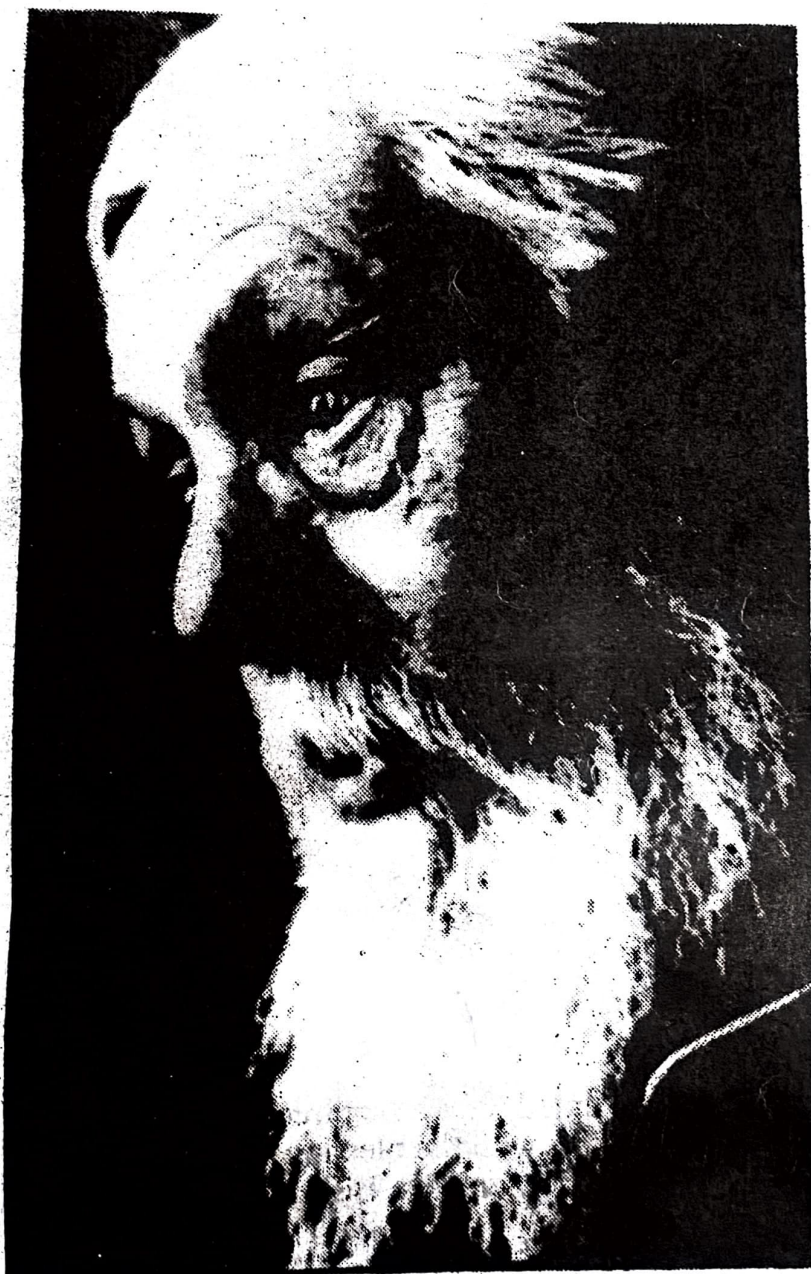


Prayer of the Heart



Archbishop Theodore



Introduction

God yearns for each of us, and within the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church there is a tradition where, when the deepest part of our soul yearns to live in the deep heart of God, then He comes to us; for deep calls unto deep. This wonderful mystical tradition is the *Prayer of the Heart*, or the Jesus Prayer, which is centered around the constant repetition of the short prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner", whose use should be guided under the skilled direction of a spiritual father, and ultimately within the Eastern Christian framework of spirituality from which it arose, and cannot long be separated.

The salvation of our souls, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the very process of Theosis (or deification), which Eastern Christianity teaches that the incarnation of Jesus Christ was about—that is, the communication of God to man—all these unfoldings are shown most clearly to us in God's Holy Ones, His Saints, and these saints themselves consistently turn and return to this practice in their lives and their teachings.

It is rare in these days to find a traveler who has journeyed far toward the ever near yet receding shore of the Living God on the wings of this prayer, and rarer still to hear his own words calling us to become eternal pilgrims to God. This then is in truth the Way of a Pilgrim, and how God yearns deeply for each of us, for He is thirsty for us.

This talk was given by Archbishop Theodore on January 1, 1985 at Christ of the Hills Monastery, New Sarov, Blanco, Texas. The occasion was the conclusion of the New Valaam Theological Academy under the direction of Abbot Herman, editor of *The Orthodox Word*.

Archbishop Theodore is a Living Link with the pre-Bolshevik Church in Russia. He was a monk at Valaam and the Caves Monasteries. A great ascetic for most of his almost ninety years, he is considered a master of the *Prayer of the Heart* and revered by many as one of the few remaining *Great Elders*. A true mystic, Archbishop Theodore lives among the poorest of the poor in Mexico and is humble beyond belief, being totally without pretense.

Upon his retirement as Ordinary of the Missionary Diocese of the West, he took back the Great Schema which is the highest ascetical Orthodox monastic state.

There in his quiet state of constant prayer, literally hundreds of pilgrims flock to him for spiritual direction.

Rarely eating, he receives all who come to him with the profoundest love and often "knows one's soul before one speaks."

This booklet is printed with the prayer that it will lead others into the *Prayer of the Heart*.

Caution: The *Prayer of the Heart* should only be undertaken with the supervision of a "Spiritual Father" or Elder.



On Prayer of the Heart

by Archbishop Theodore

He Is Thirsty

In the hot, hot desert he came—to get a little water. And when he came close to the well, he saw a woman sitting down. And when she tried to get some water, he said, “Woman, give me to drink. I’m thirsty.”

Then later, on a day that became night, a terrible voice cried through the entire universe, “I’m thirsty! I want to drink!” Now spoken from the Cross, he said, “I’m thirsty ... thirsty!”

Who is this man?

It is better that I should never talk to you about this; better that my dirty mouth would never open to tell you about this, which is so terrible that every one of you, and me, should all tremble and fall to the ground. The cry is His Cry, and He is thirsty. He is thirsty for us; for our hearts. And He is thirsty to share with you something greater than any part of creation can see, or dream, or even think about—His overwhelming Love.

There was a little girl only six or seven years old, who asked Him to put her where she could be alone to pray. Her name was Mary. She was praying with her lips, and so much like the angels themselves teach, that an angel appeared to her and said, “Your voice has penetrated the universe. He is coming down ... to be here ... to live here ... to share with us our food, our clothes ... everything.”

Because He is thirsty for us. And His name is Christ.

Nobody Will Believe Me

I was like you. Then, when I was a little baby, two years old, I saw this man. His name is Saint Seraphim of Sarov; a simple monk who lived in the center of Russia during the last century. He is also a part of what I am trying to explain to you. When he appeared to me when I was two years old, I didn’t understand. But later, throughout my life—even though maybe I am the worst man in the whole universe, and there is no sin that I could not commit—again and again, I heard this voice, “I’m thirsty for your life. I’m thirsty that you be Mine, and I be yours.”

It’s so terrible, so terrible, that it would be better that I didn’t talk to you. I was afraid. I ran away before ... because I didn’t want to talk about this. It’s so terrible! And if I talk to you now, you won’t believe me. Nobody will believe me.

He wants to be part of you. He wants to live with you throughout every minute; in the time you talk, or when you eat, or when you do anything at all. He wants to be part of you, and He wants you to be part of Him—but in such a degree that even your ears could never believe it.

Stay Away from False Teachings

I'm not talking to you like the teachings of charismatics, or pentecostals, Indians, yogis, or Theosophists—all these teachings which are right now blowing like a big, big lake of fire through the whole world, to try to destroy even the last heart that can still be saved. So my advice is: Stay away! Stay away! Stay a thousand miles away from any teacher who comes to you—guru or not—and tries to take your heart and destroy it. Because after an experience like this—like the pentecostals or charismatics—you can no longer come to Him. The door will be closed forever and ever, throughout eternity. So that's my advice: Stay away!

If you want to be truly happy, if you want to be really alive, if you want perfect love throughout eternity, please stay away from all these teachings. Return to Orthodoxy. Return to the Fathers of the Church. Start to practice what they teach every day. It may possibly be hard in the beginning for you to understand in all the languages of the Church Fathers—whether Greek, or Russian, or French, or German; whatever the language. Try to do what you can to learn what they teach.

The Eternal Pilgrim

When I was growing up as a boy, I understood—through the miracles of Holy Seraphim, who first appeared to me when I was two years old—I understood to start looking for spiritual advisors, for Elders who could teach me what I believed was the greatest thing, and what I needed—not to be a monk, or a priest, or a bishop, that was all secondary—but to obtain my own heart, to give my heart to Him because I loved Him. I wanted to be with Him. I wanted to stay with Him forever, no matter what happened in my life.

So I went to the Elders ... I went to the deserted places, to the monasteries ... to any place in order to find teachers who could explain to me what I could do, how I could be truly Orthodox—not by name, or by clothes, or anything external, but to love Him because I wanted to love Him. I wanted to be with Him because, like that woman, I was thirsty.

I took my bag and started to walk through the deserted places of the land of Russia. I walked through all of Siberia, from China to Moscow, and from Moscow to many other places. I walked, and walked, and walked. I was the eternal pilgrim.

Why? Why did I go to the Pskov Monastery, the Caves at Kiev? Why did I go to Holy Valaam Monastery? Why did I go to Elders? For when I heard some priest or monk was very holy, I ran to him. I ran to see him, to talk with him, to learn from him how he became holy, how he became what I was so thirsty to obtain. It was to Elders, it was to Fathers, it was to bishops ... to them I ran and they taught me, and

taught me, and I tried to follow them and what they said. That's my advice to you. Learn it! Learn it! Go to the Fathers of the Church, go to monks, to priests who are very devotional. Ask them! Learn from them! It is so important, and I knew that it was important for myself.

The Heart of the Pilgrim

I didn't want money, or clothes, or any of the things that people want and like in this life because I saw it was nothing. Today you have money, tomorrow you have nothing. Today you have glory, and people say wonderful things about you, and tomorrow they will spit on you and call you names. It is all for nothing, all for nothing.

You! You and your heart! What else is there? When you are alone and there is nobody in your room, then you really feel happy. There is no need to go outside to parties, or music, or anything at all. But maybe you cannot stay alone—because you are empty—because there is no heart left inside of you.

Then listen to my advice. It is only the poor advice of a poor man who is trying to see what is best.

The Prayer of the Heart

I came to see an Elder in Valaam Monastery and tried to find him in his house, a poor house, a small church by the lake. I started looking for him, and began to walk through the woods. Then I saw somebody kneeling down. I came closer. It was a hermit named Nicholai. I came before him and he looked at me. He didn't speak and neither did I. I had come to him for the most important thing in my life, and I asked him, "Father, can I obtain the Prayer of the Heart?" He looked at me but didn't answer. Then he put his head down, and when he looked up again he said, "Yes. But you need to work." That is all he said and there was nothing else to ask. I said, "Goodbye, Father," as he still knelt before me, and then we separated.

Then I went to another father, and another, and another. I looked and looked for them, and I tried to learn.

When I was in Paris in 1931, I was working with very wealthy people, who tried to help me in every way they could. We built a beautiful church in one of the best parts of Paris and soon a thousand people, including Grand Dukes of Russia, started to come to my church. When Christmas drew near, we decided to make and set up a big Christmas tree for the poor people that nobody else cared about. The ladies said to me, "Father, we'll get you anything that you ask—candy, clothes, toys, anything, but you have to find the children."

I went out to look and found an abandoned house. Inside on the floor, five children were sleeping. I woke them and asked if they wanted to come to my Christmas tree. One of the children was a little girl, only six or seven, and I saw that she had a few papers tied together next to her shoes on the empty floor. She said they were a few stories that she liked very much. I asked her if I could look at them, and when she agreed, I read them.

Among them there was a story about a boy who was so beautiful that when a great artist wanted to make a picture of an angel, he used that boy as a model. Everybody who looked at the portrait said that it was truly the face of an angel. Many years later, that same artist went to one of the most terrible prisons where he found one of the worst criminals in all of London, and he used him as the perfect model for a portrait of the devil. When he asked the man his name, it was the same as the boy that he had painted so many years before—it was the same person!

When I finished reading the story, I looked at the little girl and asked her if she liked this kind of story. She said that she liked only this kind of story. Then she began to learn to pray. Later after she had learned to pray very intensely, at age 14, she started praying in a deserted railway station while returning from school, because prayer was the only thing she wanted to do. As she started to pray, a sinister looking man came into the station, and when she saw him she started to run outside to get to a safe place, because there were no other people in the station at the time. Later she wrote to me in America about it. I wrote back to her and told her that it was wonderful that she loved prayer so much, but to be careful to always pray in a safe place. This little girl is now a nun and a famous doctor in Paris, and has visited the monastery on Mount Sinai in Egypt three times. She is great in prayer.

I can tell you stories, and stories, and stories about prayer, each one better than the last—like the boy who wrote me this letter:

“Dear Father,

Today I am going away on vacation, but before I leave I wanted to write you, and so I got my mother’s permission to do so. I tried to tell you when you came to my school and spoke to us, that I knew nothing about prayer. My prayer was only like somebody playing with a small shovel. Right now, though, it is working in me like a great machine. Joy and happiness come to me all of the time.

Signed, Seriozha Sergei.”

I tell you, there’s no end to these stories. Why do I talk to you about this? I’m trying to do something. I am trying to produce in you interest in what you have inside of you. You don’t know who you are: you are temples of prayer. You were created for this because somebody was thirsty ... with an eternal thirst ... and He created you for Himself. But He made you like a temple; you are all temples, each of you—small or big, short or tall—but you don’t know about this. You walk through life, you meet friends, you do everything; but you don’t know that you are a temple. The temple is empty, and the door is closed. You must go inside, open the door and start to live in this temple.

I know a lady, one of the wealthiest women I have ever known, who slept on the top of a trunk, without extra clothes or blankets or anything. But when you saw her, you understood what was happening with her. Her eyes were shining like two black diamonds for prayer, from joy, and from happiness. She didn’t care about all her wealth, because she was truly rich. And not only her, but I know many other people who had found these riches too. I know doctors who never use medicine on people anymore—they only need to use prayer to cure them.

How To Begin

Now you are asking me, and saying, "It's good. You're right. We know you're right. You're not a pentecostal, you're not a charismatic, you're not a Theosophist, you're not a guru, or anything like that. You're an Orthodox spiritual father."

Soon, I'm going away, but I'm going away with something more valuable than anything in the world. I've known the Czar of Russia. I've known the Czarina. I've known people of very great social status, who had everything in life, and yet, they weren't happy. Something was missing.... But let's return to what I was talking about—*Prayer of the Heart*.

Prayer of the Heart is very, very difficult. My advice to you and to your children—if you have children—is to teach them from the youngest age ... carefully ... carefully ... with very great preparation for this. And for yourself? Start simply, and use whatever you can find to help—a prayer rope, or even your fingers, like one little boy who was made a monk when he was only ten years old. Then he died, but you could hardly find anything more wonderful than this boy. He used his fingers! When somebody asked him why he was always moving his fingers, he said simply, "I'm praying." He was always in the church, always helping the bishops and priests, and when he began to die very early in life, a Metropolitan came to his bed and asked him, "Seriozha, what do you want?"

He said, "I want you to make me a monk." And at the age of ten he became a monk with a cross and a candle in his hand. Then he died, but this boy didn't die forever. Once a man came to see me who had lost his wife, and he told me that when he used to go to her grave and sit there, he saw a little boy who came over and started to talk to him. He said that this boy totally changed his entire life. It was the same little boy. How wonderful a little child he was. But what made him so wonderful? It was the same Man who cried on the Cross, "I'm thirsty!"

What Is Needed

Now I must tell you, prayer is difficult, prayer is hard. You must have somebody to supervise you. You must have somebody teach you how and give you help at the right time, because against you will be ranged all the demons and Satan himself, who will try to do anything they can to prevent this prayer. You will get in big trouble. You will possibly be beaten up sometimes, or spit at; or your relatives will reject you. I cannot even begin to describe everything that can happen to you, but don't be afraid. The more you suffer, the more joy will come to you. This is what is called the *Prayer of the Heart*.

Prayer of the Heart starts from the prayer of the lips. Then you start to pray in your mind. You will start to pray in the morning and in the evening, or whenever you have time; and when you listen to beautiful music or while looking at a beautiful picture. Anything can produce in you a feeling of prayer, so ... Pray! Don't stop! Let prayer begin to visit you more and more, more and more, until you start to feel that it is a part of you, and it is never separate from you. And it is also miraculous. Sometimes it comes, from nowhere ... when you're going someplace, or when you sit down in the park, or when you visit some poor

person who is in bed, and while you are trying to help him, then something happens to you—something you've never known: your heart starts to pray all by itself. Don't stop! Don't stop! Listen, listen until the heart stops itself, and then you can begin again to pray with your lips or any way you like.

Read the Psalms ... read the New Testament, and then try to memorize every part of it completely by heart, so that when you are alone at night, you can lie down and start to repeat, "Mary, the Mother of Jesus, stood by the cross, and beside her was Mary Magdalen and the other Mary ...", and so on. Even in the smallest details, repeat, repeat, and repeat. It was for this reason that we were created; for we were created for Him, not for ourselves. He wanted to make us happy, and He does make us happy, but you must work. Every day it needs work; and when you work, it's easy. But don't stop; try and remember to pray always. A princess of Roumania once told me that just before going into an operation, she was praying; during the operation she could remember nothing; but at the first moment she opened her eyes, she heard the prayer in her heart.

It's so wonderful. I told you that you wouldn't believe me, for you cannot believe this until experience teaches you, but don't take my word for it: try it yourself. Take home the Fathers of the Church, take the New Testament, and incense—anything! Surround yourself with this kind of atmosphere.

Prayer Can Do Anything

I remember one time I saw my spiritual father. He was walking in the park alone, and I looked at him and I never forgot him. He was a wonderful wonderful priest. The best books about prayer were written by him, and this is what I want to talk to you about now. Prayer is so valuable—more valuable than anything in this world—but it can be in different states. The beginning of prayer is the prayer of the mind. The second state is when the prayer starts to work inside your heart. What is next is so high that I'm afraid to talk about it, for I can tell you that the beginning of prayer is possibly for everyone, the Prayer of the Heart is for one in ten thousand, and the highest form of prayer is only for one in a generation.

It is like a great composer—Beethoven, or Bach, or Mozart—when you listen to their works, you understand that it is the creation of great genius. This is a million times more exalted. With prayer you can do anything you desire. Anything! I remember cases that before my eyes were cured totally from a disease from which the doctors could do nothing at all. I also remember one house full of people where a man was already lying down on a table and he had been covered with flowers as dead. After I came to him and put holy oil on him, he stood up and talked to the people there. Possibly he is still alive today. It was not me. Not me! I'm only an ordinary man and one of the greatest sinners you've ever known, but this is the work of prayer. Prayer can do anything. If you want it, prayer is God Himself. Remember, the name of Jesus is like Himself. When you speak it, remember that nothing can happen to you. Nobody can do anything to you because God Himself has command over everything, both visible and invisible, inside and outside of you. Respect it. Keep it.

That is my word for you. Please pardon me because I am not worthy to talk to you about this, but this work is so important, so important for all of us. Each of you can do it. There is absolutely nothing that can stop you from doing it. Later you will remember, and you will say Father Theodore was right. Father Theodore, we thank you, because you told us how important it is.

Please pardon me.



