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## Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov

### Saint Seraphim will help!

Posted in [Sermons](#) by Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov on 1 August 2010

*Russian:* <http://osergii.wordpress.com/>

*A talk given at the celebration in the Western American Diocese on 2 August 2003, Monterey, California*

One of the organizers of the celebration of the glorification of Saint Seraphim of Sarov was a Russian patriot, General Vladimir Feodorovich von der Launitz, governor of Tambov in 1903. The General devoted his whole life to serving the Tsar and his Fatherland, and was eventually killed by a terrorist revolutionary while leaving a church. When he was asked how such a grand ecclesiastical celebration as the glorification of a saint can be organized, Vladimir Feodorovich crossed himself with a sweeping motion and responded, “Saint Seraphim will help!” These words of the Russian nobleman of an ancient boyar family were meant to express that which united over three hundred thousand people gathered from all corners of Russia in the Sarov monastery in July 1903: the hope with which the faithful turn to the God-pleasing saint for almost two centuries now, beseeching him for prayers and intercession before the Lord.

Even during the temporal life of the elder, a variety of people streamed to see him: government figures and peasants, merchants and soldiers, the rich and the poor, the old and the young—and every one of them was greeted by Saint Seraphim with the words “My joy, Christ is risen!”; and each was consoled, given guidance, teaching, or healing of physical ailments and spiritual ills. Every one of them took with them in their hearts a part of his spiritual wisdom, passing on his words from mouth to mouth.

What was so special that these people found in the warm-hearted Seraphim? Our contemporary, Valentina Dmitrievna Sologub, an Orthodox journalist, wrote that every epoch “expresses its own holiness, the Lord reveals the saint that is most needed by the people. Some saints are examples of humility—others of prayer and serving the needy; some heal, others teach the endurance of suffering...” Saint

Seraphim, the great laborer-for-God and example of spiritual struggle, shone brightly in the rays of Divine light, and this light was seen by many.

Saint Seraphim spent some forty years in fasting, seclusion, solitary living, labors of silence and nocturnal prayer, piously studying the Word of God, Scripture and the Lives of Saints before the doors of his poor cell were opened to visitors. During this whole time, Saint Seraphim strove to only one goal—to acquire the Holy Spirit, which he attested to in words spoken to the novice John Tikhonov: “My joy! I beseech you, acquire the spirit of peace, then thousands around you will be saved!”

Prokhor Isidorovich Moshnin, later to become Saint Seraphim of Sarov, was born in July 1759 in the city of Kursk. His parents were famed for their care for God’s temples and tending to the needy and misfortunate. The special intercession of the Queen of Heaven on behalf of Prokhor was expressed while he was still a child. Prokhor, in return, came to love the reading of the Bible and other religious books at an early age.

Prokhor’s elder brother, Aleksei, was a merchant and owned a store in Kursk. The young Prokhor was also taught business in the shop. But his heart lay far away from all earthly matters, and he gathered his treasure where “no worm abides, no corruption decays, no thieves can steal.” And so, at the age of seventeen, after a pilgrimage to the relics of the first Russian monastics, Saints Anthony and Feodosii of Kiev of the Caves, Prokhor was accepted as a novice in the Sarov Monastery.

Prokhor humbly and earnestly observed the monastic rules and obediences. Prokhor spent seven years as a novice. After exhaustive examination, the abbot of the monastery interceded before the Church authorities to tonsure him as a monk. Prokhor was elevated to the angelic order with the name of Seraphim, meaning “the fiery one,” for they saw in him an earthly angel and a man of heaven, and saw in his heart a burning love for the Lord. This fire, which was to warm thousands of souls, gave Father Seraphim the strength to rise ever higher along the ladder of spiritual struggle, and the Lord strengthened his zeal with divine revelations. The purity of heart, restraint, constant striving of his soul to God created in Father Seraphim a man capable of seeing the invisible world. Protecting himself with humility, he rose from one level of spiritual power to another.

Only a few of Saint Seraphim’s spiritual labors are known. Many were performed in seclusion, hidden from the eyes of men, visible only to God. Saint Seraphim did not carelessly assume the most difficult labors, but acted wisely and only with the blessing of the abbot, under whom he was in the humblest obedience.

Spending his life in solitude, labor, reading and prayer, fasting and restraint, Father Seraphim gradually added strict seclusion and silence. Only after long struggles of

the greatest self-denial, a burden no emulator of the Saint could bear, the Lord opened the cell of the elder and showed the world a lantern, the likes of which, when lit, is not hidden but placed in full view for the multitudes. Even the face of the saint emanated a wondrous light, impossible to behold for its brightness, according to the same Novice John.

The Lord glorified His righteous one with the gift of miracle-working. As during the life of the holy elder, through his prayers, the Lord opened the eyes of the blind, healed the lame and sick, saved those in need, cast out demons, so after his blessed repose, those who turn to him receive speedy intercession and blessed aid.

No less is Saint Seraphim known for the gift of clairvoyance. Rising with his spiritual gaze to the heavenly abodes, the vision of the saint pierced the hidden fates of both individual persons and of Russia herself. "Preserve yourself through silence!" warned Father Seraphim, and showed a peasant where to find a lost cow. Preserving himself through silence, the saint wrote a letter, from which, seventy years later, Royal Martyr Tsar Nicholas II learned of the terrible fate awaiting Russia and the Dynasty.

The living link between Saint Seraphim and the Royal Family is instructive for all for whom the fate of Russia is important. In accordance with some witnesses, during the life of the saint, the Most August ancestor of the Tsar-Martyr, Emperor Alexander I, visited the elder. In 1903, through the initiative of His Imperial Highness, Emperor Nicholas II, the life and works of the Saint were glorified, and his relics were placed in a splendid crypt commissioned by the pious Tsar.

Father Seraphim was not alone in his reverence for the God-given royal throne and the Anointed of God, but directed others to this saving path. Often during discussions with the judge of Simbir, Nikolai Aleksandrovich Motoviloff, the saint explained "how the Tsar must be served and how we must treasure his life," recalling David's warrior chief, Abishai, who said "Of us you have many, Master, but we have only you. If we are all slain, yet you remain alive, then Israel is whole. If you are no more, what is to become of Israel?" What happened to Russia when she murdered her Tsar is known to all. When speaking of Christian deeds, Saint Seraphim noted that "after Orthodoxy, [the fervor and zeal of the subjects for the Tsar] is the first duty of us Russians, and the main foundation of true Christian piety."

Father Seraphim wrote a letter to the Tsar who many years later would glorify him; he sealed the letter with soft bread and gave it to Motoviloff for safekeeping with the words: "You will not live to see it, but your wife will, when in Diveevo [Monastery] the whole Royal Family will arrive, and the Tsary will come. Let her give this to him." Having received this letter in 1903 and read it, "the Tsar wept inconsolably."

Saint Seraphim had foreseen the Russian revolution, and rivers of blood, and the destruction and desecration of churches, and the moral decline of bishops. But he saw also the renaissance of a great Russia. “Not until the end,” said the saint, “will the Lord be wrathful and allow the complete destruction of the Russian Land...” “We have the Orthodox Church without any stain, and because of this Russia will always be famed and fearsome and unconquerable to her enemies, having faith and piety—the gates of hell shall not prevail.”

As we see, the salvation and resurrection of Russia was seen by the saint specifically in the Orthodox faith. Our obligation is not only to rejoice over the stream of people who rushed in the late 80’s and early 90’s to the churches of Russia; not only to support with all our might this blessed process of rebirth and healing of our Fatherland; but also to preserve the purity of Orthodoxy ourselves and to rear our children in its spirit. The words of Saint Seraphim apply not only to his contemporaries almost two centuries ago, but to us as well: “We, living on earth, have strayed far from the path of salvation; we incur the wrath of the Lord also with the failure to observe the holy fasts; now Christians eat meat during the holy Great Lent and other fasts, Wednesdays and Friday fasts are not observed; but the Church has a law: those who do not observe the holy fasts and Wednesdays and Fridays sin greatly.” If we are not faithful to our Church even in the small things, what more can we hope for?

Celebrating today the hundredth anniversary of the glorification of Saint Seraphim, it is worth remembering that the procession which traveled in 1903 from Diveevo to Sarov, in the prophecy of Saint Seraphim, will return from Sarov to Diveevo, and the wondrous elder, reposing now with the sleep of the Seven Youths of Ephesus, will arise once more and preach repentance. “The town of Diveevo, having become a world-wide home of faith, will shine brighter than all others, not only Russian, but all the cities of the world—for the light of faith in Christ through this resurrection from the dead of the Great Elder Seraphim will be established in the whole world. Then all will avidly turn to all the well-springs of Orthodoxy to learn of the origin and path of this wonder of history.”

There is still some time, let us repent, let us struggle, let us convert those around us to the holy faith of Orthodoxy through example. And how are we to manage such a great task? Saint Seraphim will help!

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