

St. Seraphim of Sarov: Conversation with Nicholas A. Motovilov (The "Conversation in the Snow")

It was Thursday. The day was gloomy. The snow lay eight inches deep on the ground; and dry, crisp snowflakes were falling thickly from the sky when Father Seraphim began his conversation with me in a field adjoining his near hermitage, opposite the River Sarovka, at the foot of the hill which slopes down to the river bank. He sat me on the stump of a tree which he had just felled, and he himself squatted opposite me.

"The Lord has revealed to me," said the great Elder, "that in your childhood you had a great desire to know the aim of our Christian life, and that you continually asked many great spiritual persons about it."

I must say here that from the age of twelve this thought had constantly troubled me. I had, in fact, approached many clergy about it; but their answers had not satisfied me. This was not known to the Elder.

"But no one," continued Father Seraphim, "has given you a precise answer. They have said to you: 'Go to Church, pray to God, do the commandments of God, do good— that is the aim of the Christian life.' Some were even indignant with you for being occupied with profane curiosity and said to you: 'Do not seek things that are beyond you.' But they did not speak as they should. And now poor Seraphim will explain to you in what this aim really consists.

"Prayer, fasting, vigil and all other Christian activities, however good they may be in themselves, do not constitute the aim of our Christian life, although they serve as the indispensable means of reaching this end. The true aim of our Christian life consists in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. As for fasts, and vigils, and prayer, and almsgiving, and every good deed done for Christ's sake, they are only means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. But mark, my son, only the good deed done for Christ's sake brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit. All that is not done for Christ's sake, even though it be good, brings neither reward in the future life nor the grace of God in this. That is why our Lord Jesus Christ said: He who gathers not with Me scatters (Luke 11:23). Not that a good deed can be called anything but gathering, since even though it is not done for Christ's sake, yet it is good. Scripture says: In every nation he who fears God and works righteousness is acceptable to Him (Acts 10:35). [1]

"As we see from the sacred narrative, the man who works righteousness is so pleasing to God that the Angel of the Lord appeared at the hour of prayer to Cornelius, the God-fearing and righteous centurion, and said: 'Send to Joppa to Simon the Tanner; there shalt thou find Peter and he will tell thee the words of eternal life, whereby thou shalt be saved and all thy house.' Thus the Lord uses all His divine means to give such a man in return for his good works the opportunity not to lose his reward in the future life. But to this end we must begin here with a right faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who came into the world to save sinners and Who, through our acquiring for ourselves the grace of the Holy Spirit, brings into our hearts the Kingdom of God and opens the way for us to win the blessings of the future life. But the acceptability to God of good deeds not done for Christ's sake is limited to this: the Creator gives the means to make them living (cp Heb. 6:1). It rests with man to make them living or not. That is why the Lord said to the Jews: If you had been blind, you would have no sin. But now you say, We see, and your sin remains on you (Jn. 9:41). If a man like Cornelius enjoys the favour of God for his deeds, though not done for Christ's sake, and then believes in His Son, such deeds will be imputed to him as done for Christ's sake merely for faith in Him. But in the opposite event a man has no right to complain that his good has been no use. It never is, except when it is done for Christ's sake, since good done for Him not only merits a crown of righteousness in the world to come, but also in this present life fills us with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, as it is said: God gives not the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. (Jn. 3:34-35).

"That's it, your Godliness [2]. In acquiring this Spirit of God consists the true aim of our Christian life, while prayer, vigil, fasting, almsgiving and other good works [3] done for Christ's sake are merely means for acquiring the Spirit of God."

"What do you mean by acquiring?" I asked Father Seraphim. "Somehow I don't understand that."

"Acquiring is the same as obtaining," he replied. "You understand, of course, what acquiring money means? Acquiring the Spirit of God is exactly the same. You know well enough what it means in a worldly sense, your Godliness, to acquire. The aim in life of ordinary worldly people is to acquire or make money, and for the nobility it is in addition to receive honours, distinctions and other rewards for their services to the government. The acquisition of God's Spirit is also capital, but grace-giving and eternal, and it is obtained in very similar ways, almost the same ways as monetary, social and temporal capital."

"God the Word, the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, compares our life with a market, and the work of our life on earth He calls trading, and says to us all: Trade till I come (Lk. 19:13), redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16). That is to say, make the most of your time for getting heavenly blessings through earthly goods. Earthly goods are good works done for Christ's sake and conferring on us the grace of the All-Holy Spirit.

"In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, when the foolish ones lacked oil, it was said: 'Go and buy in the market.' But when they had bought, the door of the bride-chamber was already shut and they could not get in. Some say that the lack of oil in the lamps of the foolish virgins means a lack of good deeds in their lifetime. Such an interpretation is not quite correct. Why should they be lacking in good deeds if they are called virgins, even though foolish ones? Virginity is the supreme virtue, an angelic state, and it could take the place of all other good works.

"I think that what they were lacking was the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God. These virgins practiced the virtues, but in their spiritual ignorance they supposed that the Christian life consisted merely in doing good works. By doing a good deed they thought they were doing the work of God, but they little cared whether they acquired thereby the grace of God's Spirit. Such ways of life based merely on doing good without carefully testing whether they bring the grace of the Spirit of God, are mentioned in the Patristic books: 'There is another way which is deemed good at the beginning, but it ends at the bottom of hell.'

"Antony the Great in his letters to Monks says of such virgins: 'Many Monks and virgins have no idea of the different kinds of will which act in man, and they do not know that we are influenced by three wills: the first is God's all-perfect and all-saving will: the second is our own human will which, if not destructive, yet neither is it saving; and the third is the devil's will— wholly destructive.' And this third will of the enemy teaches man either not to do any good deeds, or to do them out of vanity, or to do them merely for virtue's sake and not for Christ's sake. The second, our own will, teaches us to do everything to flatter our passions, or else it teaches us like the enemy to do good for the sake of good and not care for the grace which is acquired by it. But the first, God's all-saving will, consists in doing good solely to acquire the Holy Spirit, as an eternal, inexhaustible treasure which cannot be rightly valued. The acquisition of the Holy Spirit is, so to say, the oil which the foolish virgins lacked. They were called foolish just because they had forgotten the necessary fruit of virtue, the grace of the Holy Spirit, without which no one is or can be saved, for: 'Every soul is quickened by the Holy Spirit and exalted by purity and mystically illumined by the Trinal Unity.' [4]

"This is the oil in the lamps of the wise virgins which could burn long and brightly, and these virgins with their burning lamps were able to meet the Bridegroom, Who came at midnight, and could enter the bridechamber of joy with Him. But the foolish ones, though they went to market to buy some oil when they saw their lamps going out, were unable to return in time, for the door was already shut. The market is our life; the door of the bridechamber which was shut and which barred the way to the Bridegroom is human death; the wise and foolish virgins are Christian souls; the oil is not good deeds but the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God which is obtained through them and which changes souls from one state to another — that is, from corruption to incorruption, from spiritual death to spiritual life, from darkness to light, from the stable of our being (where the passions are tied up like dumb animals and wild beasts) into a Temple of the Divinity, into the shining bridechamber of eternal joy in Christ Jesus our Lord, the Creator and Redeemer and eternal Bridegroom of our souls.

"How great is God's compassion to our misery, that is to say, our inattention to His care for us, when God says: Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Rev. 3:20), meaning by 'door' the course of our life which has not yet been closed by death! Oh, how I wish, your Godliness, that in this life you may always be in the Spirit of God! 'In whatsoever I find you, in that will I judge you,' says the Lord. [5]

"Woe to us if He finds us overcharged with the cares and sorrows of this life! For who will be able to bear His anger, who will withstand the wrath of His countenance? That is why it has been said: Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation (Mk. 14:38), that is lest you be deprived of the Spirit of God, for watching and prayer bring us His grace.

"Of course, every good deed done for Christ's sake gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit, but prayer gives us it most of all, for it is always at hand, so to speak, as an instrument for acquiring the grace of the Spirit. For instance, you would like to go to Church, but there is no Church or the Service is over; you would like to give alms to a beggar, but there isn't one, or you have nothing to give; you would like to preserve your virginity [6], but you have not the strength to do so because of your temperament, or because of the violence of the wiles of the enemy which on account of your human weakness you cannot withstand; you would like to do some other good deed for Christ's sake, but either you have not the strength or the opportunity is lacking. This certainly does not apply to prayer. Prayer is always possible for everyone, rich and poor, noble and humble, strong and weak, healthy and sick, righteous and sinful.

"You may judge how great the power of prayer is even in a sinful person, when it is offered whole-heartedly, by the following example from Holy Tradition. When at the request of a desperate mother who had been deprived by death of her only son, a harlot whom she chanced to meet, still unclean, from her last sin, and who was touched by the mother's deep sorrow, cried to the Lord: 'Not for the sake of a wretched sinner like me, but for the sake of the tears of a mother sorrowing for her son and firmly trusting in Thy loving kindness and Thy almighty power, Christ God, raise up her son, O Lord!' And the Lord raised him up.

"You see, your Godliness! Great is the power of prayer, and it brings most of all the Spirit of God, and is most easily practiced by everyone. We shall be blessed if the Lord God finds us watchful and filled with the gifts of His Holy Spirit. Then we may boldly hope to be caught up...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (I Thes. 4:17) Who is coming with great power and glory (Mk. 13:26) to judge the living and the dead (I Pet. 4:5) and to reward every man according to his works (Mat. 16:27).

"Your Godliness deigns to think it a great happiness to talk to poor Seraphim, believing that even he is not bereft of the grace of the Lord. What then shall we say of the Lord Himself, the never-failing source of every kind of blessing, both heavenly and earthly? Truly in prayer we are granted to converse with Him, our all-gracious and life-giving God and Saviour Himself. But even here we must pray only until God the Holy Spirit descends on us in measures of His heavenly grace known to Him. And when He deigns to visit us, we must stop praying. Why should we then pray to Him, 'Come and abide in us and cleanse us from all impurity and save our souls, O Good One,' when He has already come to us to save us who trust in Him and truly call on His Holy Name, that humbly and with love we may receive Him, the Comforter, in the mansions of our souls hungering and thirsting for His coming.

"I will explain this to your Godliness by an example. Imagine that you have invited me to pay you a visit and at your invitation I come to have a talk with you. But you continue to invite me, saying: 'Come in, please. Do come in!' Then I should be obliged to think: 'What is the matter with him? Is he out of his mind?' So it is with regard to our Lord God the Holy Spirit. That is why it is said: Be still and realize that I am God; I shall be exalted among the heathen, I shall be exalted in the earth (Ps. 45:10). That is, I shall appear and shall continue to appear to everyone who believes in Me and calls upon Me, and I shall converse with him as I once conversed with Adam in Paradise, with Abraham and Jacob and other servants of Mine, with Moses and Job, and those like them.

"Many explain that this stillness refers only to worldly matters; in other words, that during prayerful converse with God you must 'be still' with regard to worldly affairs. But I will tell you in the name of God that not only is it necessary to be dead [7] to them at prayer, but when by the omnipotent power of faith and prayer our Lord God the Holy Spirit condescends to visit us, and comes to us in the plenitude of His unutterable goodness, we must be dead to prayer too.

"The soul speaks and converses during prayer, but at the descent of the Holy Spirit we must remain in complete silence, in order to hear clearly and intelligibly all the words of eternal life which He will then deign to communicate. Complete soberness of both soul and spirit, and chaste purity of body is required at the same time. The same demands were made at Mount Horeb, when the Israelites were told not even to touch their wives for three days before the appearance of God on Mount Sinai. For our God is a fire which consumes everything unclean, and no one who is defiled in body or spirit can enter into communion with Him."

"Yes, Father, but what about other good deeds done for Christ's sake in order to acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit? You have only been speaking of prayer!"

"Acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit also by practicing all the other virtues for Christ's sake. Trade spiritually with them; trade with those which give you the greatest profit. Accumulate capital from the superabundance of God's grace, deposit it in God's eternal bank which will bring you immaterial interest, not four or six percent, but one hundred percent for one spiritual ruble, and even infinitely more than that. For example, if prayer and watching give you more of God's grace, watch and pray; if fasting gives you much of the Spirit of God, fast; if almsgiving gives you more, give alms. Weigh every virtue done for Christ's sake in this manner.

"Now I will tell you about myself, poor Seraphim. I come of a merchant family in Kursk. So when I was not yet in the Monastery we used to trade with the goods which brought us the greatest profit. Act like that, my son. And just as in business the main point is not merely to trade, but to get as much profit as possible, so in the business of the Christian life the main point is not merely to pray or to do some other good deed. Though the Apostle says: Pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17), yet, as you remember, he adds: I would rather speak five words with my understanding than ten thousand words with the tongue (I Cor. 14:13). And the Lord says: Not everyone that says unto Me: Lord, Lord, shall be saved, but he who does the will of My Father, that is he who does the work of God and, moreover, does it with reverence, for cursed is he who does the work of God negligently (Jer. 48:10). And the work of

God is: Believe in God and in Him Whom He has sent, Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:1;6:29). If we understand the commandments of Christ and of the Apostles aright, our business as Christians consists not in increasing the number of our good deeds which are only the means of furthering the purpose of our Christian life, but in deriving from them the utmost profit, that is in acquiring the most abundant gifts of the Holy Spirit.

"How I wish, your Godliness, that you yourself may acquire this inexhaustible source of divine grace, and may always ask yourself: Am I in the Spirit of God or not? And if you are in the Spirit, blessed be God! — there is nothing to grieve about. You are ready to appear before the awful judgement of Christ immediately. For 'In whatsoever I find you, in that I will judge you.' But if we are not in the Spirit, we must discover why and for what reason our Lord God the Holy Spirit has willed to abandon us; and we must seek Him again, and must go on searching until our Lord God the Holy Spirit has been found and is with us again through His goodness. And we must attack the enemies that drive us away from Him until even their dust is no more, as has been said by the Prophet David: I shall pursue my enemies and overtake them; and I shall not turn back till they are destroyed. I shall harass them, and they will not be able to stand; they will fall under my feet. (Ps. 17:37-38).

"That's it, my son. That is how you must spiritually trade in virtue. Distribute the Holy Spirit's gifts of grace to those in need of them, just as a lighted candle burning with earthly fire shines itself and lights other candles for the illumining of all in other places, without diminishing its own light. And if it is so with regard to earthly fire, what shall we say about the fire of the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God? For earthly riches decrease with distribution, but the more the heavenly riches of God's grace are distributed, the more they increase in him who distributes them. Thus the Lord Himself was pleased to say to the Samaritan woman: Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; but the water that I shall give him will be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life (Jn. 4:13-14).

"Father," said I, "you speak all the time of the acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit as the aim of the Christian life. But how and where can I see it? Good deeds are visible, but can the Holy Spirit be seen? How am I to know whether He is with me or not?"

"At the present time," the Elder replied, "owing to our almost universal coldness to our holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and our inattention to the working of His Divine Providence in us, and to the communion of man with God, we have gone so far that, one may say, we have almost abandoned the true Christian life. The testimonies of Holy Scripture now seem strange

to us, when, for instance, by the lips of Moses the Holy Spirit says: And Adam saw the Lord walking in paradise (cp. Gen. 3:10), or when we read the words of the Apostle Paul: 'We went to Achaia, and the Spirit of God went not with us; we returned to Macedonia, and the Spirit of God came with us'. More than once in other passages of Holy Scripture the appearance of God to men is mentioned.

"That is why some people say: 'These passages are incomprehensible. Is it really possible for people to see God so openly?' But there is nothing incomprehensible here. This failure to understand has come about because we have departed from the simplicity of the original Christian knowledge. Under the pretext of education, we have reached such a darkness of ignorance that what the ancients understood so clearly seems to us almost inconceivable. Even in ordinary conversation, the idea of God's appearance among men did not seem strange to them. Thus, when his friends rebuked him for blaspheming God, Job answered them: How can that be when I feel the Spirit of God in my nostrils? (cp. Job 27:3). That is, 'How can I blaspheme God when the Holy Spirit abides with me? If I had blasphemed God, the Holy Spirit would have withdrawn from me; but lo, I feel His breath in my nostrils.'

"In exactly the same way it is said of Abraham and Jacob that they saw the Lord and conversed with Him, and that Jacob even wrestled with Him. Moses and all the people with him saw God when he was granted to receive from God the tables of the law on Mount Sinai. A pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, or, in other words, the evident grace of the Holy Spirit, served as guides to the people of God in the desert. People saw God and the grace of His Holy Spirit, not in sleep or in dreams, or in the excitement of a disordered imagination, but truly and openly.

"We have become so inattentive to the work of our salvation that we misinterpret many other words in Holy Scripture as well, all because we do not seek the grace of God and in the pride of our minds do not allow it to dwell in our souls. That is why we are without true enlightenment from the Lord, which He sends into the hearts of men who hunger and thirst wholeheartedly for God's righteousness.

"Many explain that when it says in the Bible: 'God breathed the breath of life into the face of Adam the first-created, who was created by Him from the dust of the ground,' it must mean that until then there was neither human soul nor spirit in Adam, but only the flesh created from the dust of the ground. This interpretation is wrong, for the Lord God created Adam from the dust of the ground with the constitution which our dear little Father, the holy Apostle Paul describes: May your spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thess. 5:23). And all these three parts of our nature were created from the dust of the ground, and Adam was not created dead, but an active living being like all the other animate creatures of God living on earth. The point is that if the Lord God had not breathed afterwards into his face this breath of life (that is, the grace of our Lord God the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son and is sent into the world for the Son's sake), Adam would have remained without having within him the Holy Spirit Who raises him to Godlike dignity. However perfect he had been created and superior to all the other creatures of God, as the crown of creation on earth, he would have been just like all the other creatures which, though they have a body, soul and spirit each according to its kind, yet have not the Holy Spirit within them. But when the Lord God breathed into Adam's face the breath of life, then, according to Moses' word, Adam became a living soul (Gen. 2:7), that is, completely and in every way like God, and, like Him, for ever immortal. Adam was immune to the action of the elements to such a degree that water could not drown him, fire could not burn him, the earth could not swallow him in its abysses, and the air could not harm him by any kind of action whatever. Everything was subject to him as the beloved of God, as the king and lord of creation, and everything looked up to him, as the perfect crown of God's creatures. Adam was made so wise by this breath of life which was breathed into his face from the creative lips of God, the Creator and Ruler of all, that there never has been a man on earth wiser or more intelligent than he, and it is hardly likely that there ever will be. When the Lord commanded him to give names to all the creatures, he gave every creature a name which completely expressed all the qualities, powers and properties given to it by God at its creation.

"Owing to this very gift of the supernatural grace of God which was infused into him by the breath of life, Adam could see and understand the Lord walking in paradise, and comprehend His words, and the conversation of the holy Angels, and the language of all beasts, birds and reptiles and all that is now hidden from us fallen and sinful creatures, but was so clear to Adam before his fall. To Eve also the Lord God gave the same wisdom, strength and unlimited power, and all the other good and holy qualities. And He created her not from the dust of the ground but from Adam's rib in the Eden of delight, in the Paradise which He had planted in the midst of the earth.

"In order that they might always easily maintain within themselves the immortal, divine [8] and perfect properties of this breath of life, God planted in the midst of the garden the tree of life and endowed its fruits with all the essence and fullness of His divine breath. If they had not sinned, Adam and Eve themselves as well as all their posterity could have always eaten of

the fruit of the tree of life and so would have eternally maintained the quickening power of divine grace.

"They could have also maintained to all eternity the full powers of their body, soul and spirit in a state of immortality and everlasting youth, and they could have continued in this immortal and blessed state of theirs for ever. At the present time, however, it is difficult for us even to imagine such grace.

"But when through the tasting of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil— which was premature and contrary to the commandment of God — they learnt the difference between good and evil and were subjected to all the afflictions which followed the transgression of the commandment of God, then they lost this priceless gift of the grace of the Spirit of God, so that, until the actual coming into the world of the God-Man Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God was not yet in the world because Jesus was not yet glorified (Jn. 7:39).

"However, that does not mean that the Spirit of God was not in the world at all, but His presence was not so apparent [9] as in Adam or in us Orthodox Christians. It manifested only externally; yet the signs of His presence in the world were known to mankind [10]. Thus, for instance, many mysteries in connection with the future salvation of the human race were revealed to Adam as well as to Eve after the fall. And for Cain, in spite of his impiety and his transgression, it was easy to understand the voice which held gracious and divine though convicting converse with him. Noah conversed with God. Abraham saw God and His day and was glad (cp. Jn. 8:56). The grace of the Holy Spirit acting externally was also reflected in all the Old Testament prophets and Saints of Israel. The Hebrews afterwards established special prophetic schools where the sons of the prophets were taught to discern the signs of the manifestation of God or of Angels, and to distinguish the operations of the Holy Spirit from the ordinary natural phenomena of our graceless earthly life. Simeon who held God in his arms, Christ's grand-parents Joakim and Anna, and countless other servants of God continually had quite openly various divine apparitions, voices and revelations which were justified by evident miraculous events. Though not with the same power as in the people of God, nevertheless, the presence of the Spirit of God also acted in the pagans who did not know the true God, because even among them God found for Himself chosen people. Such, for instance, were the virgin-prophetesses called Sibyls who vowed virginity to an unknown God, but still to God the Creator of the universe, the all-powerful Ruler of the world, as He was conceived by the pagans. Though the pagan philosophers also wandered in the darkness of ignorance of God, yet they sought the truth which is beloved by God, and on account of this God-pleasing seeking, they could partake of the Spirit of God, for it is said that the

nations who do not know God practice by nature the demands of the law and do what is pleasing to God (cp. Rom. 2:14). The Lord so praises truth that He says of it Himself by the Holy Spirit: Truth has sprung out of the earth, and righteousness has looked down from heaven (Ps. 84:11).

"So you see, your Godliness, both in the holy Hebrew people, a people beloved by God, and in the pagans who did not know God, there was preserved a knowledge of God — that is, my son, a clear and rational comprehension of how our Lord God the Holy Spirit acts in man, and by means of what inner and outer feelings one can be sure that this is really the action of our Lord God the Holy Spirit, and not a delusion of the enemy. That is how it was from Adam's fall until the coming in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world.

"Without this perceptible realization of the actions of the Holy Spirit which had always been preserved in human nature, men could not possibly have known for certain whether the fruit of the seed of the woman who had been promised to Adam and Eve had come into the world to bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15).

"At last the Holy Spirit foretold to St. Simeon, who was then in his 65th year, the mystery of the virginal conception and birth of Christ from the most pure Ever-Virgin Mary. Afterwards, having lived by the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God for three hundred years, in the 365th year of his life he said openly in the Temple of the Lord that he knew for certain [11] through the gift of the Holy Spirit that this was that very Christ, the Saviour of the world, Whose supernatural conception and birth from the Holy Spirit had been foretold to him by an Angel three hundred years previously.

"And there was also Saint Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, who from her widowhood had served the Lord God in the Temple of God for eighty years, and who was known to be a righteous widow, a chaste servant of God, from the special gifts of grace she had received. She too announced that He was actually the Messiah Who had been promised to the world, the true Christ, God and Man, the King of Israel, Who had come to save Adam and mankind.

"But when our Lord Jesus Christ condescended to accomplish the whole work of salvation, after His Resurrection, He breathed on the Apostles, restored the breath of life lost by Adam, and gave them the same grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God as Adam had enjoyed. But that was not all. He also told them that it was expedient for them that He should go to the Father, for if He did not go, the Spirit of God would not come into the world. But if He, the Christ, went to the Father, He would send Him into the world, and He, the Comforter, would guide

them and all who followed their teaching into all truth and would remind them of all that He had said to them when He was still in the world. What was then promised was grace upon grace (Jn. 1:16).

"Then on the day of Pentecost He solemnly sent down to them in a tempestuous wind the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire which alighted on each of them and entered within them and filled them with the fiery strength of divine grace which breathes bedewingly and acts gladdeningly in souls which partake of its power and operations (Cp. Acts 2:1-4). And this same fire-infusing grace of the Holy Spirit which is given to us all, the faithful of Christ, in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, is sealed by the Sacrament of Chrismation on the chief parts of our body as appointed by Holy Church, the eternal keeper of this grace. It is said: 'The seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit.' On what do we put our seals, your Godliness, if not on vessels containing some very precious treasure? But what on earth can be higher and what can be more precious than the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are sent down to us from above in the Sacrament of Baptism? This Baptismal grace is so great and so indispensable, so vital for man, that even a heretic is not deprived of it until his very death; that is, till the end of the period appointed on high by the Providence of God as a life-long test of man on earth, in order to see what he will be able to achieve (during this period given to him by God) by means of the power of grace granted him from on high.

"And if we were never to sin after our Baptism, we should remain for ever Saints of God, holy, blameless and free from all impurity of body and spirit. But the trouble is that we increase in stature, but do not increase in grace and in the knowledge of God as our Lord Jesus Christ increased; but on the contrary, we gradually become more and more depraved and lose the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God and become sinful in various degrees, and most sinful people. But if a man is stirred by the wisdom of God which seeks our salvation and embraces everything, and he is resolved for its sake to devote the early hours to God and to watch in order to find his eternal salvation [12], then, in obedience to its voice, he must hasten to offer true repentance for all his sins and must practice the virtues which are opposite to the sins committed. Then through the virtues practiced for Christ's sake he will acquire the Holy Spirit Who acts within us and establishes in us the Kingdom of God. The word of God does not say in vain: The Kingdom of God is within you (Lk. 17:21), and it suffers violence, and the violent take it by force (Mat. 11:12) [13]. That means that people who, in spite of the bonds of sin which fetter them and (by their violence and by inciting them to new sins) prevent them from coming to Him, our Saviour, with perfect repentance for reckoning with Him, yet force themselves to break their bonds, despising all the strength of

the fetters of sin— such people at last actually appear before the face of God made whiter than snow by His grace. Come, says the Lord: Though your sins be as purple, I will make them white as snow (Is. 1:18).

"Such people were once seen by the holy Seer John the Divine clothed in white robes (that is, in robes of justification) and palms in their hands (as a sign of victory), and they were singing to God a wonderful song: Alleluia. And no one could imitate the beauty of their song. Of them an Angel of God said: These are they who have come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-14). They were washed with their sufferings and made white in the Communion of the immaculate and life-giving Mysteries of the Body and Blood of the most pure and spotless Lamb— Christ— Who was slain before all ages by His own will for the salvation of the world and Who is continually being slain and divided until now but is never exhausted. Through the Holy Mysteries we are granted our eternal and unfailing salvation as a viaticum to eternal life, as an acceptable answer at His awful judgement and as a precious substitute beyond our comprehension for that fruit of the tree of life of which the enemy of mankind Lucifer who fell from heaven would have liked to deprive our human race. Though the enemy and devil seduced Eve, and Adam fell with her, yet the Lord not only granted them a Redeemer in the fruit of the seed of the woman Who trampled down death by death, but also granted us all in the woman, the Ever-Virgin Mary Mother of God, who crushes the head of the serpent in herself and in all the human race, a constant mediatrix with her Son and our God, and an invincible and insistent intercessor even for the most desperate sinners. That is why the Mother of God is called the 'Plague of Demons,' for it is not possible for a devil to destroy a man so long as the man himself has recourse to the help of the Mother of God.

"And I must further explain, your Godliness, the difference between the operations of the Holy Spirit who dwells mystically in the hearts of those who believe in our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ and the operations of the darkness of sin which, at the suggestion and instigation of the devil, acts predatorily in us. The Spirit of God reminds us of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and always acts triumphantly with Him, gladdening our hearts and guiding our steps into the way of peace, while the false diabolic spirit reasons in the opposite way to Christ, and its actions in us are rebellious, stubborn, and full of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

"And whoever lives and believes in Me shall not die for ever (Jn. 11:26). He who has the grace of the Holy Spirit in reward for right faith in Christ, even if on account of human frailty his soul were to die from some sin or other, yet he will not die for ever, but he will be raised by

the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ Who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29) and freely gives grace upon grace. Of this grace, which was manifested to the whole world and to our human race by the God-Man, it is said in the Gospel: In Him was life, and the life was the light of men (Jn. 1:4); and further: And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness did not overpower it (Jn. 1:5). This means that the grace of the Holy Spirit which is granted at Baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in spite of men's falls into sin, in spite of the darkness surrounding our soul, nevertheless shines in the heart with the divine light (which has existed from time immemorial) of the inestimable merits of Christ. In the event of a sinner's impenitence this light of Christ cries to the Father: 'Abba, Father! Be not angry with this impenitence to the end (of his life)'. And then, at the sinner's conversion to the way of repentance, it effaces completely all trace of past sin and clothes the former sinner once more in a robe of incorruption woven from the grace of the Holy Spirit, concerning the acquisition of which, as the aim of the Christian life, I have been speaking so long to your Godliness.

"I will tell you something else, so that you may understand still more clearly what is meant by the grace of God, how to recognize it and how its action is manifested particularly in those who are enlightened by it. The grace of the Holy Spirit is the light which enlightens man. The whole of Sacred Scripture speaks about this. Thus our holy Father David said: Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path (Ps. 118:105), and: Unless Thy law had been my meditation I should have died in my humiliation (Ps. 118:92). In other words, the grace of the Holy Spirit which is expressed in the Law by the words of the Lord's commandments is my lamp and light. And if this grace of the Holy Spirit (which I try to acquire so carefully and zealously that I meditate on Thy righteous judgements seven times a day) did not enlighten me amidst the darkness of the cares which are inseparable from the high calling of my royal rank, whence should I get a spark of light to illumine my way on the path of life which is darkened by the ill-will of my enemies?

"And in fact the Lord has frequently demonstrated before many witnesses how the grace of the Holy Spirit acts on people whom He has sanctified and illumined by His great inspiration [14]. Remember Moses after his talk with God on Mount Sinai. He so shone with an extraordinary light that people were unable to look at him. He was even forced to wear a veil when he appeared in public. Remember the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor. A great light encircled Him, and His raiment became shining, exceedingly white like snow (Mk. 9:3), and His disciples fell on their faces from fear. But when Moses and Elias appeared to Him in that light, a cloud overshadowed them in order to hide the radiance of the light of the

divine grace which blinded the eyes of the disciples. Thus the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God appears in an ineffable light to all to whom God reveals its action."

"But how," I asked Father Seraphim, "can I know that I am in the grace of the Holy Spirit?"

"It is very simple, your Godliness," he replied. "That is why the Lord says: 'All things are simple to those who find knowledge' (Prov. 8:9, Septuagint). The trouble is that we do not seek this divine knowledge which does not puff up, for it is not of this world. This knowledge which is full of love for God and for our neighbour builds up every man for his salvation. Of this knowledge the Lord said that God wills all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:4). And of the lack of this knowledge He said to His Apostles: Are you also yet without understanding (Mat. 15:16)? Concerning this understanding [15], it is said in the Gospel of the Apostles: Then opened He their understanding (Lk. 24:45), and the Apostles always perceived whether the Spirit of God was dwelling in them or not; and being filled with understanding, they saw the presence of the Holy Spirit with them and declared positively that their work was holy and entirely pleasing to the Lord God. That explains why in their Epistles they wrote: It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (Acts 15:28). Only on these grounds did they offer their Epistles as immutable truth for the benefit of all the faithful. Thus the holy Apostles were consciously aware of the presence in themselves of the Spirit of God. And so you see, your Godliness, how simple it is!"

"Nevertheless," I replied, "I do not understand how I can be certain that I am in the Spirit of God. How can I discern for myself His true manifestation in me?"

Father Seraphim replied: "I have already told you, your Godliness, that it is very simple and I have related in detail how people come to be in the Spirit of God and how we can recognize His presence in us. So what do you want, my son?"

"I want to understand it well," I said.

Then Father Seraphim took me very firmly by the shoulders and said: "We are both in the Spirit of God now, my son. Why don't you look at me?"

I replied: "I cannot look, Father, because your eyes are flashing like lightning. Your face has become brighter than the sun, and my eyes ache with pain."

Father Seraphim said: "Don't be alarmed, your Godliness! Now you yourself have become as bright as I am. You are now in the fullness of the Spirit of God yourself; otherwise you would not be able to see me as I am."

Then, bending his head towards me, he whispered softly in my ear: "Thank the Lord God for His unutterable mercy to us! You saw that I did not even cross myself; and only in my heart I prayed mentally to the Lord God and said within myself: 'Lord, grant him to see clearly with his bodily eyes that descent of Thy Spirit which Thou grantest to Thy servants when Thou art pleased to appear in the light of Thy magnificent glory.' And you see, my son, the Lord instantly fulfilled the humble prayer of poor Seraphim. How then shall we not thank Him for this unspeakable gift to us both? Even to the greatest hermits, my son, the Lord God does not always show His mercy in this way. This grace of God, like a loving mother, has been pleased to comfort your contrite heart at the intercession of the Mother of God herself. But why, my son, do you not look me in the eyes? Just look, and don't be afraid! The Lord is with us!"

After these words I glanced at his face and there came over me an even greater reverent awe. Imagine in the center of the sun, in the dazzling light of its midday rays, the face of a man talking to you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes, you hear his voice, you feel someone holding your shoulders; yet you do not see his hands, you do not even see yourself or his figure, but only a blinding light spreading far around for several yards and illumining with its glaring sheen both the snow-blanket which covered the forest glade and the snow-flakes which besprinkled me and the great Elder. You can imagine the state I was in!

"How do you feel now?" Father Seraphim asked me.

"Extraordinarily well," I said.

"But in what way? How exactly do you feel well?"

I answered: "I feel such calmness and peace in my soul that no words can express it."

"This, your Godliness," said Father Seraphim, "is that peace of which the Lord said to His disciples: My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you (Jn. 14:21). If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (Jn. 15:19). But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (Jn. 16:33). And to those people whom this world hates but who are chosen by the Lord, the Lord gives that peace which you now feel within you, the peace which, in the words of the Apostle, passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7). The Apostle describes it in this way, because it is impossible to express in words the spiritual well-being which it produces in those into whose hearts the Lord God has infused it. Christ the Saviour calls it a peace which comes from His own generosity and is not of this world, for no temporary earthly prosperity

can give it to the human heart; it is granted from on high by the Lord God Himself, and that is why it is called the peace of God. What else do you feel?" Father Seraphim asked me.

"An extraordinary sweetness," I replied.

And he continued: "This is that sweetness of which it is said in Holy Scripture: They will be inebriated with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy delight (Ps. 35:8) [16]. And now this sweetness is flooding our hearts and coursing through our veins with unutterable delight. From this sweetness our hearts melt as it were, and both of us are filled with such happiness as tongue cannot tell. What else do you feel?"

"An extraordinary joy in all my heart."

And Father Seraphim continued: "When the Spirit of God comes down to man and overshadows him with the fullness of His inspiration [17], then the human soul overflows with unspeakable joy, for the Spirit of God fills with joy whatever He touches. This is that joy of which the Lord speaks in His Gospel: A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. In the world you will be sorrowful [18]; but when I see you again, your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you (Jn. 16:21-22). Yet however comforting may be this joy which you now feel in your heart, it is nothing in comparison with that of which the Lord Himself by the mouth of His Apostle said that that joy eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for them that love Him (I Cor. 2:9). Foretastes of that joy are given to us now, and if they fill our souls with such sweetness, well-being and happiness, what shall we say of that joy which has been prepared in heaven for those who weep here on earth? And you, my son, have wept enough in your life on earth; yet see with what joy the Lord consoles you even in this life! Now it is up to us, my son, to add labours to labours in order to go from strength to strength (Ps. 83:7), and to come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13), so that the words of the Lord may be fulfilled in us: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall grow wings like eagles; and they shall run and not be weary (Is. 40:31); they will go from strength to strength, and the God of gods will appear to them in the Sion (Ps. 83:8) of realization and heavenly visions. Only then will our present joy (which now visits us little and briefly) appear in all its fullness, and no one will take it from us, for we shall be filled to overflowing with inexplicable heavenly delights. What else do you feel, your Godliness?"

I answered: "An extraordinary warmth."

"How can you feel warmth, my son? Look, we are sitting in the forest. It is winter out-of-doors, and snow is underfoot. There is more than an inch of snow on us, and the snowflakes are still falling. What warmth can there be?"

I answered: "Such as there is in a bath-house when the water is poured on the stone and the steam rises in clouds."

"And the smell?" he asked me. "Is it the same as in the bath-house?"

"No," I replied. "There is nothing on earth like this fragrance. When in my dear mother's lifetime I was fond of dancing and used to go to balls and parties, my mother would sprinkle me with scent which she bought at the best shops in Kazan. But those scents did not exhale such fragrance."

And Father Seraphim, smiling pleasantly, said: "I know it myself just as well as you do, my son, but I am asking you on purpose to see whether you feel it in the same way. It is absolutely true, your Godliness! The sweetest earthly fragrance cannot be compared with the fragrance which we now feel, for we are now enveloped in the fragrance of the Holy Spirit of God. What on earth can be like it? Mark, your Godliness, you have told me that around us it is warm as in a bath-house; but look, neither on you nor on me does the snow melt, nor does it underfoot; therefore, this warmth is not in the air but in us. It is that very warmth about which the Holy Spirit in the words of prayer makes us cry to the Lord: 'Warm me with the warmth of Thy Holy Spirit!' By it the hermits of both sexes were kept warm and did not fear the winter frost, being clad, as in fur coats, in the grace-given clothing woven by the Holy Spirit. And so it must be in actual fact, for the grace of God must dwell within us, in our heart, because the Lord said: The Kingdom of God is within you (Lk. 17:21). By the Kingdom of God the Lord meant the grace of the Holy Spirit. This Kingdom of God is now within us, and the grace of the Holy Spirit shines upon us and warms us from without as well. It fills the surrounding air with many fragrant odours, sweetens our senses with heavenly delight and floods our hearts with unutterable joy. Our present state is that of which the Apostle says; The Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). Our faith consists not in the plausible words of earthly wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power (cp. I Cor.2:4). That is just the state that we are in now. Of this state the Lord said: There are some of those standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God come in power (Mk. 9:1). See, my son, what unspeakable joy the Lord God has now granted us! This is what it means to be in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, about which St. Macarius of Egypt writes: 'I myself was in the fullness of the Holy

Spirit.' With this fullness of His Holy Spirit the Lord has now filled us poor creatures to overflowing. So there is no need now, your Godliness, to ask how people come to be in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Will you remember this manifestation of God's ineffable mercy which has visited us?"

"I don't know, Father," I said, "whether the Lord will grant me to remember this mercy of God always as vividly and clearly as I feel it now."

"I think," Father Seraphim answered me, "that the Lord will help you to retain it in your memory forever, or His goodness would never have instantly bowed in this way to my humble prayer and so quickly anticipated the request of poor Seraphim; all the more so, because it is not given to you alone to understand it, but through you it is for the whole world, in order that you yourself may be confirmed in God's work and may be useful to others. The fact that I am a Monk and you are a layman is utterly beside the point. What God requires is true faith in Himself and His Only-begotten Son. In return for that the grace of the Holy Spirit is granted abundantly from on high. The Lord seeks a heart filled to overflowing with love for God and our neighbour; this is the throne on which He loves to sit and on which He appears in the fullness of His heavenly glory. 'Son, give Me thy heart,' He says, 'and all the rest I Myself will add to thee (Prov. 23:26; Matt. 6:33),' for in the human heart the Kingdom of God can be contained. The Lord commanded His disciples: Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things (Mat. 6:32,33). The Lord does not rebuke us for using earthly goods, for He says Himself that, owing to the conditions of our earthly life, we need all these things; that is, all the things which make our human life more peaceful and make our way to our heavenly home lighter and easier. That is why the holy Apostle Paul said that in his opinion there was nothing better on earth than piety and sufficiency (cp. II Cor.9:8; I Tim.6:6). And Holy Church prays that this may be granted us by the Lord God; and though troubles, misfortunes and various needs are inseparable from our life on earth, yet the Lord God neither willed nor wills that we should have nothing but troubles and adversities. Therefore, He commands us through the Apostles to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). The Lord Jesus personally gives us the commandment to love one another, so that, by consoling one another with mutual love, we may lighten the sorrowful and narrow way of our journey to the heavenly country. Why did He descend to us from heaven, if not for the purpose of taking upon Himself our poverty and of making us rich with the riches of His goodness and His unutterable generosity? He did not come to be served by men but to serve them Himself and to give His life for the salvation of many. You do the

same, your Godliness, and having seen the mercy of God manifestly shown to you, tell of it to all who desire salvation. The harvest truly is great, says the Lord, but the labourers are few (Lk. 10:2). The Lord God has led us out to work and has given us the gifts of His grace in order that, by reaping the ears of the salvation of our fellow-men and bringing as many as possible into the Kingdom of God, we may bring Him fruit— some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold and some a hundredfold. Let us be watchful, my son, in order that we may not be condemned with that wicked and slothful servant who hid his talent in the earth, but let us try to imitate those good and faithful servants of the Lord who brought their Master four talents instead of two, and ten instead of five (Cf. Mat. 25:14-30).

"Of the mercy of the Lord God there is no shadow of doubt. You have seen for yourself, your Godliness, how the words of the Lord spoken through the Prophet have been accomplished in us: I am not a God far off, but a God near at hand (cp. Jer. 23:23), and thy salvation is at thy mouth (cp. Deut. 30:12-14; Rom. 10:8-13). I had not time even to cross myself, but only wished in my heart that the Lord would grant you to see His goodness in all its fullness, and He was pleased to hasten to realise my wish. I am not boasting when I say this, neither do I say it to show you my importance and lead you to jealousy, or to make you think that I am a Monk and you only a layman. No, no, your Godliness! The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him in truth (Ps. 144:18) and there is no partiality with Him (Eph. 6:9). For the Father loves the Son and gives everything into His hand (cp. Jn. 3:35). If only we ourselves loved Him, our heavenly Father, in a truly filial way! The Lord listens equally to the Monk and the simple Christian layman provided that both are Orthodox believers, and both love God from the depth of their souls, and both have faith in Him, if only as a grain of mustard seed; and they both shall move mountains. 'One shall move thousands and two tens of thousands' (cp. Deut. 32:30). The Lord Himself says: All things are possible to him who believes (Mk. 9:23). And the holy Apostle Paul loudly exclaims: I can do all things in Christ Who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13). But does not our Lord Jesus Christ speak even more wonderfully than this of those who believe in Him: He who believes in Me, not only the works that I do, but even greater than these shall he do, because I am going to My Father. And I will pray for you that your joy may be full. Hitherto you have asked nothing in My name. But now ask... (Jn. 14:12,16; 16:24).

"Thus, my son, whatever you ask of the Lord God you will receive, if only it is for the glory of God or for the good of your neighbour, because what we do for the good of our neighbour He refers to His own glory. And therefore He says: "All that you have done unto one of the least of these, you have done unto Me" (cp. Matt. 25:40). And so, have no doubt that the Lord God will fulfill your petitions, if only they concern the glory of God or the benefit and edification

of your fellow men. But, even if something is necessary for your own need or use or advantage, just as quickly and graciously will the Lord be pleased to send you even that, provided that extreme need and necessity require it. For the Lord loves those who love Him. The Lord is good to all men; He gives abundantly to those who call upon His Name, and His bounty is in all His works. He will do the will of them that fear Him and He will hear their prayer, and fulfill all their plans. The Lord will fulfill all thy petitions (cp. Ps. 144:19; 19:4,5). Only beware, your Godliness, of asking the Lord for something for which there is no urgent need. The Lord will not refuse you even this in return for your Orthodox faith in Christ the Saviour, for the Lord will not give up the staff of the righteous to the lot of sinners (cp. Ps. 124:3), and He will speedily accomplish the will of His servant David; but He will call him to account for having troubled Him without special need, and for having asked Him for something without which he could have managed very easily.

"And so, your Godliness, I have now told you and given you a practical demonstration of all that the Lord and the Mother of God have been pleased to tell you and show you through me, poor Seraphim. Now go in peace. The Lord and the Mother of God be with you always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen. Now go in peace."

And during the whole of this time, from the moment when Father Seraphim's face became radiant [19], this illumination continued; and all that he told me from the beginning of the narrative till now, he said while remaining in one and the same position. The ineffable glow of the light which emanated from him I myself saw with my own eyes. And I am ready to vouch for it with an oath.

Endnotes

* The very discovery of Motovilov's manuscript is a great miracle. For about seventy years, this most valuable manuscript lay buried in complete oblivion and was in danger of being destroyed, for it had already been thrown away and was lying in a heap of rubbish in an attic under a layer of bird-droppings. Here it was miraculously found by S. A. Nilus, the famous author of the book *Multum in Parvo*. Reverently searching for scraps of the great Seraphim's life, Nilus was rummaging among odds and ends in the attic and was already beginning to lose hope of finding anything when an exercise book which was very indistinctly written attracted his attention. This proved to be the memoirs of Motovilov, and that is how they came to be given to the world. The memoirs were found in 1902 and printed in the "Moscow News" in 1903; almost simultaneously the exposition of the relics of St. Seraphim took place.

1. St. Seraphim is giving the sense of Acts 10:5ff. and not quoting literally.
2. Lit. "Your God-lovingness," corresponding to the English idioms "Your Worship", "Your Excellency", etc.
3. "Good works." It is one compound word in Russian, and may also be translated "virtue". St. Augustine says: "Wisdom's labours are virtues."
4. Antiphon of the Byzantine Rite, Tone 4.
5. St. Justin (Dial. 47) records this "unwritten saying" of Christ.
6. That is, you would like to remain unmarried.
7. Lit. "be still."
8. Lit. "God-gracious" or "Divine-grace-given."
9. Lit. "His abiding (stay, sojourn, dwelling, residence) was not so full-measured."
10. Or, "were proved true."
11. Lit. "palpably recognized" or "perceptibly realized."
12. Cp. Wisdom 7:27; 6:14-20.
13. Lit. "The Kingdom of Heaven is forced, and the forceful seize it"; or "the Kingdom of Heaven is stormed, and the stormers capture it." Cp. Luke 16:16; "Everyone forces himself into it."
14. Lit. "descents." Slavonic naitie.
15. In the Slavonic one word represents three different Greek words.
16. The same word which in Slavonic means delight in Russia means sweetness.
17. Lit. "descent." Slavonic naitie.
18. "In the world you will be sorrowful." This is the Slavonic for "In the world you will have tribulation"(Jn.16:33). St. Seraphim has transposed it to its present context.
19. Or, "became illumined," "began to shine."