



On Meekness, Humility and Love

In order for us to become one with the God, we are first and foremost required to exhibit meekness, as the Lord Himself says: “Come unto Me...and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:28-29). This rest is precisely the rapture of Christ’s Heavenly Kingdom. It is clear that without meekness we will never come to Christ, we will never become one with Him, and consequently, instead of experiencing bliss, we will be most wretched.

Only the meek are under God’s special protection. And this protection is the source of all the indescribable bounties which God showers upon us, of all our happiness and bliss, both temporal and eternal.

This leads us to understand why the Holy Fathers say: “Do not seek miracles, but rather seek a meek person, who is the supreme miracle.” Therefore, let us seek meekness above all and strive to attain it. But to this end we must understand, what exactly is meekness? Meekness is the mildness of a tender age, and not only tender age, but angelic mildness, and not only angelic, but Divine mildness. The most prominent and essential characteristic of saints was precisely such meekness.

St. Seraphim of Sarov possessed this meekness. When three robbers fell upon him in the forest of Sarov, he threw down the axe which he held in his hands, folded his arms over his chest and meekly said to them: “Do with me what you will.” The robbers beat up the holy elder nearly to death with his own axe. But when these robbers were caught and stood trial for their crime, St. Seraphim pleaded with the authorities for their release. And even that was not enough. Through the intercession of St. Seraphim, the robbers were released from prison. They then came to the holy saint to beg his forgiveness, and he forgave them whole-heartedly, as a father would forgive his errant sons.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk possessed this meekness. Once, when a haughty and cruel landowner slapped him in the face, St. Tikhon fell at the feet of the landowner and asked his forgiveness.

This wondrous meekness was possessed to the fullest measure by our Saviour. When He was hit over the head and the crown of thorns, when He was spat upon, the Lord did not turn His face away, but silently and meekly gazed upon His tormentors. And when the Lord was being crucified, He prayed for His executioners. To such a grace, to such a supreme and wondrous possession we must aspire with all our hearts. If we attain this meekness, we will attain the rapture of the Heavenly Kingdom of Christ.

The great Optina elder Ambrose looked upon his offenders as his greatest benefactors. Elder Ambrose used to say: “Whoever slanders us - showers us with gifts, and whoever praises us - robs us .”

The saints fully embodied the Lord’s words: “Upon whom shall I gaze? Only upon the meek, and the silent, and the one who trembles at My words.” Why does the Lord, speaking of meekness, also mention silence? In order to show that our meekness should be expressed through silence.

But one can keep silence with one’s lips, yet hold great malice and hate in one’s heart against those who offend us. The Lord wishes our heart to participate in this time of silence, too. Therefore, let Christ’s silence during His trial be a constant example to us in this case, and may the words of the Gospel: “But Jesus held His peace” (Matt. 26:63) serve as the basic guideline of our spiritual life. Let us always remember St. Seraphim’s injunction to one of his monks: “Keep silent, keep silent, keep ever silent.” This means - with one’s lips, with one’s heart, while being insulted, in order to attain meekness or supreme love.

One may ask: how can one attain this meekness, this supreme love, when we are so weak, so frail, and unable to do any good on our own? Yes, we are weak and frail, but within us is omnipotent the grace of the Holy Spirit, which even the impossible makes possible and attainable. For this reason the Lord demands from all people without exception to model themselves in perfection on God Himself, saying: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). And be ye merciful, even as your Father which is in Heaven is merciful.

Let us strive to attain meekness and supreme love, which is the pinnacle of all Christian virtues. But it is impossible to reach the top of the mountain without climbing the entire mountain. Therefore, let us strive towards the acquisition of all the virtues, and first of all the attainment of their foundation - Christian humility.

It is easy to be humble in terms of being aware of one’s sinfulness. It is easy for us also to humble ourselves before God, realizing all our frailties and all our insignificance. But it is most difficult for us to humble ourselves before our neighbors. We are impeded by a consciousness of our supposed superiority to them, for we believe ourselves to be better than others, even when we have great shortcomings. We always justify and whitewash these shortcomings. But rarely do we forgive the shortcomings of our neighbors. Almost always we accuse and judge them for sins which do not exist in their lives, but exist only in our sinful and haughty imagination.

Let us humble ourselves before our neighbors not out of fear, but out of love for them, as the Lord enjoined us during His Mystic supper. And thus let us not consider our moral state to be higher and better than that of others. Let us bring the attention of our hearts and minds only upon our own sins, and not upon the sins of others, for love is expressed in a mutual and forgiving participation in the carrying of the burden of others, i.e. our neighbors’ shortcomings. Blessed Augustine says: “Nothing makes us as pleasing in the eyes of the Lord as our forgiving attitude towards our neighbors’ shortcomings.”

Unfortunately, our mutual relationships exhibit completely the opposite: not love towards one another, but cruelty; not a forgiving, but a judgmental attitude towards the imperfections of others. This condemnation is the favorite topic of our conversations, and is often accompanied by slander and a feeling of malice.

May the Lord help us acquire great love for our neighbors, and a forgiving attitude towards their imperfections. As Apostle Paul witnesses, in acquiring such love we will fulfill the entire law of God, all His saving commandments. Then the grace of the Holy Spirit, as manifested in the Epiphany, will shine its divine light upon us. Then we will become the embodiment of the wondrous church hymn: “As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ,” and the grace of baptism will become the vestment of Christ for us.

This vestment of Christ, or the grace-filled divine light, will shield us from all demonic attacks when our souls will be passing through the celestial toll-houses after death.

This vestment of Christ, this baptismal grace, made available to us by our fulfillment of God’s commandments and the endurance of sorrows, will cover us at the Last Judgment. Like a wedding garment, this grace will lead us into the celestial chamber of our Saviour, and will be the source of our eternal and continuous joy in the Heavenly Realm of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the sermons of the newly-canonized Saint Seraphim (Sobolev),

ST ELIZABETH THE NEW MARTYR (ROCOR)

1615 SHULL ST. WEST COLUMBIA, SC 29169 • WWW. STELIZABETH.NET • (803) 600-0001