he was.

We can also learn how to vanquish our anger by following the example of St. Paisius the Great. Once, when our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him in prayer, the Saint asked Him how he could learn to control his anger. The Saviour then said, "*If you truly wish to vanquish hate and anger, then you must neither desire anything, not hold anyone in enmity or disdain.*"

From St. Seraphim of Sarov's *Spiritual Instructions*

**Others ways necessary to preserve spiritual peace.**

In order to preserve spiritual peace, a person must also refrain from despondency and strive to attain a joyful spirit, for *sorrow has destroyed many, and there is no profit in it*. It is necessary, also, to avoid judging one's neighbor. To avoid judging others, one must be mindful only of himself and his own failings. To everything else he must be dead and not be distracted by the sins or ill-will of others. One must frequently look within himself and ask the question, "At what point am I spiritually?" At the same time, one must take particular care that the bodily senses, especially that of sight, are serving the needs of the inner man and are not distracting the soul by focusing on material things. For this reason the gifts of grace are granted only to those who look within themselves and are vigilant over their souls. Spiritual peace is preserved also by humility and silence. And divine revelation comes only to those who have already achieved spiritual peace.

St. Seraphim of Sarov

**The absence of peace in the soul causes extreme distress.**

It is the soul that makes one a person, and the soul must live only through God, and only in union with Him. When the soul separates itself from God, it experiences extreme distress. The life of the soul consists in the peace of one's spiritual powers, and this peace proceeds exclusively from God. It is true that there exists carnal peace also, but this peace is delusive—the forerunner of spiritual storm—of which the Lord says: "When they shall say (to men), Peace and safety, then suddenly destruction cometh upon them" (I Thess. 5:3); but spiritual peace, which proceeds from the Spirit of God differs, as heaven does from earth, from such carnal peace. It is bliss given from Heaven. "Peace I give you," the Lord said often to His disciples. The Apostles also gave "peace to believers," and wished them God's peace as the highest blessing, because God's peace constitutes the life of our soul, and witnesses to the union of our soul with God. The absence of peace in the soul—that disturbance which characterizes all the passionate conditions of our soul—is spiritual death and the sign of the action of the enemy of our salvation in our hearts.

St. John of Kronstadt

**Nothing is more grievous than to be one's own spiritual director.**

I know of no fall that happens to a monk that does not come from trusting his own judgment. . . . Do you know someone who has fallen? Be sure that he has directed himself. Nothing is more grievous than to be one's own director, nothing is more pernicious. . . . I am always afraid of this danger. When I was in the cenobium, I used to reveal everything to Abba John, for I never set out to do anything contrary to his judgment. And there were times when my thoughts said to me, "Will he not say the same thing that I am telling you? Why do you want to disturb him?" And I used to say to my thoughts, . . . "whatever you know, you know from the devil." Therefore, I went and asked the Elder, and it often happened that his reply coincided with the judgment I had already formed, . . . but I said to my thoughts, "It is right to do this, for now it is from the Holy Spirit." . . . So I was in a complete state of rest and freedom from care, . . . not knowing the cause of such peace of soul until Abba John made it clear to me by saying, "Don't be troubled. Everyone who puts himself under obedience to the Fathers has this peace and freedom from anxiety."

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

**Peace comes from obedience.**

At one time, before I knew the power of this virtue (that is, humility), hearing that through much tribulation we must enter the Kingdom of Heaven, I became afraid because I had no troubles. And when such thoughts came upon me, I used to take up a pen and write to one of the Elders. On one occasion I wrote to Abba John, the disciple of Abba Barsanuphius, and while I was writing, even before I had finished, I was sensible of help and relief, and this itself increased my freedom from care and my sense of peace. And this is what I said: “Master, since the scriptures say that through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, and I do not seem to have a single affliction, what shall I do? Shall I not lose my soul if I haven’t a single affliction or anxiety?” When I had explained my thought to him in this way, he wrote back declaring, “Do not be afraid; you have no cause to be, for everyone who throws himself completely into obedience to the Fathers shall surely possess this state of freedom from care and peacefulness of soul.”

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

**Give thanks for peace.**

When holy peace reigns in my soul, then surely the King of Peace dwells within me—the Lord Jesus Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit; and then especially I should be full of feelings of gratitude to the Lord of Peace, and endeavor with all my strength to preserve this peace within me by means of fervent prayer and by abstaining from every sin, both inward and outward.

St. John of Kronstadt