

The Life and Teachings of Elder Siluan

By Bishop Alexander and Natalia Bufius

Translated by Anatoly Shmelev

Contents: [Life of Elder Siluan](#). [Teachings and Sermons of Elder Siluan](#). [Final Word](#).

There once lived a person of great spiritual strength whose name was Siluan. He prayed long with tearful cries of "Lord have mercy on me," but God would not hear him. Many months went by in such prayer, and the strength of his soul was dissipated; he lost heart and cried, "You are unresponsive to prayer!" And suddenly, with these words on his lips and his soul drained of strength, for a moment he saw the Living Christ. His heart and entire body were filled with such flame that had the apparition continued another second, he would have died. Later he was unable to forget the inexpressibly meek, limitlessly loving, joyful and peaceful look of Christ; from that point forward he witnessed untiringly that God is love, love without measure or frontiers.

It is Siluan, this witness of God's love, who forms the subject of this text.

The Life of Elder Siluan

Schema-monk Siluan of Mt. Athos (his secular name was Semyon Ivanovich Antonov) was born in 1866 in the village of Shov, Lebedinsk region of the Tambov district of Russia. He first arrived on Mt. Athos in 1892, was tonsured in 1896 and took the vows of the schema in 1911. His period of obedience was served at the Mill, the Kalamarey Metoch (monastery territory outside Mt. Athos), the Old Nagorny Rusik and the Oeconomia. He died on the 24 (11) September 1938. These brief facts are taken from the Athos records.

Between "born" and "died" there seems very little to say; but to speak of someone's inner life before God is a forthright, audacious act. To open up the "innermost heart" of a Christian on the world stage is almost sacrilege. But in the knowledge that for the Elder, who left this world a victor over it, there is nothing to fear; nothing will disturb his eternal rest in God, so we — who also search for righteousness — can attempt to discover his morally rich life.

Many who come into contact with monks and with Elder Siluan in particular, do not see anything particular in them and thus remain unsatisfied and possibly even disappointed. This occurs because they approach monastics with the wrong scales, with improper demands and expectations.

The monk is engaged in endless struggle, and often very pitched struggle, but an Orthodox monk is not a fakir. He is not interested in the acquisition, through special exercises, of specific psychic powers, which is what so many ignorant seekers of mystical life expect. Monks engage in difficult, constant battle, and some of them, like Elder Siluan, engage in a titanic struggle, invisible to the outside world, to destroy within themselves the proud beast and to become men, real men in the image of the perfect Man — Jesus Christ — humble and meek.

This is a strange life, incomprehensible to the secular world; everything in it is paradox, everything is in a form opposite to the order of the secular world, and it is impossible to explain it in words. The only way to understand it is to perform the will of God, that is, to follow the commandments of Christ; the path, indicated by Him.

Childhood and Early Life

From the long life of the Elder we would like to highlight certain facts which are indicative of his spiritual life and his "history." The first comes from his early childhood, when he was no more than four years old. His father, like many Russian peasants, would take in pilgrims and travelers. Once, on some holy day, he invited to his home a man carrying books, hoping to hear from

this "learned type" something new and interesting, for he was unhappy in his "darkness" and eagerly sought enlightenment and knowledge. At home, the guest was treated to tea and food. Little Semyon with childish curiosity studied the guest and listened closely to his words. The bookworm tried to convince Semyon's father that Christ is not God and that there is no God. Little Semyon was particularly affected by the words: "Where is He, where is God?" and he thought to himself, "When I grow up, I will travel the world to find God." When the guest had left, Semyon said to his father: "You teach me to pray, but he said there is no God." His father answered, "I thought he was an intelligent person, but he turned out to be a fool. Don't listen to him." But his father's answer did not calm Semyon's apprehension.

Many years passed. Semyon grew up, became a healthy young man and went to work on the neighboring estate of Prince Troubetskoy. He worked as a carpenter with a gang of other workmen. The gang had a cook, an old peasant woman. Once, on a pilgrimage, she visited the grave of the hermit Ioann Sezenovsky (1791-1839) a famed monk. Upon her return, she told of her pilgrimage and of the miracles that happen at the grave. Some of the workers also mentioned the miracles and all agreed that Ioann was a holy man.

Listening to this conversation, Semyon thought, "If he is a holy man, then God must be among all of us, and there is no need to wander the earth searching for Him." With this thought, his young heart was lifted with love for God.

Somehow, from the age of four to the age of nineteen, the thought that had entered Semyon's soul during the bookworm's conversation with his father, a thought that had stayed with him, unresolved, was finally answered in this strange, apparently naive manner.

After Semyon felt that he had acquired faith, his mind was concentrated on the memory of God, and he prayed often with tears. At the same time, he felt an internal change and a desire to become a monk, and, as he later recounted, he began to look on the beautiful daughters of Prince Troubetskoy with love, but not desire, as sisters, though earlier he had been partial to them. At that time he also asked his father to release him to go to the Kiev Pecherskaya Lavra (Monastery), but his father told him categorically, "First you must finish your military service, and then you will be free to go."

Semyon spent three months in this state, but then it dissipated and he once again resumed his friendship with his peers, took up drinking vodka, chasing after girls, playing the accordion, and in general living like all the other peasant boys his age.

Young, handsome, strong, and by that time wealthy, Semyon enjoyed life.

The villagers liked him for his happy and peaceful character, and the girls looked at him as a good marriage possibility. He also fell in love with one of them, and before the question of marriage was resolved, one late night, "something happened."

Strangely, the next morning, while working with his father, the latter asked Semyon, "Son, where were you last night, my heart was aching." These meek words fell deep into Semyon's soul, and later, remembering his father, he said: "I didn't follow in his footsteps. He was completely illiterate, he even said 'Our Father' with mistakes, having learned it by ear in church. But he was a humble and wise man."

Semyon's was a large family: father, mother, five sons-brothers and two daughters. They lived together and were content. The older brothers worked with their father. Once, during the harvest, Semyon prepared dinner in the field. It was Friday, but Semyon had forgotten, and so he prepared pork, and everyone ate it. Half a year passed from that day, and one winter holiday, Semyon's father turned to him with a kind smile: "Son, remember when you fed me with pork in the field? It was a Friday, and you know, I ate it then as if it were carrion."

— "Why didn't you tell me then?"

— "I didn't want to embarrass you."

In telling about these events from his life in his father's house, the Elder would add, "This is the type of Elder one should be: he never became angry, always had an even and meek disposition. Think about it: he waited a half-year for a good moment to tell me without shaming me."

Elder Siluan had great physical strength. Once when he was still young, prior to military service, after Easter he stayed at home when his brothers went out to see friends. Even though he had just had a large meal with meat, his mother made him an entire pot-full of scrambled eggs, at least fifty, and he ate it all.

In those days he worked with his brothers on the estate of Prince Troubetskoy, and on holidays he would sometimes visit the local inn. There were instances when he could drink an entire "quarter" (2.5 liters) of vodka, but still not be drunk.

Once, during a severe frost that followed a thaw, he was staying at an inn. One of the guests who had spent the night there was preparing to return home. He went out to prepare his horse, but soon returned, saying, "Trouble! I must get home, but I can't: ice has gathered on my horse's hooves and she

won't let me break it off because it is too painful." Semyon said, "Come, I will help you." In the stable he took the horse's head under his arm and said to the peasant, "Break the ice off." The horse stood motionless during the entire process, and the peasant was able to ride off.

Semyon could take an entire cast-iron pot of boiling soup from the stove to the table where the gang of workers would be sitting. He could break a thick board in pieces with his fist. He could lift heavy objects and was able to withstand extreme temperatures and great physical labor with little food.

But this strength, which later helped him in his extraordinary struggles, was also the reason for his greatest sin, for which he had to do an extraordinary penance.

Once, during the yearly village religious holiday, Semyon was out walking and singing with friends as all the villagers gathered outside their huts. Two brothers — the village bootmakers — walked toward Semyon and his group. One of these brothers was also very strong, and a troublemaker. This day he happened also to be drunk. He came up to Semyon and tried to take away his accordion, but Semyon managed to pass it to his friend. Semyon began to ask the bootmaker to go in peace, but the latter, wishing apparently to show his strength in front of the entire village, jumped on Semyon. This is how the Elder described the situation:

First I thought it better to retreat, but suddenly I became ashamed by the fact that the village girls would laugh at me, so I punched him in the chest. He flew backward and hit the ground in the middle of the road: blood and froth came from his mouth. Everyone grew frightened and so did I: I thought I killed him. I stood there even as the younger brother of the bootmaker took a big rock and threw it at me. I managed to turn in time, but the rock hit me in the back and I said to him, 'Do you want the same treatment?' I moved on him, but he ran away. The bootmaker lay long on the roadway, but people came to help him, washed him with cold water. It was a half-hour before he could get up, and with great difficulty they brought him home. For two months he was ill, but he lived. I had to be careful from then on because his brothers and friends would lie in wait for me in the evenings with knives and sticks, but God preserved me.

So it was that in the noise of young life the first sound of God's call to monasticism was drowned out in Semyon's soul. But God, who had chosen him, soon repeated the call with a type of vision.

Once, after spending some time indulging in earthly pleasures, Semyon fell asleep and in a dream saw that a snake had slid through his mouth inside him. He felt disgusted and awoke. At the same time he heard these words, "You swallowed a snake in your sleep and you are disgusted. That is how unpleasant it is for me to see your actions."

There was no one in the room. He heard only a voice that spoke those words, a voice that was extraordinary in its kindness and beauty. But the impression that voice made, in spite of its quietness and sweetness, was revelatory. The Elder was deeply and undoubtedly convinced that this was the voice of the Mother of God. To the end of his days he thanked the Mother of God for not forsaking him, for visiting him and helping him rise up from his fall. He said, "Now I see how the Lord and the Mother of God feel sorry for people. Think of it — the Mother of God came down from Heaven to show me, a lad, of the error of my ways."

He attributed the fact that he was unable to see the Virgin Mary to the unclean state he was in at the time.

This second call, which came not long before his military service, had a decisive influence on his choice of life. The first result of this call was a complete reversal in his lifestyle, which had taken on an unwholesome form. Semyon felt a deep shame for his past and began to ask genuinely for forgiveness from God. The decision to enter a monastery after military service returned with new strength. He acquired a strong sense of sin, and because of this he began to view everything in life differently from before. This different attitude became apparent not only in his own life and actions, but also in his conversations with others.

Military Service.

Semyon's military service took place in St. Petersburg, in the Life-Guards Sapper Battalion. Leaving for service with a living faith and deep feeling of penitence, he never ceased to remember God.

In the army he was liked as a well-disciplined, calm and orderly soldier. To his comrades he was a loyal and trusted friend. This was in fact, typical of the Russian army as a whole, where soldiers lived together as brothers.

Once, during a holiday, he went with three soldiers from his battalion to a large tavern in the capital, where there was much gaiety and music. A dinner with vodka was ordered and the group began to talk loudly. Semyon remained mostly silent, and one of his friends asked,

"Semyon, you are so quiet, what are you thinking about?"

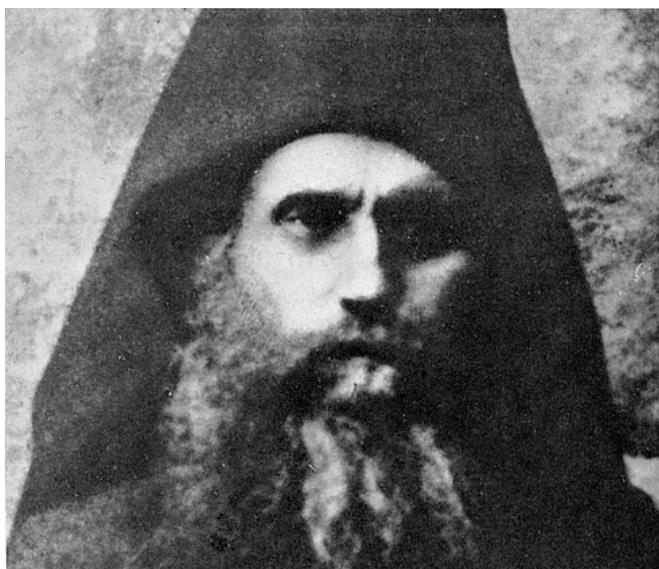
"I am thinking: here we are in this tavern, eating, drinking vodka, listening to music and having a good time, and meanwhile on Mt. Athos monks are keeping the vigil and will pray all night. So, who of us will give a better answer on Judgment Day — we or they?"

Then another said, "What a strange character you are, Semyon! We are listening to music and having a good time, and your mind is on Mt. Athos and Judgment Day!"

The words of this Guards soldier, that Semyon's "mind is on Mt. Athos and the Judgment Day," are applicable not merely to the moment when they were all sitting in the tavern, but to the entire period of his military service. His thoughts of Athos were also apparent in the fact that he sent money there on several occasions. One day he was walking from the Ust-Izhora camp, where the battalion was quartered in the summer, to the Kolpino post office to send a donation to Mt. Athos. Upon his return, not far from Kolpino, a rabid dog ran toward him. As it approached and prepared to bite him, he could only exclaim in fear, "Lord, have mercy!" As soon as the words left his mouth, some force pushed the dog aside as if it had encountered a wall; circling Semyon, it ran off toward a nearby village, where it bit a number of people and cattle.

This event left a deep impression on Semyon. He personally felt the proximity of God, who had saved him, and his faith became even stronger.

Having finished his military service, before departing for home, Semyon and the company clerk went to visit Father Ioann of Kronstadt to ask for his prayers and blessing. However, Father Ioann was absent from Kronstadt, so they decided to leave him letters instead. The clerk began to write a long letter in his best handwriting, but Semyon wrote only a few words: "Father, I wish to become a monk. Pray that the world does not detain me."



They returned to their barracks in St. Petersburg and, in the words of the Elder, the very next day he felt that all round him "the flames of hell were burning."

Leaving St. Petersburg, Semyon returned home, but he spent only one week there. Clothes and presents were collected for him to take to the monastery. He said good-bye to everyone and departed for Mt. Athos. But from



the day that Father Ioann of Kronstadt prayed for him, "the flames of hell" burnt round him no matter where he was: on the

train, in Odessa, on the ship and even in the monastery on Mt. Athos, in church, everywhere.

Arrival on the Holy Mountain. Deeds as a monk.

Semyon arrived on the Holy Mountain in the autumn of 1892, entering the Russian monastery of the holy martyr St. Panteleimon. Thus began his new life as a monk.

According to the customs of Mt. Athos, the novice "brother Simeon" was to spend a few days in complete calm, so as to ruminate on the sins of his life, and, having written them down, confess them to his priest. The hellish suffering he had endured brought forth in him a complete and sincere repentance. During the sacrament of Confession, he sought to free his soul from all that weighed on it, and for this reason he willingly and fearfully, without a trace of self-righteousness, confessed all the sins of his life.

His confessor then said to him, "You have confessed your sins before God, and know that they are forgiven... Now you must prepare to lead a new life... Go in peace and be joyous that the Lord has led you to this harbor of salvation."

Brother Simeon was prepared for spiritual feats by the centuries-old tradition of monastic life on Mt. Athos, filled with the ever-present memory of God: prayer in the cells alone, lengthy common services in the church, fasts and vigils, frequent confession and communion, reading, work, and works of penance. Soon he learned the Prayer of Jesus on the rosary. Only a brief while later, some three weeks, one evening during prayer before an icon of the Mother of God, the prayer entered his heart and continued to repeat there day and night, but it was some time before Simeon appreciated the greatness and rarity of this gift, received from the Mother of God.

Brother Simeon was patient, mild, and obedient; in the monastery he was held in high regard as a good worker of fine temperament, and this pleased him greatly. It was then that thoughts began to creep into his soul, such as, "You live a saintly life, you have repented, your sins have been forgiven, you pray incessantly, and you fulfil your obligations well."

These thoughts disturbed the mind of the novice and worried his heart, but due to his inexperience, Simeon did not know what to make of these feelings.

One night, his cell filled up with a strange light, which showed through even his body, so that he could see his organs inside. A thought came to him, "Take this — it is grace," but his soul was confused, and he was left in a state of great anxiety. After seeing the strange light, he was visited by demons, and out of naivete he spoke with them, "as with people." Their visits became more frequent; sometimes they would say, "You are now a saint," and sometimes, "You will not be saved." Brother Simeon once asked a demon, "Why do you say such contradictory things: on the one hand I am holy, and on the other I will not be saved?" The demon laughed in answer, "We never tell the truth."

Contrary demonic insinuations, lifting him to heights of pride and throwing him into the depths of eternal damnation, burdened the soul of the young novice, bringing him to the verge of despair and causing him to pray with increasing fervor. He slept little and in brief spells. Physically strong, of heroic stature, he did not lie down in bed, but spent his nights in prayer either standing or sitting on a stool. When exhaustion overcame him, he would sleep for 15-20 minutes on his stool, and then rise again for further prayer.

Months passed, but the suffering of demonic visits only intensified. The young novice's spiritual strength began to falter, his courage was exhausted, the fear of death and despair gripped him, and a horrible feeling of hopelessness took hold of his entire being more and more often. Finally, he reached the brink of his despair, and, sitting in his cell one evening, concluded that, "It is impossible to reach God through prayer." With this thought he felt completely forlorn, and his soul darkened with hellish languor and anguish.

The same day, during vespers, on an icon of the Savior outside the church of the Holy Prophet Elijah by the windmill, he saw the Living Christ.

"The Lord mysteriously revealed himself to the young novice," and his entire body, his entire being, was filled with the fire of grace of the Holy Spirit, the same fire that the Lord brought to earth during His Coming (Luke 12:49). From this vision, Simeon fainted, and the Lord disappeared.

It is impossible to describe Simeon's condition in this hour. He had been sanctified by the glorious light of God, as though he had been removed from this world and spiritually transported to the heavens, where he heard unspoken words. At this moment, he was as though born anew from on high (John 1:13; 3:3). The meek gaze of the all-forgiving, all-loving, joyous Christ drew to Him his entire person, and having disappeared, continued to vitalize his soul with the sweetness of God's love through the vision of God outside the confines of worldly objects. Later, in his writings, Simeon often repeated that he came to understand the Lord through the Holy Spirit, that he saw God in the Holy Spirit. He also insisted that when the Lord Himself visits a soul, the

soul cannot but recognize him as its Creator and God.

Comprehending its resurrection and having seen the light of true and eternal being, Simeon's soul experienced the joy of the Pascha for some time following this vision. Everything was great: the world was wonderful, people were nice, nature indescribably beautiful; and his body seemed different too: it was lighter and he appeared to have greater strength. But slowly the feeling of grace began to weaken. Why? What could be done to avoid its loss?

The search for an answer to this puzzle was sought in the advice of Simeon's spiritual guide and the writings of the ascetic Holy Fathers. "During prayer keep your mind free of all imagination and thought and concentrate it in the words of the prayer," admonished the Elder Father Anatoly of Holy Rusik. Simeon talked much with Elder Anatoly, who concluded his useful and didactic teaching with the words, "If you are already such, where will you be in old age?" Without wishing it, Anatoly's astonishment gave the young novice a strong push toward vanity, which Simeon did not yet know how to vanquish.

The young and inexperienced Simeon now embarked on the most difficult and complicated struggle against vanity. Pride and vanity bring with them all manner of sorrows and falls: grace disappears, the heart grows colder, prayer becomes weaker, the mind is distracted and various passions take root.

Now a monk, Siluan gradually becomes more adept at ascetic works, most of which appear impossible to the common man. His sleep remains fitful: 15-20 minutes several times a day. As before, he does not lie down, but sleeps sitting on his stool; in the daytime he labors as a worker; he follows the precepts of internal obedience and learns to submit his own will in order to more fully commit himself to doing the will of God; he abstains from food, talk, and extraneous movement; spends lengthy periods praying the Prayer of Jesus. And despite all this spiritual exertion the feeling of grace often leaves him, and at night he is surrounded by demons.

The constant change of condition from a feeling of some grace to a feeling of hopelessness in the face of demonic attack does not pass without bringing fruit. In this state of perpetual change, Siluan's soul becomes accustomed to constant internal battle, vigilance, and the diligent search for a solution.

Fifteen years passed since his vision of Christ. And one day, during a struggle with the demons, when, despite his efforts, it proved impossible to achieve a clear state of mind for prayer, Siluan rose from his stool to prostrate himself, but saw before him an enormous demon, obscuring the icon and expecting to take Siluan's bow for himself. The entire cell was full of demons. Father

Siluan sat down again on his stool, and, head hung low, with heavy heart prayed, "Lord, you see that I wish to pray to you with a clear mind, but the demons won't let me. Teach me what I must do so that they cannot distract me." And the answer came from within his soul, "The proud always suffer like this from demons." "Lord," said Siluan, "teach me what I must do to humble my soul." Once again the answer came from his heart: "**Keep your mind in hell and don't lose hope.**"

From this moment he saw not in an abstract or intellectual manner, but with his entire being that the root of all sin, the seed of death is pride; that God is Meekness, and the person seeking to win God must win meekness. He understood that the indescribable sweetness of Christ's meekness that he had been given to experience during the Vision, was an inseparable aspect of God's love, God's being. From this moment he truly understood, that his entire spiritual labor must be directed toward attaining meekness. Thus with his own being, he was able to comprehend this great mystery of Being.

In this manner, his soul was exposed to the mystery of the struggle of Serafim of Sarov, who, following his vision of Christ in church during the Liturgy, also experienced a feeling of having lost grace and contact with God; who stood for a thousand days and nights in a desert on a rock, calling, "God, have mercy upon me, a sinner."

He finally saw the true meaning and force of Saint Pimen the Great's answer to his disciples, "Believe, my children! Where Satan is, there I will be." He understood that Saint Anthony the Great was sent by God to a shoemaker in Alexandria to learn the same lesson: from the shoemaker he learned to think, "All will be saved, only I will perish."

He understood from the experience of his life that the field of spiritual struggle with evil, cosmic evil, lies within a person's own heart. He saw with his soul that the tap root of sin is pride, that curse of mankind that tore people from God and thrust the world into endless sorrow and suffering; pride was that true seed of death that had enveloped mankind in the darkness of despair. From this moment, Siluan, now a spiritual giant, turned all his energies toward acquiring the meekness of Christ, which he was given to witness during his first Vision, but which he had not then been able to keep.

Now the monk Siluan stood firmly on the path of righteousness. From this day, his "favorite song," as he called it, became, "Soon I will die, and my cursed soul will descend into the closed black confines of hell, and there I alone will burn in a dark flame and cry for the Lord, 'Where are You, light of my soul? Why have You deserted me? I cannot live without you'." This prayer led to peace in Siluan's soul and to clarity in prayer, but even this flaming path was not a short one.

Grace does not desert him as before. He **feels** it in his heart, he feels the living presence of God, God's mercy fills him with wonder, he experiences the depth of the world of Christ; the Holy Spirit once again fills him with the power of love. And though he is no longer as foolish as before, and though he has emerged wiser from the long and arduous struggle, though he is now a great spiritual wrestler, yet still he suffered from the inconstancy and mutability of human nature, and his heart cried with an inexpressible sorrow when he felt grace slipping from him. And this continued for fifteen more years, until one day he acquired through one sweeping exercise of the mind, invisible on the outside, the ability to vanquish that which had for so long defeated him.

By way of clear internal prayer, the ascetic learns the great mysteries of the soul. Entering his heart with his mind, first he finds his human heart, within which he sees, deeply hidden, the heart whose essence is not human at all. He finds this deeper heart, this spiritual, metaphysical heart, and discovers that the being of humanity is not something alien or external to him, but is organically connected to his own personal being.

"Our brother is our life," taught the Elder. Through Christ's love all people are accepted as an indivisible part of our own personal eternal being. The commandment to love your neighbor as you would yourself, he begins to understand as something other than a mere ethical norm; in the word "as" he sees not an indication of the level, or measure, of love, but a sign of the ontological commonality of being.

"The Father does not judge, but has given judgment to the Son... because He is the Son of man" (John 5:22-27). This Son of man, the Great Judge of the world, on Judgement Day will proclaim that "the one among the smallest of these" is Himself; in other words that the being of each individual is held in common with Him, and is included in His own personal being. All of humanity, "all of Adam," he has taken into himself and has suffered for all of Adam.

After the experience of the torments of hell, after God's admonition to "Keep his mind in hell," it became a habit of Elder Siluan to pray for the dead suffering in hell. But he prayed also for the living and for future generations. His prayer, which was not bound by temporal limits, erased any trace of the transient features of human life, and of enemies. He was given in the sorrow of the world to distinguish between those who experienced God and those who did not. It became unbearable for him to consider that people could languish in the depths of darkness.

Once a hermit-monk said to him that "God would punish all atheists. They will burn in an eternal flame." It appeared to give this monk satisfaction that they would be punished by eternal fire. But Elder Siluan, with some worry, asked,

"Tell me please, if you are placed in Heaven, and from there you see how others burn in hellish flames, would you remain detached?" "What can you do — it's their own fault," countered the monk. The Elder, filled with sorrow, answered, "Love cannot accept that... Everyone must be prayed for."

And indeed, he prayed for everyone; to pray only for himself became a foreign concept. All people are disposed to sin, and all are stripped of God's glory (Romans 3:22). For Siluan, having been exposed to the glory of God and having been denied it, the very thought of such denial was too heavy to bear. His soul languished in the consciousness that people live without knowing God and His love, and he prayed with great prayer that the Lord through his inscrutable love should allow them to know Him.

Till the end of his life, despite waning strength and sickness, Siluan continued to sleep for only brief spells. He had much time for individual prayer, and he remained in prayer constantly, changing its form to fit circumstances. He prayed especially strongly at night, before the matins. That was when he prayed for the living and the dead, for friends and enemies, for the entire world.

Teachings and admonitions of Elder Siluan

Contents: [On the condition of man.](#) [The will of God.](#) [A word on prayer.](#) [On humility.](#) [On the world of the soul.](#) [On grace.](#) [On love.](#) [On pastors.](#) [On thought and vainglory.](#) [On obedience.](#) [Final word.](#)

[On the condition of man.](#)

People, until they come to know something greater, are satisfied with the little that they have. Man is like a village rooster who lives in a small enclosure with few people and farm animals about, who knows his ten hens and is content with this life, because he knows no more. But an eagle, who circles high in the clouds, and sees great distances with his sharp eyes, who hears the sounds of the earth and revels in its beauty, who knows many lands, seas and rivers, and sees a multitude of animals and birds, would not be content to live in a small enclosure with a rooster.

It is the same in spiritual life. Whoever has not known the grace of the Holy Spirit is like the rooster who does not know the flight of the eagle; he cannot comprehend the sweetness of tender emotion and love of God. He knows

God from nature and from Scripture, he is satisfied with the law and is content with his lot as is the rooster, and does not feel sorrow that he is not an eagle. But he who has experienced the Lord through the Holy Spirit, he prays day and night, because the grace of the Holy Spirit calls him to love the Lord, and the sweetness of the Lord's love gives him the ability to carry the burdens of the world with ease; his soul pines only for the Lord and searches constantly for the grace of the Holy Spirit.

We are all suffering on this earth and searching for freedom, but few know what freedom is and where it can be found. The Lord gives the repentant His peace and the freedom to love Him. Oh, my brothers, all the earth, repent while you still have time. God awaits our repentance with mercy. And all the heavens, all the saints await our repentance. As God is love, so the Holy Spirit in the saints is love. Ask, and the Lord shall forgive. And when you receive absolution from your sins, then your soul will be joyful and happy, and the grace of the Holy Spirit will enter your soul, and you will say, "Here is true freedom: it is in God and of God."

The grace of God does not hinder freedom, but only helps to keep the commandments of God. Adam was in grace, and his will was not fettered. So too the angels are in the Holy Spirit, but their free will is not taken away.

The Lord wants us to love each other; this is the essence of freedom — love for God and for your neighbor. This is both freedom and equality. But in earthly titles there can be no equality; this is of no concern to the soul, however. Not everyone can be a king or a prince; not everyone can be a patriarch or an abbot, or a leader, but no matter what your title you can love God and serve Him, and that is all that matters. And whoever loves God more on earth shall be in greater glory in the Kingdom.

The Will of God.

When you have no kind mentors, then you must submit humbly to the will of God. And then the Lord will make you wiser with His grace, for the Lord loves us more than words can describe.

It is a great goodness to submit to the will of God. Then your soul is filled with the Lord only, and it has no other thought, it prays to God with a special purity, and feels the love of God, even though the body may suffer. When the soul has submitted wholly to the will of God, then the Lord Himself begins to lead it, and the soul learns directly from God, where before it had learnt from teachers and Scripture. But it is very rare that the Teacher of a soul should be the Lord Himself through the Holy Spirit, and few know of this, except those who live according to the will of God.

The proud do not wish to live according to the will of God, they prefer to direct their own lives, and they do not understand that man lacks the capacity to direct his own life without God. And when I lived in the world and did not know the Lord and His Holy Spirit, I did not know how much the Lord loved us; I only depended on my own abilities. But when through the Holy Spirit I felt the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, then my soul submitted to God, and everything wicked that befalls me I accept with the words, "The Lord watcheth over me, what have I to fear?" Previously, I could not live like this.

The most precious thing on earth is to know God and at least in part understand His will. The soul that has felt God must submit to his will in everything and live before Him in fear and love. In love, because the Lord is love. In fear, because it must be afraid to insult God by some evil thought.

How do you know whether you are living according to the will of God? Here is a sign: if you long for some thing, then you have not submitted to the will of God, even though you may think that you live according to His will. Whoever lives according to the will of God does not concern himself with anything. And if he needs some thing, then he submits himself and that thing to God; and if he does not receive it, then he remains content as though he had received it. The soul which has submitted to the will of God, fears nothing: neither storm nor bandits; **nothing**. And whatever should happen, it says, "It is God's will." If the body is ill, the soul thinks, "Then I am in need of this illness, otherwise God would not have given it to me." And so the body and the soul remain at peace.

Any soul that feels burdened by doubt must appeal to the Lord, and the Lord shall answer it. But in general, this should only be done in an hour of crisis and confusion; ordinarily, one should appeal to a confessor, for this is an expression of humility. The Lord has provided for the Holy Spirit to be present on earth, and those in whom He lives feel Heaven in their hearts. Perhaps you ask, why do I not feel such grace? Because you have not submitted to the will of God, but live according to your own.

We must always pray, so that the Lord will tell us what we must do, and the Lord will not leave us in confusion. Adam was unwise not to ask the Lord about the fruit brought to him by Eve, and so lost Eden. David did not ask the Lord, "will it be good if I take for myself the wife of Uriah?" and so fell into the sins of murder and adultery. And so all the saints who have sinned, sinned because they did not call upon God for help and spiritual guidance. Saint Serafim of Sarov once said, "When I spoke of my own mind, I made mistakes."

If you speak or write of God, then pray and ask the Lord for help and guidance, and the Lord will aid and teach you. And if you are bewildered, bow

three times and say, "Merciful Lord, You see that my soul is confused, and I fear falling into sin, guide me, oh Lord." And the Lord will certainly direct you because He is very close to you. If you doubt this, then you will not receive that for which you ask. Thus the Lord said to Peter, "Why did you doubt, you of little faith" (Matthew 14:31), when Peter began to drown in the water. It is the same with the soul that begins to drown in evil thoughts when it enters into doubt.

And so, only the Lord knows all; as for us, whoever we are, we must pray to God for enlightenment and turn to our spiritual confessors, so as not to make mistakes.

A Word On Prayer.

Whoever loves the Lord remembers Him always, and this memory of the Lord gives birth to prayer. If you do not remember the Lord, you will not pray; in the absence of prayer the soul languishes without the love of God. For it is through prayer that we feel the grace of the Holy Spirit. Prayer saves man from sin, for a praying mind is busy with God and stands in humility before the Lord, whom the soul recognizes.

Prayer is given to those who pray, as the Scriptures say, but prayer offered only by force of habit, without heartfelt sorrow for sins, is not pleasing to the Lord. A loving soul cannot abstain from prayer, for it strives to reach Him through the grace which it feels by means of prayer.

For prayer we have been given churches, in which services are conducted according to books, but you cannot take a church with you, and even books are not always available, whereas internal prayer is with you always and in all places. Holy rites are performed in churches in the presence of the Holy Spirit, but the soul is the best church of God, and whoever prays in the soul knows the world as his church. But this is not for everyone.

Many pray aloud and like to pray from books, and this is good, and the Lord accepts their prayers and has mercy on them. But if someone should pray to the Lord and be thinking of something else, this prayer will not be heard. Whoever prays through habit has no change in prayer, but whoever prays with feeling has many changes: there is a struggle with the enemy, a struggle with oneself, with passions, a struggle with others, and one must remain hearty. Many like to read good books, and this is commendable, but prayer is best.

If your mind wishes to pray in your heart and cannot, then read the prayer aloud and keep your mind on the words of the prayer, as the "Ladder" recommends. In time, the Lord will give you prayer of the heart without

interfering thoughts, and prayer will become easy. Some have damaged their hearts by forcing their minds to pray in their hearts and have even reached a point where their mouths could not say the words. Know the order of religious life: gifts are given to a simple, humble, attentive soul. Whoever is obedient is sparing in everything: food, words, acts; to these the Lord gives prayer, and it repeats easily in the heart.

Unceasing prayer derives from love and is lost through passing judgment, idle talk and intemperance. Whoever loves God might think about Him day and night, because **no activities can stand in the way of loving God**. The Apostles loved God and the world did not stand in their way, though they understood the world, and prayed for it, and preached.

On Humility.

It is a great sign of grace to learn Christian humility: it becomes easier to live, and everything becomes dearer to the heart. Only to the humble does the Lord show himself through the Holy Spirit, and if we are not humble, then we cannot see God. Humility is that light, by means of which we can see the Light of God, just as we sing "In Your light we see the light."

There is a great difference between the simplest person who has felt the Lord through the Holy Spirit and the person, though he may be prominent, who has not felt the grace of the Holy Spirit. There is a great difference between believing only that God exists, experiencing Him only through nature or the Scriptures, and experiencing Him through the Holy Spirit. If one has experienced God through the Holy Spirit, his soul burns with love for God day and night, and it can no longer be tied to anything earthly. The soul which has not felt the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, feels joy in the vanity of earthly fame or wealth, but the soul that has experienced God through the Holy Spirit, desires only the Lord, and places no value on wealth or earthly glory.

If we were humble, the Lord in His kindness would show us everything, reveal all secrets, but we are not humble, we are proud and vain over all details, and in this we suffer ourselves and torment others.

The Lord does not reveal Himself to proud souls. The proud soul, even if it has read all the books, will never understand the Lord, for in its pride it does not allow any room for the grace of the Holy Spirit, and God is only experienced through the Holy Spirit. Pride does not allow the soul to enter on the path of faith. I give this advice to the unbeliever: let him say, "Lord, if You exist, then enlighten me, and I will serve You with all my heart and soul." For this humble thought and preparedness to serve God, the Lord will certainly enlighten him.

The Lord, though He is merciful, tests the soul with hunger and does not bestow grace until it learns humility. The proud person fears reproach while the humble does not. Whoever has acquired the meekness of Christ is always prepared to reproach himself and welcomes abuse, and sorrows when he is complimented. But this is only the first step in humility; when the soul experiences the Lord through the Holy Spirit in His humility and meekness, then it sees itself as worse than all.

The Lord has taught me to hold my mind in hell, and not to despair. And this is how my soul becomes humble, but this is not yet real humility, which is indescribable. As the soul moves toward the Lord, it becomes fearful, but when it sees the Lord, then it becomes immensely joyous from the beauty of His glory, and it forgets everything earthly in the face of the love of God and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit. This is the Lord's Heaven. Love will surround everyone, and from the humility of Christ they will be glad to see others above them. The humility of Christ exists in the lowly: they are happy in their lowliness. This was given to me to understand by the Lord.

The Lord said, "Learn from Me to be meek and humble of heart." There are many types of humility. You can be obedient and reproach yourself in everything — this is a form of humility. Another can repent his sins and count himself the lowest before Christ — this is also a form of humility. But when a soul sees the Lord through the Holy Spirit in all His meekness and humility, then it also becomes humbled to its limits. This is a special sort of humility which cannot be described, it can only be experienced through the Holy Spirit. And if people could experience the Lord through the Holy Spirit, they would all change — the wealthy would despise their wealth, the learned their studies, the powerful their glory and authority, and all would be humbled and would live in great peace and love, and the earth would be filled with great joy. He who has experienced God through the Holy Spirit has a different understanding and taste.

The Lord loves people, but sends them sorrows, so that they can understand their weakness and be humbled, and for their humility they can accept the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit all is good, all is joyous, all is wonderful.

One might suffer greatly from poverty and ill-health, yet not be humbled: and so suffer in vain. But whoever is humbled is happy with any fate because the Lord is his wealth and joy, and all people will be amazed at the beauty of his soul.

You say, "I have great sorrow." But I say, or rather, the Lord Himself says, "Have humility," and you will see your sorrows dissolve into peace, so that you yourself will be amazed and say, "Why did I suffer and torment myself so?" Now you are joyful because you have become humble and the grace of

God has descended upon you. And should you even remain alone in poverty, joy will not leave you because there is the peace in your soul of which the Lord said, "I give you My peace." Thus does the Lord give His peace to all humble souls.

The soul of the humble person is like the sea: cast a stone into the sea, and for a moment it will disturb its serenity, and then sink to the depths. Sorrows sink in the heart of the humble because the power of the Lord is with them.

Previously I thought that the Lord performed miracles only in response to the prayers of saints. But now I know that the Lord will perform a miracle even for a sinner as soon as his soul is humbled, for when a person learns humility, then the Lord shall hear his prayers.

In their inexperience, many believe that one or another saint performed a miracle, but I have learned that it is the Holy Spirit residing in a person who performs the miracle. The Lord hopes that we will all be saved and be with Him eternally, and for that reason He listens to the prayers of a sinner for the good of others and for the one who prays.

Where do you reside, humble soul; and who resides in you; and what can I compare you to?

You shine brightly, like the sun, and you do not burn out, but give warmth to all around.

You will inherit the earth of the meek, as the Lord said.

You are like a flourishing garden, in the midst of which stands a beautiful house, where the Lord likes to live.

The earth and the sky love you.

The holy Apostles, Prophets, and Saints love you.

The Angels, Seraphims and Cherubims love you.

You, in your humility, are loved by the Ever-Virgin Mother of God.

The Lord loves you and finds joy in you.

On the World of the Soul.

Judging by what is written in the Scriptures and by the character of the people surrounding us, we are living in the final days. However, as that great holy man of Russia, Saint Serafim of Sarov, said, we must seek to keep safe

our inner peace, because without this salvation is impossible. During Serafim's life, in response to his prayers, the Lord kept Russia safe; after him came another pillar stretching from earth to the heavens, Father John of Kronstadt. He loved the people and prayed continuously for them: "Lord, I wish that Your world would be in all Your people, whom You love so boundlessly that You gave Your Only Son to save the world."

Praying thus without respite for the people, he retained his inner peace. But we are losing ours because we do not love people. The Holy Apostles and all the saints desired salvation for all people and, remaining among people, prayed for them energetically. The Holy Spirit gave them the strength to love all people. If we do not love our brothers, then we cannot have peace. Everyone should think this over.

Glory to the Lord, that He has not left us orphans, but has given us the Holy Spirit to be with us on this earth. The Holy Spirit teaches the soul unspoken love for people and sorrow for all those who have lost their way and who are descending into hell. And whosoever has not acquired the Holy Spirit does not wish to pray for enemies.

Saint Paisii the Great prayed for his disciple, who had renounced Christ, and while he was praying, the Lord appeared and said to him, "Paisii, who are you praying for? He has renounced Me." But Paisii continued to sorrow for his disciple, whereupon the Lord said, "Paisii, you have become like Me in your love."

Thus is peace retained, and **there is no other path.**

If someone prays much and fasts, but does not love his enemies, then he cannot achieve peace in his soul. I could not speak like this, if the Holy Spirit had not taught me love.

You should guide your brother meekly, with love. Peace is lost when the soul becomes vain, treating a brother with condescension, or judging someone, or teaching a brother, but not meekly and without love. If you eat too much, or pray limply, you will lose the peace in your soul.

But if we adapt to diligent prayer for our enemies and love for them, then peace will ever be in our souls; and if we should hate and condemn our brethren, then our minds shall become clouded and they will both lose inner peace and become impudent before God.

Whoever carries within himself the peace of the Holy Spirit brings peace to others as well; and who carries with him an evil spirit brings evil to others. The soul that has experienced God wishes always to see Him within itself, for He

enters quietly, and brings peace to the soul, and witnesses salvation without words.

On Grace.

The Lord called on a sinful soul to repent, and it turned to Him. Then He mercifully accepted it and revealed Himself to it because He is merciful, humble and meek. In His infinite mercy He did not mention the soul's sins, and the soul loved Him without end, and was drawn to Him like a caged bird to a green wood.

Suddenly the soul loses the Lord's grace and wonders how it insulted the Lord. "I will ask for forgiveness, and perhaps He will once again give me His grace, for my soul wishes for nothing else in this world except the Lord," thinks a person, for the love of the Lord is so warming, that if a soul should taste it — it would desire nothing else; and if it should lose it, or if grace should dissipate, then what prayers would a soul not utter in order to return the Lord's grace to it?

When a soul lives in the Holy Spirit, then it is joyful and does not pine for the heavens, because it feels the Kingdom of God within itself: the Lord has come and abides within it. But when it loses grace, then it begins to pine for heaven and tearfully seeks out the Lord.

Whoever has not felt grace cannot know what it is to desire it. Most people have become attached to the worldly, and they cannot understand that nothing worldly could ever take the place of the Holy Spirit. The Lord takes His grace from the soul and in this manner mercifully and wisely teaches it to be humble, for it was for the soul that He spread His arms on the Cross with such great suffering. He gives the soul the ability to struggle against our enemies, but the soul by itself is powerless to achieve victory; for this reason it is said, "Ask, and ye shall receive." And if we do not ask, then we but torment and rob ourselves of the grace of the Holy Spirit, without which the soul remains confused, because it cannot see the will of God.

Here is the shortest and easiest path to salvation: Be obedient and temperate, do not judge and keep your mind and heart free of evil thoughts; believe instead that all people are kind and that God loves them. For these humble thoughts the grace of the Holy Spirit will live within you, and you will say, "God is merciful."

It brings the Lord joy to see a humbly penitent soul, and He brings the grace of the Holy Spirit to it. I know how one novice received the Holy Spirit after only a half-year in a monastery; others received the Holy Spirit after ten years; and yet others live for forty and more years before they experience

grace. But **none** of them could retain grace, because we are not humble.

Saint Serafim was 27 years old, when he saw the Lord, and his soul loved God so, that the sweetness of the Holy Spirit changed him entirely. But when he later went to a deserted area and saw that he no longer carried **that** grace, he stood for three years on a rock and cried, "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner."

Blessed is he who does not lose the grace of God, but rises from strength to strength. I have lost grace, but the Lord has felt great pity for me and allowed me to taste an even greater one in His mercy. Brothers, with all your strength, humble your souls, so that the Lord will love them and bestow His mercy upon them. But we cannot hope for mercy if we do not love our enemies.

On Repentance.

Glory to the Lord, that He gave us repentance, with which we can all — without exception — achieve salvation. Only those who refuse to repent shall not achieve salvation, and in this I see their despair, and I cry out of pity for them.

Any soul which has lost its peace must repent, and the Lord will forgive its sins, and then peace and joy will visit the soul. There need be no witnesses, for the Holy Spirit is the witness of the remission of sins. Here is a sign of forgiveness: if you have come to hate sin, then the Lord has forgiven your sin.

Whoever repents sincerely is prepared to withstand any sorrow: hunger and homelessness, cold and heat, illness and poverty, humiliation and banishment, lies and slander, for the soul seeks God and does not concern itself with anything worldly, but instead prays with a clear mind. And whoever is tied to lands and wealth can never have a clear mind in God, because deep within his soul there is always a concern over worldly things. If he should not repent completely and not sorrow over his insult to God, then he will die impassioned, never having received the Lord.

Christ prayed for those that crucified Him: "Father, count not this sin against them; they know not what they do." Archdeacon Stefan prayed for those who stoned him so that the Lord would not judge this sin against them. And so we, if we wish to retain grace, must pray for our enemies. If you do not find pity on a sinner who will suffer in flames, then you do not carry the grace of the Holy Spirit, but rather an evil spirit; and while you yet live, you must free yourself from his clutches through repentance.



On Love.



The Lord loves us as His children, and His love is stronger than a mother's love, because even a mother can forget her child, but the Lord never forgets us. And if the Lord Himself had not given the Holy Spirit to the Orthodox people and our great pastors, then we could never know how much He loves us.

The Lord loves us so much that for our salvation He came down to earth and spilled His Blood for us, and gave It to us to drink, and gave us His Ever-Clean Body. Thus we became His children, of His Flesh and Blood; and we are like

the Lord in flesh as children are like their fathers, no matter their age. And the Spirit of God witnesses to our souls that we shall always be with Him.

In order to experience the Lord it is not necessary to have wealth, or learning, but it is necessary to be obedient and abstemious, to have a humble spirit and love your neighbor; the Lord will love such a soul and reveal Himself to it, and will more often teach it love and humility, and will give it all it needs in order that it may find peace in God.

The Lord created man from earth, but He loves us as His children, and awaits us with joy.

The Lord loves all people, but whoever searches for Him, He loves most. "Who loves Me — I love," says the Lord, "and who seeks me shall find grace" (Proverbs 8:17). The love of the Lord is such that He desires that all people should be saved and be with Him in Heaven for eternity, to witness His glory. We cannot know this glory in full, but through the Holy Spirit can know it in part. And whoever has not experienced the Holy Spirit cannot know this glory, but can only believe in the promise of the Lord and keep His commandments. But even they are blessed, as the Lord said to the Apostle Thomas (John 20:29); and they will be equal to those who witnessed the glory of the Lord on earth.

And I learned that love is different in strength. Whoever fears God in order not to insult Him: this is the first kind of love. Whoever has a mind clear of unnecessary thought — this is the second form of love, greater than the first. Whoever feels the presence of grace in his soul — this is the third form of

love, even greater.

The fourth, absolute, love for God is to have grace in your body as well as your soul. Such a body will become holy and leave relics. This happens with great martyrs, prophets and saints. Whoever has reached this level is untouched by bodily love. He may sleep with a girl and feel no desire for her. The love of God is greater than that bodily love that attracts the entire world, except those who have the grace of God in full, for the sweetness of the Holy Spirit recreates the entire person and teaches to love God completely. In the fullness of the love of God, the soul does not touch the earth; though one may live among others in the world, he forgets all in the world thanks to the love of God. Our misfortune is that we are too proud to stand in that grace, and it leaves our souls, and the soul searches for it, crying and weeping, and says, "My soul pines for the Lord."

Whoever wishes to love the Lord must love his enemies and be without spite; then the Lord will give you to glorify Him day and night, and your mind will forget the world; and if it should return and remember, then it will pray diligently for the world.

This is how the saints lived, for the Spirit of God taught their souls to pray for others.

On Pastors.

The Lord calls upon bishops to lead their flocks and bestows upon them the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Spirit they have the authority to release sin or not. They are the heirs of the Apostles, and they lead us to Christ by the grace bestowed upon them. They teach us repentance; they teach us to keep the commandments of the Lord. They enlighten us with the word of God, so that we might experience the Lord. They show us the path of salvation and help us rise to the peak of the humble spirit of Christ. They collect the sorrowing and the lost sheep of Christ in the churchyard in order that their souls might achieve peace in God.

They pray to God on our behalf, so that we might be saved. They, as the friends of Christ, can entreat the Lord, so that the living will be given humility and the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the dead — forgiveness for their sins, and the Church — peace and freedom. They engage in great labors and deeds, and for this they receive the wealth of knowledge of the Saints, whose lives they emulate. They stand above all; like eagles, they soar high and from there they see boundless space, and with the wisdom of theology they lead the herd of Christ.

The priest, servant at the altar of Christ, is a great figure. Whoever insults him

insults the Holy Spirit abiding in him. One humble and meek man was strolling with his wife and three children. He met an archpriest in a carriage, and when the peasant bowed to him in reverentially, he saw the archpriest blessing him enveloped in flames of grace.

If people could see the true glory in which a priest serves, they would faint from the sight; and if a priest could himself see the heavenly glory he stands in while conducting the service, he would become a great ascetic, in order not to allow any insult to the grace of the Holy Spirit residing within him.

I write these lines and my soul is joyous that our pastors are like the Lord Jesus Christ; but even we sheep, despite our small grace, are also like the Lord. People do not know this mystery, but John the Theologian clearly said, "Let us be like Him," and not only in death, but even now, for the Merciful Lord has sent the Holy Spirit to earth, and the Holy Spirit lives in our Church. He lives in pure pastors; He lives in the hearts of believers; He teaches the soul spiritual feats. He gives strength to fulfil the Lord's commandments and puts us on the path to righteousness.

On thought and vainglory.

Know two thoughts and fear them. One says: you are a saint; the other: you will not be saved. Both these thoughts are from the enemy, and there is no truth in them. You must think: I am a great sinner, but the Lord is merciful, He loves His children greatly, and will forgive my sins. But don't depend on your deeds, though you may have worked much. One ascetic said to me, "I must surely be forgiven, for I bow so many times per day," but when death came, he tore at his shirt. So, not for our labors, but in His grace the Lord dispenses mercy. The Lord wishes our souls to be humble, absent of hate and willing to forgive all, then the Lord shall forgive us with joy.

Know that if your thought leads you to look at how others live, this is a sign of pride. Watch after yourself and you will see that as soon as your soul rises above your brother, this is followed by evil thoughts.

Our enemies (demons) fell because of their pride, and call us to follow them, and bring us feelings of praise. And if your soul accepts that praise, then grace will depart, until the soul becomes humble again. And so all your life you must learn the humility of Christ.

A person can fall into vainglory either through inexperience or pride. If it is inexperience, the Lord will quickly heal him, but if it is pride, the soul will suffer long before it learns to be humble.

We fall into vainglory when we think we are smarter and more experienced

than others, even our confessor.

If you see a light within you, or about you, do not believe it, if together with the light you do not feel tender emotion to God and love for your neighbor. But do not be afraid, and be humble, and the light will disappear.

If you see a vision, or an image, or a dream, do not believe it, for if it is from the Lord, the Lord will teach you. The soul that has not experienced the Holy Spirit cannot comprehend visions nor where they are from. The enemy gives the soul a sweetness mixed with vanity, and this is how to recognize vainglory. If a vision is from the enemy the soul will feel confusion and fear; but this is only a humble soul that feels itself unworthy of a vision; a vain person may not feel fear or even confusion, because he seeks visions and feels himself worthy, and as a result the enemy easily fools him.

The heavenly is experienced through the Holy Spirit, and the earthly through the mind: whoever wants to experience God with his mind through learning is in vainglory, for God can only be experienced through the Holy Spirit.

On obedience.

Why did the Holy Fathers place obedience above fasting and prayer? Because asceticism without obedience leads to vanity; if a novice merely does what he is told, he has no reason to be proud. Moreover, the obedient has cut off his will in everything and listens to his spiritual father, and for this reason his mind is clear of any concern and his prayer is pure. The obedient has in mind only God and the word of his elder, while the disobedient's mind is full of various business and condemnation for his elder, and for that reason he cannot see God.

Obedience is necessary not only for monks, but for all people. Even the Lord was obedient. Proud and self-assured do not let grace reside within them, and therefore they never have internal peace, whereas the soul of the obedient easily accepts the grace of the Holy Spirit, bringing with it joy and serenity.

Whoever carries in him even a small amount of grace will submit to leadership with great joy. He knows that the Lord controls heaven and earth and the netherworld, and his own self, and his affairs and all that exists in the world, and for this reason he is always at peace.

Obedience prevents pride. In return for obedience you receive the ability to pray, along with the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is why obedience is greater than fasting and prayer.

If the fallen angels had retained obedience, they would have stayed in the heavens and would glorify the name of the Lord to this day. And if Adam had retained obedience, then he and his issue would have remained in Eden. But even now it is possible to return to Eden through repentance. The Lord loves us greatly, despite our sins, as long as we seek humility and love our enemies. Whoever does not love his enemies cannot achieve peace, even if he were placed in Eden.

Final Word

If we view the entire two-thousand-year history of Christianity, we can see the endless wealth of achievements of Christian culture. Enormous libraries, filled with the great works of human minds and spirits. A great number of academies, universities, institutes, where hundreds of thousands of young people approach the banks of this great ocean, sometimes with baited breath and pounding hearts, thankful for the fortune and joy given to them, in other cases with a burning enthusiasm, so that they feel no need to sleep or care for themselves, and drink greedily of the living waters of wisdom. Tens of thousands of beautiful temples, magnificent creations of human genius. Uncounted precious creations of other forms of art: music, art, sculpture, poetry. And much else besides. And the Elder ignores this and sees only one thing: humility and love of one's enemies — **this is all there is.**

As wise and learned and fine-looking as a person may be, if he does not love his enemies, i.e. any other person, he cannot reach God. And the opposite is also true, however simple a person may be, and poor and ignorant, but if he carries within himself that love, then "he is with God and God is with him." The Elder maintained that it was impossible to love one's enemies outside of the One True God. The carrier of such love is a participant in eternal life, and he carries within himself an undeniable witness of this. He is the abode of the Holy Spirit, and knows the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, knows them with a true and life-giving knowledge, and in the Holy Spirit he is a brother and friend of Jesus Christ, he is the son of God, and close to God in grace.

The Lord condensed all the law and prophets into two brief commandments (Matthew 22:40). And during the last supper, before His path to death on the cross, said to the Apostles, "There is no greater love but that a man lay down his life for his friends," adding, "You are My friends... I call you friends because I have told you all that I have heard from My Father" (John 15:13-15). Thus in

these few words was said **everything**. And without them all the laws, prophets, cultures, are **nothing**.

In order to remain in the love of God, it is necessary that anger and "hate" be multiplied to their limits, but they must be directed at the sin that lives inside me, at the evil that acts within me, **within me**, not within my brother.

All the energy of the struggle with cosmic evil is contained in the deep heart of the Christian, even as externally he — as Christ commanded — "must not resist evil" (Matthew 5:39).

Elder Siluan walked the earth, labored with his hands, and lived among people as a simple human, but nobody except God ever knew him.

Saintly Father Siluan,

Pray God for us!

Missionary Leaflet # EA17

Copyright © 2001 Holy Trinity Orthodox Mission

466 Foothill Blvd, Box 397, La Canada, Ca 91011

Editor: Bishop Alexander (Mileant)

(siluan_e.doc, 09-11-2001)

Edited by Donald Shufan

Edited by	Date