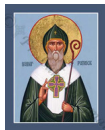


11. THE MIND OF THE FATHERS



It is very difficult in our times to be looking to heaven, because of all the weight, the dead weight of worldliness which lies upon us. If one applies oneself constantly, however, one can begin to do it. Even with a little bit of struggle, if applied constantly, one begins to form for oneself a whole different viewpoint, a whole different way of looking at life, a whole different possibility for action. Any kind of spiritual activity that is to come out of our world today, any kind of Orthodox missionary activity, apostleship, etc., must be on the basis of such a view of things. It must be based on looking first at what God wants, first at what is the higher side, first at what the Holy Fathers think, and only then looking down at the practical means one has to use, at money problems, and even at things like sicknesses, because they are all sent for our good, and we have to find how to bring the good out of them. If one does not do that, one is weighed down, especially in our days. [Next...](#) If a person is in a place of leadership, such as a priest in a parish, and if he is going to look back and look first at the people, he will see that 99% of them are going to drag him down, because they have their problems and passions, confessions weigh him down, and so on. If this side becomes too important for him, it simply drags him back and he cannot lead them to heaven. Of course, a pastor or any kind of spiritual leader must be leading to heaven first himself and then the others, by looking first to the other world. We don't have to imagine what that other world is like or have opinions about it, because we have the whole treasury—much of which is now available in English—of the writings of the Holy Fathers.

Recently we have had such great fathers as Bishop Ignatius Brianchininov (+1867), who was one of the sharpest ones to speak about the apostasy, and also one of the greatest ones to speak about the Holy Fathers. We must get into their language, into their way of looking at things, because that is Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy, of course, does not change from one day to the next, or from one century to the next. Looking at the Protestant and Roman Catholic world, we can see that certain spiritual writings get out of date. Sometimes they come back into fashion again, sometimes they go out. It is obvious that they are bound up with worldly things, which appeal to people at one time, or rather to the spirit of the times. This is not so with our Orthodox holy writings. Once we get into the whole Orthodox Christian outlook—the simply Christian outlook—which has been handed down from Christ and the apostles to our times, then everything becomes contemporary. You read the words of someone like St. Macarius, who lived in the deserts of Egypt in the 6th century, and he's speaking to you now. His conditions are a little different, but he's speaking right to you now, in the same language; he's going to the same place, he's using the same mind, he has the same temptations and failings, and there's nothing different about him. It's the same with all the other fathers from that time down to our century, like St. John of Kronstadt (+1908). They all speak the same language, one kind of language, the language of spiritual life, which we must get into. When we do that, we can save ourselves; and, as St. Seraphim says, "When you acquire the Spirit of Peace, the Holy Spirit, you can save thousands around you." It is not for us to calculate whether thousands around us will be saved. It is only for us to acquire the Holy Spirit, and what God will do with that is His doing.

11. In Step With Sts. Patrick and Gregory of Tours

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We have yet to expect in our times many surprising things, so we should not have the opinion that it is too late to do anything, everything is stuck, nobody cares, the world is collapsing.... All that is opinion, and opinion is the first stage of prelest (deception). Therefore we should free ourselves from being stuck in opinions, and should look at things freshly, i.e., according to the spiritual life. Father Nicholas Deputatov, who is obviously one who has much love for the Holy Fathers, has read their writings, underlined them and written them out in books. He says: When I get in a very low mood, very discouraged and despondent, then I open one of my notebooks, and I begin to read something that inspired me. It is almost guaranteed that when I read something which once inspired me, I will again become inspired, because it's my own soul that was at one time being inspired, and now I see that it was something which inspired me then and can nourish me now also. So it's like an automatic inspiration, to open up something which inspired me before.

Thus, when we think of someone like St. Patrick, our attitude should not be merely: "Aha, that was a long time ago, that was inspiring; but now—well, what's the use?" On the contrary, in the activity of St. Patrick we should see the activity of a contemporary person, of a soul who was burning with zeal and love for God. He has gone to that country where we are to be citizens, if only we will strive. We are all of the same nationality, the Christian race. St. Patrick's life should be for us a contemporary thing, something which applies to us today. Whatever inspiration we can take from it, is for us right now. And however much fruit this bears, depends on how much we love God and how much opportunity there is. The inspiration is ours for free.