



“My soul, o my soul, rise up! Why art thou sleeping? The end draws near, and soon thou shalt be troubled ... ”

A sermon by *Metropolitan Philaret (Voznesensky)* on St Andrew of Crete’ Great Canon of Repentance

“My soul, o my soul, rise up! Why art thou sleeping? The end draws near, and soon thou shalt be troubled ... ”

In a sense, these words are at the core of the Great Penitential Canon, composed by St. Andrew of Crete, one of the great Saints of God.

He addresses his soul, ***“My soul, o my soul, rise up, why art thou sleeping?”*** If that great righteous one could criticize his own soul for having spiritually fallen asleep, what can we say about ourselves?

The Holy Fathers often say that in spiritual life there is a certain paradox (an assertion that at first glance seems self-contradictory, but in fact contains a profound philosophical meaning). According to the Holy Fathers, **the “spiritual paradox” rests in the fact that sinners see themselves as righteous, while the righteous see themselves as sinners.** Why is this? Why does a sinner see himself as a righteous person? Because he does not know himself, while the righteous man focuses all of his spiritual power on knowing himself.

The best of the pagans also recognized that you have to somehow know how to look into your internal world. Even in pre-Christian antiquity, we heard the phrase – attributed either to Socrates or to some other of the pagan thinkers – **“know thyself.”** With respect to the Christian understanding of that truth, there is after all reason for us to pray throughout Great Lent “Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own faults ... ” Were we to see them as we should, there would be no need for us to pray with such words.

We used to mention the following example from the lives of the saints: A certain righteous man began to implore God to show him to what depths sin had penetrated man's being, to what extent it had, as it were, maimed him, filled, and defeated him. When the Lord granted the ascetic's humble prayer and showed him the extent to which our nature was poisoned and maimed by sin, the terrified ascetic felt that he was about to go mad, and began to implore the Lord to hide that awful vision from his sight as soon as possible. That is just how poisoned by sin man is.

The deeper one delves into himself, the more accustomed he becomes to comprehending his internal world, the more clearly and painfully he feels the internal harm done by sin.

It was for a reason that in their prayers before Holy Communion, Sts. Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, and other Saints like them called themselves the worst of sinners, unworthy to look upon the heights of Heaven. This was no rhetorical phrasemongering, no hyperbole. They saw themselves just as what they said.

It was for a reason that St. Seraphim, that great Venerable One of the Russian Land, whom others saw as radiant as the sun, whom they saw rising up into the air while praying, liked to call himself the "poor wretched Seraphim." For the righteous person truly feels himself to be a sinner.

If in some room there is a dirty rag, but there is no light in the room, the dirt on the rag is not visible. Should light come into the room, the dirt immediately becomes perceptible. The more light, the more clearly visible will be the dirt. Therefore, the closer the Saints approach God, the more clearly they see their sinfulness. When someone truly comes close to God, his conscience is illumined, its voice becomes clear, and sounds like a bell, sounds a reproach for any falling away from God, for any instance of being unfaithful to Him.

As to the sinner, he knows neither himself nor his soul, and even when he goes to Confession, it seems to him that he is not all that bad. When he hears about great sinners, he, like many others like him, thinks, "*Well, at least I am not like that! I don't consider myself to be a righteous person, and I am not a saint, but still, I am not that bad. Certainly there are people worse than me ...*" **However, no truly righteous person – a person who remembers only his own sins, and not someone else's, one who always has compunction for them, and sees himself as meek before God would allow even the slightest self-justification to enter into his soul.**

We have now entered a period of repentant reflection and prayer.

Let us pray that the Lord might also truly grant unto us sinners to see our transgressions, and not those of others. We always notice others' sins, deficiencies and blunders, but often we don't notice our own; even if we do notice them, we don't have any problem justifying them, but always can find a reason [to justify them]. Thus, I repeat, let us sincerely pray that the Lord grant unto us to see our transgressions, for without that spiritual sight, there can be no true repentance.