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Repentance is the means by which we cleanse the mirror of our soul, the image of God in us, and this eventually brings us to likeness to God. As we know from the Book of Genesis, man was created in the image and likeness of God. The image consists of what God placed in him, of what He breathed into him, while the likeness is man's potential which is fulfilled by living in accordance with God's commandments. And it is because of his creation in the image and likeness of God that man is able to repent at all. If we bore no such kinship to God within ourselves, it would be impossible to undertake repentance and set off on the Lord's path. But because God said so, and made it so (for His word is deed: 'He spake, and it was done', Ps. 33:9), man himself is able to work towards the showing of his likeness to God. Similarly, if the Lord had not said, 'Take eat, this is my body; drink ye all of it, this is my blood', this would never actually come to pass in our Divine Liturgy. The foundation of all being is the word of the Lord, and this is shown in the prayer of the Church in the Holy Spirit.

We must, then, be aware that God has given us to be His 'image', whereas our 'likeness' to Him is attained by the voluntary struggle of repentance. The Holy Fathers interpret the image and likeness to God in different ways; some see the image of God in man in his rational character, while others see it in his freedom. But according to St. Gregory Palamas, man's whole being is in the image and likeness of God, not just his soul, but also his body, because even the body receives the breath of God and is sanctified, as St. Silouan would often say.

We have been created for the sole purpose of showing forth the virtues of God: 'Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Pet. 2:9). And again, the Gospel says more simply that the light of God should shine through us, and then the people, seeing that, will glorify God (*cf.* Matt. 5:16). Unfortunately, God's image in us has been distorted almost beyond recognition, and we have yet to acquire the true likeness to Him, which we also call deification.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE BUILDING UP OF THE HEART BY THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE MIND

**A**CCORDING TO THE APOSTLE PAUL, the wisdom of God is foolishness to the world (*cf.* 1 Cor. 1:18). The world sees only foolishness in the Cross of Christ. But anyone who has tasted of the salvation which the Cross of Christ brought into the world, knows that God's wisdom is beyond all wisdom, and that the wisdom and the power of God are able to save man.

Christ died on the Cross in obedience to His Heavenly Father, and the believer takes up his cross in obedience to the commandment of God. Man cannot be saved by avoiding the cross and death; his salvation is realised through the cross and death. Christ died on the Cross for the salvation of men, and those who desire to follow in the path of Christ, which is the way that leads to life, must willingly take up their cross in fulfilment of the divine command. They will obey God's will in the keeping His commandments and their mind will be crucified unto the birth of a new mind – the mind of Christ. To become wise, one must first become a fool, as the Apostle says (1 Cor. 3:18). One must allow one's mind to be led captive to the will of God. This is achieved in an untiring search for humble thoughts. The mind is thus preserved in blessed captivity to Jesus Christ. The study of Holy Scripture begets humility of mind, for the words themselves proceed from the humble Spirit

hidden weaknesses which can be exploited by the spirit of wickedness. He will more easily chase the demonic energy away by taking refuge in the humble prayer of self-reproach, deeming himself to be deserving of every form of hardship, even the demonic.

Grace will, without fail, visit the heart for its humble disposition and broken spirit, and the mind will naturally descend into the heart and be united with it. The heart becomes a spiritual fortress, and man then receives divine strength to repel the enemies by prayer. He becomes able to chase away evil thoughts by a single invocation or even by a movement of his spirit. However, the union of the mind with the heart is, first and foremost, the fruit of repentance. The more intense one's repentance, the greater the fervour of the heart, and the firmer the foundations of the mind therein. While the pain of repentance is most effective in the mind's returning to the heart, any other pain in life can contribute, as long as it is accepted with trust in God's providence. Sickness, persecution, poverty or any other kind of suffering can be transformed into an energy which clears the entrance to the heart.

The many sufferings of men are the consequence of their continued separation from such a good God. Because of man's fall into sin, the universe is full of affliction and misfortune, and the humble Spirit of the Lord can no longer find repose therein. By His 'suffering of death' (Heb. 2:9), Christ has saved the world from its absurd and tragic never-ending chain of suffering. But Christ's sufferings, which accompanied His self-emptying from the day He assumed human nature until the time of His sacrifice at the fearful 'place of the skull' (Matt. 27:33), are qualitatively indescribable, incomprehensible and unattainable by man. Moreover, they can never be surpassed or overcome because the Lord is Love pre-eternal, Who, though hated and rejected by men, was appointed by God the Father to be the chief cornerstone of life indestructible and the Author of everlasting salvation.

Despite the incomparable magnitude of the Lord's sufferings, there is no element of tragedy in them.<sup>2</sup> Tragedy is characteristic of the suffering of fallen man, and Christ was never separated from His Father, and He fulfilled the twofold commandment of love by

in order to find our heart. Can you give us some insights on the phenomenon of the 'fool for Christ' that would help us understand how to deal with the world around us, which we are immersed in, and how that would help us in our journey to find our heart?

*Answer 1:* To be a fool for Christ's sake is a very special gift in the Church. Those who have undertaken that kind of life were people who had great blessings and, wanting to hide them, they found ways of provoking the contempt of the people around them in order to keep the humility necessary to preserve the great gifts that they had received. Fr. Sophrony told me once that those people who became fools for Christ also had something in their nature convenient for that kind of life. It is not for everybody. He told us that once on the Holy Mountain somebody went to a great Elder to ask his blessing to become a fool for Christ, and the Elder said to him, 'No! Now it is not the time for that. Nowadays even by keeping the faith in the world we are fools for Christ's sake!' That reminds me of the saying of a Father from the fourth century. When asked, 'What have we done in our life?' he answered, 'We have done the half of what our Fathers did.' When asked, 'What will the ones who come after us do?' he replied, 'They will do the half of what we are doing now.' And to the question 'What will the Christians of the last times do?' he replied, 'They will not be able to do any spiritual exploits, but those who keep the faith will be glorified in heaven more than our Fathers who raised the dead.'<sup>5</sup> In general, I think the way of the Gospel is foolishness to the world. As St. Paul says, if you want to become wise, you first have to become a fool (*cf.* 1 Cor. 3:18).

*Question 2:* What struck me when you were talking about the life of St. Silouan was the fact that after he had the vision of Christ he felt almost sad with longing for that. I think that even if we do not relate completely to that, nevertheless, we know from our lives at some definite points, whether it is in the Divine Liturgy, or while reading the Bible, that God touches our heart in a very concrete way, and we feel His presence. Maybe we do not have the vision of Him, but we feel His presence and it is very comforting, but those moments are rare. Is it wrong to long for that? Do

'here lies a paradox, a twofold consciousness in me, of my own nothingness, which I find abhorrent, and, on the other hand, of the compassionate condescendence of God.'<sup>10</sup>

With this tension in mind, we also remember St. John the Baptist, and his prophetic attitude towards his Master: 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3:30). The Forerunner speaks here of their respective glory. We consider also the case of Isaiah the Prophet of the Old Testament, who relates his vision as follows: 'I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. . . . Above it stood the Seraphim. . . . And the one cried unto the other, and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory. . . . Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged' (Isa. 6:1-7).

This twofold vision or double consciousness renders man prophetic and therefore truthful. Furthermore, this is the only situation in which his truthfulness is infallible. Listen to St. John the Divine: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us' (1 John 1:8-10). And, of course, when we are made truthful, we attract the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Christ. We now confess the truth of the cosmic event of Adam's fall. We acknowledge also the supracosmic event of Christ's redemption. We bear witness to the eternal truth of His first coming in the flesh. We likewise bear witness to and anticipate His Second Coming in glory. We become His prophets for His word has been conceived in our hearts, firstly for our own salvation, and then for the salvation of the whole world through God's grace and lovingkindness.