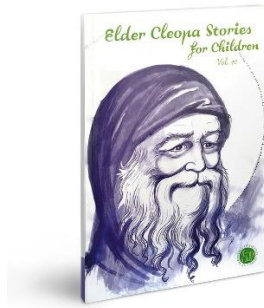


Repentance

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My dear ones, I am asking you from the bottom of my heart to love the church! May the church be dear to you; and, as much as you can, whenever you can, go to church, because this is the place where we learn to pray, to confess, to humble ourselves, and to love one another. Therefore, I urge you not to be absent from church on feast days and to listen with reverence to the holy services, especially to the Divine Liturgy. When the bells of the church are ringing and are calling you to go to the service, to the Divine Liturgy, **you should all go to church, and the angels of the Lord will write your names in the book of life and will count your every step. In this way, you will receive many gifts in life and you will be saved from serious temptations and sins.**

You should know that **the words of the Scriptures and of the Holy Fathers are heard in church and that you can learn the truth from all of these, because the gift of the Most Holy Spirit comes to those who listen with reverence to the holy services of the church; and thus, many people abandon their sins and turn towards Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, and become heirs of the Kingdom of heaven.**

In order for you to understand what I have just said, I will tell you a story about Saint Paul the Simple. Saint Paul, who was wiser than everyone else because he was a fool for Christ, was the disciple of Saint Anthony the Great and he was so advanced in his spiritual life that he became a greater wonderworker than Saint Anthony.

One time, Paul the Simple went to Alexandra, where he had been sent by Saint Anthony to run some errands. And as he was traveling, Holy Sunday came. He was an old man now, more than 80 years old, and he was wearing a ragged piece of clothing, some peasant shoes, and a wooden cross around his neck. He was holding a cane in his hand. Whoever saw him said: "There goes a monk. An old monk."

And since it was a feast day, Saint Paul went to church. And he was watching how people came to the service, because it was Holy Sunday.

For each person who was coming to church, he saw how their personal angels were bringing them there: little children, young people, women, and men. The angels were extremely happy that they brought their people to church. And Paul had a lot of joy in his heart, for he was clairvoyant and could see everything. He saw what everyone was doing – all the people, the angels, and the demons – for this is what clairvoyant people are like. And Saint Paul was rejoicing in front of the church, seeing how Christians were coming to church and their angels came along happily, bringing their people.

But he also saw a man who was tormented by demons as he was coming to church. He had a dark look on his face; the demons were pulling his clothes, they were riding on his back, they put a bit and some reins on him as is usually done with horses, and they were pouring ash and dirt on his head.

That man entered the church with all those demons on his back. And when Saint Paul saw this man surrounded by demons as he was coming along with those people who were brought by their angels, the elder started crying because he saw the pitiful state of that man's soul. But the other people who were present there could not see what Saint Paul saw, and, not knowing who he was, asked him: "Father, why are you weeping?" "I am weeping for my sins," the elder answered.

He did not want to say why he was weeping. And he wept for that man the entire Liturgy, standing in the narthex. And everyone was thinking "That monk is constantly crying for his sins. He is obviously a sinful man."

And when Liturgy was over, Paul was still standing by the church door, looking to see how the man with the demons would come out. And as he was looking, Paul saw that the man was no longer with the demons, but that he came out of the church accompanied by an angel. And the angel was extremely happy and had a bright face, while the man was now very pious and humble. Then Paul became full of joy.

He stopped weeping and he started to clap his hands, saying: "Come here, good people, come here and see God's miracles! Come and see God's mercy. Come and see that God wants all people to be saved and to arrive at the knowledge of the truth. How great are the Lord's miracles! How great are You, O Lord!"

And then the people asked: "What have you seen, father, what happened to you?"

Then, Saint Paul said: "I am a sinful monk, but I saw so many people going to church and they were going together with their angels, but this man was going with demons riding on his back; he had a bit in his mouth like the horses, and the demons were pouring dirt on him. And now he is also with the angel of the Lord, just like you are, and I can't see any demons near him."

And the man, when he realized that he had been uncovered, that his life had been shown, said: "Good people, this elder is a great man of God if he saw my state. It's true, I entered the church surrounded by demons. I'm a very sinful man. I haven't been to church for 35 years. I struggled a lot to go to church, but the demons wouldn't allow me to go. I'm a sinful man; I've done so many evil things, and now I've fought tremendously to get to the church because I said to myself that I would go to the service even if the demons kill me. That is the reason why I believe the elder saw the demons pulling me like a horse.

But here's what happened to me in church. Let me tell you: I entered the church and I heard that passage from the Scriptures being read, where God says the following: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land."

And, hearing that God promises to forgive my previous deeds and to make me as white as snow and not to mention my sins, I said in my heart “Lord, from this day on I will no longer make mistakes. Even if I die one thousand times, I won’t return to my previous sins. And, help me, Lord, to make a good beginning, to love You and to serve You without fail.”

Having made my decision, I left the church and this holy elder, who saw me surrounded by demons on my way in, now sees me accompanied by an angel, because I made up my mind to mend my ways. When I heard that God will no longer mention what I did in the past, I decided to abandon all my sins from now on, to go to a priest and to confess, and to stop committing sins.

When they heard these things, all those who were present cried to God with one voice, saying: “O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all!” And they bowed to the Lord, glorifying His mercy from the bottom of their hearts.

This is how, by hearing God’s word, the Holy Spirit touched the heart of this sinful man, who was humbled by what he had heard and thus changed his previous state, which was worthy of condemnation, into a state that was worthy of God’s mercy and of happiness, which leads to the salvation of the soul through genuine repentance.

Thus, thousands and thousands of souls turn to God by hearing His word in churches and wherever Christ’s Gospel is preached.

