



St. Seraphim of Sarov

More than 200 years ago there lived in Russia a young boy named Prochorus. When he was 27 Prochorus was made a monk and given the name Seraphim. At the age of 31 he became a priest and for a long time he served Liturgy and received Holy Communion every day. A year later, like the ancient desert-dwellers, St. Seraphim went to live alone in a dense pine forest. Next to his one-room hut or cell he planted a vegetable garden. Later he also kept bees. Even while he worked, St. Seraphim was always praying or singing hymns. Every day he would read several chapters from the New Testament. "The soul must be fed on the word of God," he said later, "for the word of God is the bread of angels, and souls that are hungry for God are fed by it." In this way St. Seraphim spent the week alone in the forest, praying, fasting and working in his garden. On feast days and on week-ends he would go to the monastery and attend the services there. Then, taking some bread with him, he would return to his forest cell. He often shared his bread with the wild animals and birds. Sometimes he was visited by a bear who obeyed him just as the animals in Paradise obeyed Adam.

St. Seraphim's holy life was so pleasing to God that the devil became very angry. He began to attack the Saint with terrible thoughts and visions. Sometimes, while standing at prayer, it would seem as though wild beasts were rushing towards him. At other times an open coffin would suddenly appear in front of him and out would come a dead man. All this only caused St. Seraphim to increase his prayers. He found a rock in the middle of the forest and for a thousand days and nights he prayed on that rock, stopping only for a little food and rest. This put the devil to shame, but still he did not leave the Saint alone. Once, when St. Seraphim was cutting wood in the forest, three strange men came up to him; and asked him for money. When the Saint replied that he had none they beat him until they thought he was dead. It was a long time before St. Seraphim recovered, and once again, it was thanks to the help of the Mother of God. From then on he was bent over and walked leaning on a stick. The robbers were caught, but the Saint asked that they not be punished. Soon they came to him in tears asking his forgiveness. They received his blessing and promised to change their lives to

please God.

Even this great trial did not persuade St. Seraphim to leave his forest which he loved so much. Soon he chose a life of absolute silence in order to better concentrate his mind and heart on God; He would tell people: "Silence brings a man near God and makes him like an earthly angel."

After 15 years in the forest, St. Seraphim returned to the monastery. There he began to share with others the spiritual gifts and understanding which he had received from God. Hundreds of people came to see the Saint-young and old, rich and poor. He greeted each person who came to him with the words "Christ is risen, my joy." This reminded them of the saving power of Christ's Resurrection. Each left full of peace and joy and the desire to lead a life pleasing to God.

St. Seraphim helped people in many ways. He anointed the sick and they became well; he helped poor peasants to find what had been lost or stolen; he comforted those that were sad and brought sinners to repentance. When the people thanked him for what he had done, he told them: "Do not thank me; I am only the servant of Jesus Christ." For his pure and holy life, God gave St. Seraphim the gift of being able to see into people's hearts. Often he knew their thoughts before they said anything to him. Many times he also told what was going to happen in the future.

Not far from Sarov Monastery was a convent called Diveyevo. St. Seraphim took care of the nuns who were very obedient to him. One day one of the older nuns came to see him. He told her that the Mother of God was going to appear to them and that she should not be afraid. Soon the door of his cell opened. It became brighter than day and there was a wonderful smell like incense. In came two angels holding branches, after them came St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. Then came the brother of God. With her were twelve virgins-saints and martyrs. They all wore beautiful crowns covered with crosses. The Most Holy Mother of God said to St. Seraphim, "Soon, my beloved, you will be with us."

The next year St. Seraphim began to prepare himself to die. He began to give his last words of advice and encouragement to those who came to him. To one monk he said, "Sow, Father Simon, sow! Sow everywhere the wheat that has been given to you. Somewhere or other it will sprout and grow and bear fruit." By this he meant that the monk should tell everyone about Jesus Christ and His Heavenly Kingdom.

After receiving Holy Communion on New Year's day in the year 1833, St. Seraphim said goodbye to all the brethren in the monastery. He told them not to be sad because the Lord was preparing crowns for them in heaven. Early the next morning the Saint was found kneeling before his icon corner. His eyes were closed and he looked so peaceful that some of the monks thought he was asleep. But when they tried to wake him they realized that his soul had gone to be with the Lord.

Even after his death, St. Seraphim continues to perform miracles. He appears to many people in dreams, and comforts and heals those who pray to him with faith.

<http://www.orthodoxworld.ru/english/sviatye/2/index.htm>