

# «Pray unceasingly» (1 Thes. 5:17): How to understand prayer and how to pray for a contemporary person? (in witnessing of the Church ascetic tradition)

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It is difficult to talk about prayer, it is anything but a simple topic, sometimes one even does not know what to begin with although there is much literature on prayer. Unwittingly one feels how right was an unknown elder who once said a joke: "No one can talk about prayer if he does not pray. If he prays, then, he has no slightest desire to talk about that"[\[1\]](#).

Nevertheless, we need to talk about that because the issue of prayer is extremely topical. People look for alternatives to prayer books with their vast codes of obscure prayers which a contemporary person just has no time to read, thus often we have to hear the following questions:

- 1) What is prayer and are there any analogies to behold its action easier?
- 2) What is its purpose and is it possible to achieve it in a shorter and simpler way than in the way that a prayer book offers?
- 3) How to behave if a prayer remained unheard?

In my report I would like to answer these questions by a selection of protreptics of Holy Fathers-hermits of different epochs and these fathers have not lost their significance until now, moreover, they are still remaining in demand.

1. The Holy Scripture mentions prayer or imploration more than 240 times. An appeal to God in any situation of life was an ordinary thing, thus Apostle Paul's reminders are deeply saturated with a deep Bible spirit: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes. 5, 17), "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph. 6, 18), "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4, 2).

In an etymologicon I looked up the source of the word *молить, молиться* (to implore, to pray) and I was amazed at the wisdom of our ancestors. It appeared that a Common Slavic verb *modliti* (from *molditi*) is close to a Greek adjective *malthakos* (mild, tender) and to an Ancient-Saxonic adjective *mildi* (mild, kind, merciful) and it had the central meaning: to make somebody mild, kind[\[2\]](#).

Amazingly exactly they got the meaning of prayer: it changes the human being so much that he/she is able to communicate with God.

Usually it is defined like Holy Hierarch Theophan the Recluse does (+1894): "Prayer is exposition of mind and heart to God"[\[3\]](#).

He summarizes here classical definitions of prayer, for example, the definition of St. John Chrysostom (+407): "Prayer is the foundation of any wheal and prayer contributes in achieving salvation and eternal life... Anybody converses with God; and everybody who is a human being knows how much it means to talk to God... What could be holier than those who converse with God? What could be more righteous? What could be nobler? What could be wiser?"[\[4\]](#).

A similar definition is found in rev. John Climacus' words (+649): Prayer by its quality is dwelling and unification of a human being with God; by action it is consolidation of peace, reconciliation with God, both mother and daughter of tears, propitiation of sins, the bridge for passing over temptations, the wall protecting from tribulations, destruction of armors, the work of Angels, the food of all the fleshless, future joy, endless activity, invisible prosperity, a soul's food, mind's enlightenment, an axe for despair, direction to hope, elimination of grief, mortification of anger, the mirror of spiritual growth, discovery of spiritual dispensation, the sign of glory. Prayer for the one who truly prays is the Judge's throne and judgment before the Last Judgment"[\[5\]](#).

To elucidate the action of prayer, Holy Fathers often looked for analogies in the surrounding world and in

the human being. This method is in general typical for the Holy Fathers' tradition and was widely used in ascetics as well as in Triadology, Christology and anthropology. It is enough to mention St. Gregory of Nissa (ca. +395) who used it so widely that he did not start any of his speculations about divine things without analogies from nature[6].

A similar attitude was applied to prayer. Here are just several eloquent analogies. Thus, St. Philaret of Moscow (+1867) compared prayer to a magnet which attracts gracious and miracle-working power[7].

And St. Theophan referred to an analogy with oxygen being breathed in:

Someone, he says, calls prayer the breath of spirit. It is the breath of spirit... Just like lungs widen and thus attract life-giving elements of air when one breathes, depths of our heart open in prayer, and spirit rises to God to receive the respective gift by communicating to Him. And as there the oxygen received in breathing through blood then spreads throughout the body and revives it, here everything received from God also enters inside us and vivifies everything there[8].

St. John of Kronstadt offers a beautiful analogy to a magnifying glass used to light a fire: "A magnifying glass igniting wood or paper when we place it so that sunrays gathered in the glass' focus are all concentrated in one point of the object being ignited, act on it in their aggregate, and thus, it is like the whole sun, diminished, fits inside the object. Likewise, in prayer, our soul is warmed, revived and ignited by the intelligent Sun - God when we direct this mental Sun at our heart as a spiritual point in our nature using our mind as a magnifying glass, and when It acts on our heart with all Its simplicity and Its force"[9].

These comparisons are not incidental. They suggest that prayer is not an occupation at a certain time of the day, but the condition of spirit, and a constant one. But then it turns out that standing before an icon and making bows is not prayer at all, but only a technique or means; reading prayers by heart or from a book is not prayer either, but just a method of exciting it. It is reverential feelings to God: divine meditation, gratitude, devotion, feeling of one's own deep sinfulness, glorification that are the sign of the work of prayer[10]. It turns out that when I have these feelings, I am praying. One has to fill one's mind with them, otherwise the mind will find an occupation by itself, will start producing thoughts and, being in constant movement, will occupy itself, according to Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria (+ ca. 1126), with curiosity, gossips and twaddle[11].

It is this meaning of prayer that St. John Chrysostom emphasizes in his comment to the words by Apostle Paul "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph. 6, 18):

Do not limit yourself by one known time of the day. Can you hear what is said? Start praying at any time. Pray without ceasing, he says. Have not you heard about a widow, how she won over (a judge) thanks to her persistence? Have not you heard of how one friend was insistently begging (his friend) in the middle of the night and succeeded in doing this? Have not you heard of a woman of Canaan how she excited the Lord's sympathy to herself by her incessant requesting? These people achieved their goals by persistence... One has to pray without ceasing with vigour of spirit[12].

2. Hence, the goal of prayer is to always keep the memory of God in oneself.

It is this kind of prayer that is described by ancient hermits. For example, Reverend Isaac of Syria (+ ca. 700), a strict ascetic and hermit, gives, at first sight, an unexpected interpretation of the notion of prayer which, in his opinion, includes all man's actions performed with a thought of God. However, he does not find anything unusual and strange in this:

We must know that any talk (to God) done secretly (internally), any care of God taken by a good mind, any meditation on the spiritual is established by prayer and is called prayer, and this includes various readings, glorification of God, careful grief of the Lord, bodily bows or psalm chanting or everything else that constitutes the whole teaching of pure prayer, from which God's love is born; because love comes from prayer...[13]

And St. Basil the Great (+379) points out the active nature of such prayer. For him, as later for Reverend Simeon the New Theologian (+1022), a word not confirmed by action is futile and empty[14], because prayer cannot be reduced to mere words. Its power and energy is in the spiritual mood and in good deeds, which, according to the precise definition given by St. Apostle Paul, should be done during the whole conscious life: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God (1. Cor.

10, 31)"[15]. St. Basil often returns to this thought, let us cite another of his typical reflection.

"Any time is good for prayers and psalm chanting, as well as for many other things. Therefore, as you move your arm to do a deed,... praise God with your tongue, and if impossible, with your heart... in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5, 19), and, as you act, pray,...thanking the One Who has given strength to your arms for work and wisdom of mind for acquisition of knowledge..."[16].

This approach is shared by St. Theophan the Recluse: "What does it mean to pray without ceasing? Being constantly in the praying mood. The praying mood is thought about God and feeling for Him. Thought about God is the thought about His Omnipresence, that He is everywhere, sees everything and contains everything. Feeling to God is fear of God, love to God, ardent desire to please only Him in everything and to avoid anything that is not pleasing for Him, and the main thing – surrendering oneself to His holy will unquestioningly and accepting everything that occurs as coming directly from His hand"[17].

He also proposes some very simple techniques to prepare for prayer and to perform it, which are well known from other sources too. One has to distract oneself from earthly affairs and subjects, stand and walk for a while, clear one's mind, think: who am I and who is He to Whom I am going to address with a prayer. It is very important to set oneself to pronounce words of glorifications with reverence and fear of God in the heart[18]. When you have started praying, try to accompany the prayer with FEELING of repentance, without which a prayer is similar to a dead miscarried child, it is also very well to imagine yourself at the Last Judgement[19]. If prayer has become hurried, it is necessary to strain oneself and make sure that not a single word is pronounced without realization of its meaning and, as far as it is possible, without feeling[20]. The following method is proposed to avoid hastiness. Try to keep your attention in your heart and nowhere else, because, as a result of weakness of attention, the mind distances itself from the heart, were it must be during the prayer, and loses the memory of God, and without attention, there is no prayer[21]. Sometimes it happens that prayer does not come to your mind, then you can postpone it for a while. But even if after this it does not come to mind, you have to force yourself into doing your prayers making yourself understand the pronounced words to feel them[22].

But is it realistic? And if yes, then how?

Experienced men of prayer recommend a very simple method – short and frequent prayers[23].

Such prayers help to keep oneself in the praying mood with better effect and for longer time, they are even compared to sparks which light the heart.

"The reason why frequent but short prayers are needed, - says Reverend John Cassian of Rome (+435), is to prevent the slandering enemy from planting something into our heart. It is a true sacrifice because the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit (Ps. 51, 17). This is a salvational offering, this is a pure drink offering, this a sacrifice of truth, this is a sacrifice of thanksgiving (Ps. 50, 14), this is a mental burnt offering (Ps. 66, 15), which is done by a grieved and humble heart"[24].

I found very useful advice by St. Theophan the Recluse on how this should be done: "A means to do so is a short prayer constantly repeated in your mind: "Lord, have mercy"... While sitting, walking, doing or saying something and at any moment, keep it in your mind that God is close and appeal to him from your heart: "Lord, have mercy"[25].

He also suggests creation of one's own short prayers which would combine everything. For example, Glory to You, Lord, worshipped in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Glory to You, Who has created everything! Glory to You, Who have honoured us with Your image! Glory to You, Lord Jesus Christ! You incarnated, suffered, died for us and was risen![26].

It is good to appeal to God many times during the day, composing the respective prayer in each case. For example, at the beginning of any undertaking - "God, bless me", at its completion – "Glory to You, my Lord", when obsessed by some passion – "Save me, Lord I am dying", in confusion – "Lead my soul out of prison", when allured by sin - "Direct me, my Lord, to the right way", when in despair - "Be graceful, my Lord, to me, a sinner", and so on[27].

St. John of Kronstadt also provides instruction on praying with one's own words: "It is good sometimes to say during a prayer several words of your own breathing with ardent belief and love to God. Yes, it is not enough to speak to God in someone else's words all the time, to be children in belief and hope, but one

needs to show his mind as well... besides, we somehow get used to others' words and grow cold to them.. And how pleased God is with this babble of our own proceeding from the believing, loving and noble heart: one cannot describe it... Do not let prayer evaporate leaving only dry words behind it, but let it breathe with warmth of spirit, like a moist and warm bread taken out from a stove"[\[28\]](#).

In order to keep the thought of God, we need to connect with it all ideas of Him, His properties and actions known to us, and delve into each of them, one by one, with our mind. It is useful to ponder on the God's creation, His dispensation, incarnation of the Son of God, sending down of the Holy Spirit, creation of the Church, Heavenly Kingdom, goodness, wisdom, omnipotence, omniscience and other Divine properties. This excites the energy of spirit.

It is good to learn to interpret all things that catch your eye in the spiritual sense so that the eye sees the object, and the mind contemplates the spiritual truth. For example, when you see stains on white linen, think how upsetting is for God to see the stains of sin on our soul. When you hear children running and screaming, imagine what noise is raised in the soul when its attention veers away from God, and so on.

This is how St. Theophan teaches and points out: "...You should start with your home and reconsider everything in it - house, walls, roof, foundation, stoves, tables, chairs. Then – your parents, children, brothers, sisters, relatives, guests, and then the whole order of life: getting up, greeting, dinner, work, departures, returns, tea drinking, treats, singing, day, night, sleep and anything else... After you have done all this, then each thing will be for you as a holy book or a chapter in the book... And then every thing and every occupation and work will bring you to thinking about God"[\[29\]](#).

Look how everything is natural and simple. You do not even need to spend additional time on prayer as a meditation on divine things, you can always occupy your mind with it.

But we have used to turn to God, if we do so, only when we need something, and often find ourselves in a situation similar to one funny talk of a young girl to a priest:

"Father, at last I have started to pray the way you taught me, absolutely unselfishly!"

"Can you tell me how?", the priest asked.

Like this: "God, I am not asking for anything for myself. But please give my mom a good son-in-law in two years or so"[\[30\]](#)

3. But what should we do if our prayers do not come true in the form in which we pray. Usually, the reasons are seen in the fact that we appeal to God without persistence, just in passing, and also because our prayers often resemble those with a snake and a stone (Matth. 7, 9-10) It seems to us that we really ask for real things, but in fact we request that God make our illusions come true. While the prayer comes true exactly to the same extent to which the labour of prayer was applied[\[31\]](#).

Reverend John Climacus teaches us approximately the same things:

Let us not grieve if, asking God for something, we are not heard for a while. Without any doubt, all those who ask God about something and do not receive it, do not do it for one of the following reasons: either because they ask before the right time has come, or because, should they have received it they would have become arrogant, or because they would have ceased trying and making efforts after fulfillment of their prayer[\[32\]](#).

And continues:

Having been in prayer for long and seeing no result, do not say: I have not gained anything. Because being in prayer is already a gain; and what is a higher good than attaching to God and staying constantly in connection with Him[\[33\]](#).

And Reverend Zeno, hermit of Sinai (4th century) indicated when a prayer would certainly come true:

One who wants God to hear his prayers soon, when he stands before God and reaches out his hands to Him, first of all, even before praying about his soul, must pray for his enemies with all his heart. For this good deed, God will hear him whatever he prays about[\[34\]](#).

The first reaction to such an appeal is: "But how can this be?" It is true that it is impossible to love actions of a person who hurts us, breaches and defies laws of nature and God. But we must find forces in ourselves, while not approving his actions, to wish well to him as a person, not recompense him evil for evil, help him in his needs, difficulties and, at last, wish him eternal goods (Rom. 12, 17-20)[35]. And Reverend Silouan of Athos did not divide people into friends and foes, but only mentioned people who have come to know God and those who have not[36].

Of course, the above information about a short prayer is only a small grain from the treasury of ascetic heritage. But, nevertheless, we would like to hope that the thoughts of hermits and ascetics collected in this article may be useful for those who want to enter the blessed world of prayer[37].

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[1] Отцы-пустынники смеются. М-, 1996. С. 61.

[2] Преображенский А. Этимологический словарь русского языка Т 1 М : Репринт 1910-1914. С. 548.

[3] Феофан Затворник, свт. Начертание христианского нравоучения. М.: Репринт 1895. С. 406.

[4] Иоанн Златоуст, сет. Творения. Т. 2. Книга вторая. О молитве. Слово второе. СПб.: Репринт, 1898. С. 837.

[5] Иоанн Лествичник, прп. Лествица. Свято-Троицкая Сергиева Лавра: Репринт 1901. С. 232-233.

The well-know polemic Epistle of the Eastern Patriarchs (1723) provides the following detailed concept of prayer: "Prayer is a conversation with God, asking for proper goods from God from Whom we hope to receive them; it is rising to God, a righteous, God-striving disposition, seeking of the heavenly in one's mind, curing of one's soul... service pleasant to God, a sign of repentance and firm trust. It can be either in one's mind alone or in one's mind and on one's lips.

During prayer, we contemplate God's goodness and grace, feel our unworthiness, are filled with the feeling of gratitude, promise to obey to God from now on.

Prayer strengthens belief and hope, teaches us to be tolerant, observe commandments and especially to ask for heavenly goods; it contributes to growth of many fruits enumeration of which would be superfluous; it is done at any time, either in the upright position of the body or with genuflection.

So useful is prayer that it constitutes food and life of the soul. Everything said is based on the Holy Scripture, and one requesting proof of that resembles a mad and blind person who doubts about sunlight during clear afternoon". (Послание патриархов Восточно-Кафолической Церкви о православной вере. Некоторые вопросы и ответы на оные. В сборнике. Догматические послания православных патриархов 17-19 веков о Православной вере. Свято-Троицкая Сергиева Лавра, 1995. С. 191),

Rev. Maximus the Confessor (+662) emphasizes an element of requesting in a prayer: "A prayer is asking for those goods which God inherently grants to people for their salvation". (Максим Исповедник, при. Творения. Книга вторая. Изд. Мартис, 1993. С. 137),

Rev. John Damascene (+749) speaks about the same: "Prayer is elevation of mind to God or asking God about proper things". (Иоанн Дамаскин, прп. Точное изложение Православной веры. Книга 3. Глава 24. О молитве Господней. Полное собрание творений. Т. 1. СПб.: Репринт, 1913. С. 290).

[6] «... St Gregory, - notes V.Nesmelov, a famous Russian theologian, - deemed the artistic organisation of the world to be not only a secondary means of strengthening the internal religious feeling, but an absolutely independent proof which allegedly had to bring an atheist to recognition of the truth of God's existence" (Несмелов В. Догматическая система святого Григория Нисского. СПб., 2000. С. 120).

[7] Цит. по: Великие мысли, кратко реченные. СПб., 2001, С. 502.

[8] Феофан Затворник, свт. Начертание. С. 406.

St. Rev. John of Kronstadt (+1908) also uses the image of air: "Prayer refreshes and revives the soul

in the same way as outdoor air does to the body. It feels more vigorous and cheerful in it, like after a walk in fresh air, you feel more vigorous and fresh, both physically and spiritually" (Сергиев Иоанн, прот. Моя жизнь во Христе. Извлечения из дневника протоиерея. Т. 2. М.: Репринт, 1894. С. 348).

There is another typical comparison. "Prayer is breath of the soul, like air is breath of the natural body. We breathe in the Holy Spirit. You cannot say a single word of prayer with all your heart without the Holy Spirit. When praying, you speak to God mouth to mouth, and if the mouth of your heart is opened by belief and love, you are at the same time breathing in from Him the spiritual goods asked for" (Сергиев Иоанн, прот, Указ. соч. С. 196).

[9] Ἡ ἀδελφότης ἔστιν ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ 1ῆ. 115. While explaining how saints hear our prayers, St. Theophan the Recluse gives another analogy, this time from the world of technology: "Do you know how the electric telegraph works? In Petersburg, for example, they switch on the respective device; at the very same moment, that action done in Petersburg is reflected in Moscow in a similar device and in the same meaning in which the movement there takes place. Why is it so? Because those devices are similar, and the wire connecting them is attached to them. Our prayer is like action of such telegraph. We and saints are like two devices – the similar ones, the medium in which saints exist and which surrounds our souls\* is the wire. When a true prayer – from the heart – is born in the soul, then it, producing its impact on that medium, flies through it like a ray of light to the saints and tells them what we want and what we pray about. There is no pause between our prayer and the moment of its hearing - the only thing is that the prayer must come from the heart. Our heart is the telegraph device for heaven. The same prayers, which do not go from the heart, but only from the head and the tongue, do not produce a ray rising to heaven and are not heard there. And this is not prayer, but only praying techniques" (Феофан Затворник, сет. Письма. Что есть духовная жизнь и как на неё настроиться? М: Репринт, 1914. с. 55).

[10] For more detail see: Дьяченко Г. свят. Общедоступные беседы о Богослужении Православной Церкви. Изд. Т-ва И. Д. Сытина, М., 1898. С. 197- 200.

[11] For more detail see: Феофилакт Болгарский, блж. Толкование на второе послание к солунянам святого Апостола Павла, Изд. Скит. М., 1993. С. 477-478.

[12] Иоани Златоуст, свт. Творения. Т. 11. Книга первая. СПб.; Репринт, 1905. С. 213,

[13] Исаак Сирий, прп. Слова подвижнические. Слово 39. Сергиев Посад; Репринт, 1911, С. 166.

Rev. Silouan of Athos (+1938) has the same thoughts speaking about three kinds of prayers: "Prayer is creation, creation for the most part, and for this reason its variety is unlimited, but still there is some possibility to differentiate its kinds depending on human's attitude or direction of spiritual forces. Holy Fathers establish three kinds of prayer: the first, due to inability of the mind to rise to pure Divine meditation, is characterized by imagination, the second –by speculation, and the third – by submerging into contemplation" (Софроний, иеромонах. Преподобный Силуан Афонский. Патриарший Ставропигиальный Монастырь св. Иоанна Предтечи. Ессекс, 1990. С. 55).

[14] Симеон Новый Богослов, прп. Слово 63. Слова преподобного Симеона Нового Богослова. Выпуск второй. М.: Репринт, 1890. С. 108

[15] For more detail see: Дьяченко Григорий, прот. Уроки и примеры христианской надежды. М., 1998. С. 149 - 150.

[16] Василий Великий, свт. Правила, пространно изложение в вопросах и ответах. Вопрос 37, Творения. Т. 2. Изд. ИЛ П. Сойкина. СПб.: Репринт, 1911. С. 374-375.

[17] Феофан Затворник, свт. Собрание писем. Письмо № 947, Выпуск шестой. М.; Репринт, 1899. С. 20-21. Собрание писем. Выпуски V, VI, VII, VIII. Т. 2. М., 2000.

[18] For more detail see: Феофан Затворник, свт. Письмо № 227, Собрание писем. Выпуск первый и второй. Издание Свято-Успенского Псково-Печерского монастыря, 1994. С. 34- 40.

[19] For more detail see: Феофан Затворник, свт. Письмо № 256. Собрание писем. Выпуск первый и второй. Издание Свято-Успенского Псково-Печерского монастыря, 1994, С.87-95. It is here, during his reflection on repentance, that St. Theophan also gives such an amazing image: "Get used to crying

over yourself like over a dead one – with lamentations... How can we refrain from crying, if we cannot say for sure that He would not say: "Move away" (с. 94).

[20] For more detail see: Феофан Затворник, свт. Письмо № 763, Выпуск пятый в сборнике: Собрание писем. Т. 2. Изд. Правило веры. М.: Репринт, 2000. С 16.

In the same letter, St. Theofan uses, in order to struggle against hastiness, the analogy with military actions and the image of the commander: "Charge yourself with this labour with the decisiveness of a military commander, so that no objection would be raised against it... The enemy suggests that you need this and that, and you answer: "I know this without you, go away".

[21] For more detail see: Феофан Затворник, свт. Письмо № 898, Выпуск пятый в сборнике: Собрание писем. Т. 2. Изд. Правило веры. М.: Репринт, 2000. С 167.

[22] Феофан Затворник, свт. Письмо № 113, Собрание писем. Выпуск первый и второй. Издание Свято-Успенского Псково-Печерского монастыря, 1994. С. 110- -114.

[23] Let us remember the well known rule by rev. Seraphim of Sarov: "He especially advised to always keep on one's lips and in one's heart the God's prayer "Our Father", Archangel's prayer "Hail! Mary, mother of God", Creed and Jesus Prayer – "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me", which he considered especially effective and salvational" (Жития святых. Книга пятая Январь М.: Репринт, 1904. С. 87).

It is interesting to point out that a short rule, though in a slightly different respect, was suggested by rev. Simeon the New Theologian:

"In the evening, after the compline, go to some special place and perform the following praying rule: Trisagion; the 50th psalm; Lord, have mercy – 50 times; Lord, forgive me, the sinner - 50 times; 6th psalm; Lord, if I have sinned by word, doing or thought, forgive me; make 25 deep bows" (Симеон Новый Богослов, прп. Слово 32. Слова преподобного Симеона Нового Богослова. Выпуск первый. М.: Репринт, 1892. С. 277).

[24] Иоанн Кассиан Римлянин, прп. Писания. Собеседование 9-е. О пользе краткой и безмолвной молитвы. Глава 36. Свято-Троицкая Сергеева Лавра; Репринт, 1993. С. 348-349,

A similar thought was expressed by St. Rev. John of Kronstadt, for whom prayer is a request, thanksgiving and glorification at the same time;

"Prayer of sincere Christians is incessant because we are always sinful; thanksgiving is incessant because we are receiving new goods from God every day, every minute, and as for old ones, they are plenty without counting; glorification is incessant because we see the glory of God's deeds in us and in the world, especially the glory of His endless love to us" (Сергиев Иоанн, прот. Моя жизнь во Христе. Т. 2. С. 365).

[25] Феофан Затворник, свт. Что есть духовная жизнь. С. 166.

Many people are used to repeating these words "Lord, have mercy" even without thinking of them as a prayer, but in fact it has a deep meaning and is usually interpreted in the following way:

"This is the first prayer of each of us, because it is most easily imprinted in babies' weak memory. It is also the last prayer which a dying man pronounces on his deathbed passing on to the other life. No matter in what sorrowful state a man finds himself: whether his soul is burdened by sin, his heart is being torn by grief, his body is being tired by illness – in all these cases, he appeals to the Creator: Lord, have mercy. What does it mean? This is the most natural scream of our soul wounded by sin, the most correct expression of our spiritual weakness. But we should not forget about this prayer in days of joy either. We can easily lose God's charismas and use them for no good if God does not show his mercy on us...As far as we can pronounce: Lord, have mercy, we still have a hope for salvation" (Дьяченко Григорий, прот. Общедоступные беседы о богослужении Православной Церкви. М. 1898. С. 308-309).

[26] Феофан Затворник, свт. Что есть духовная жизнь. С. 166.

[27] For more detail see: Феофан Затворник, свт. Письмо № 227. Собрание писем, Выпуск первый

и второй. Издание Свято-Успенского Псково-Печерского монастыря, 1994. С 39-40 ( во втором выпуске).

[28] Сергиев Иоанн, прот. Моя жизнь во Христе. Т. 1. С. 155. Т. 2. С 152.

[29] For more detail see: Феофан Затворник, свт. Что есть духовная жизнь. С. 182.

[30] Zarty nieposwiecone. Pozbieral i opowiedzial ks. Jan Kracik, Krakow, 1993. S. 64,

[31] For more detail see: Душеполезные поучения святителя Феофана Затворника. Изд. Введенской Оптиной пустыни, 2003. С. 360-363.

[32] Cited from: Дьяченко Г., прот. Уроки и примеры христианской надежды, С. 200

[33] Иоанн Лествичник, прп. Лествица, С. 237.

St. Theophan the Recluse is of the same opinion: "Prayer is never done in vain, whether God fulfills the request or not. We often ask for something not useful or harmful because of our ignorance. While not fulfilling this, God, for our labour of prayer, will give us something that we do not notice. Therefore the words: "You pray to God – what have you received?" – are stupid. The praying person asks for a good for himself and determines this good himself. If God sees that the things asked about will not do any good, He does not fulfill the request and thereby does good because, had He fulfilled it, the one who prayed would have suffered" (Письмо № 1406. Собрание писем. Выпуск восьмой. Указ. соч. С. 146).

[34] Дьяченко Г., прот. Уроки и примеры христианской надежды, С. 196

[35] For more detail see: Михаил, архим. Евангелие от Матфея. С предисловиями и подробными объяснительными примечаниями. М., 1871. С. 111-112.

[36] Let us cite two more of his short opinions on attitude to enemies: "The one who, without pity, for the sake of his own benefit and interest, does harm to others, designs or commits murders, either has become similar to a beast and realizes deep in his heart that he is a bestial creature, i.e., does not believe in eternal life, or has embarked upon the way of demonic spirituality... Those who hate and reject their brother are limited in their existence, and they have not known the true God Who is the all-embracing love and have found no way to Him" (Софроний, иером. Указ. соч. С. 44, 50)

[37] The term "world of prayer" is connected with the name of the Holy and Righteous John of Kronstadt. This is the name of the book dedicated to his labour of prayer (Св. Праведный о. Иоанн Кронштадтский. В мире молитвы. Нью - Йорк, 1987).

[Theology](#), [Moral Theology](#), [Religion and World](#), [Pastoral Theology](#), [Ascetics](#)

#### **Ключевые слова:**

[Международная богословская конференция "Жизнь во Христе: христианская нравственность, аскетическое предание Церкви и вызовы современной эпохи"](#)

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