

## Sanctification and Endurance in the Faith: Met. Moses



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## Sanctification through the Faith

### Metropolitan Moses

Talk presented at the Toronto Conference of the GOC, October, 2011

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Savior unambiguously taught us the source of our sanctification and eternal life when He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said:

*Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee: As Thou hast given Him authority over all flesh, that He should*

*give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is life everlasting, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent. (John 17:1-3)*

Saint Paul also taught of the relationship between sanctification of the Holy Spirit and faith, in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians:

*... God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; to which He called you through our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 2:13-14)*

And so, it is through God knowledge and belief and the gift of the Holy Spirit given unto us by the New Testament priesthood established by the Holy Apostles that we partake of our salvation. Of course, what follows in this quote from Saint Paul's epistle are the words with which we encourage ourselves and each other:

*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. (2 Thess 2:15)*

Once again, a Christian comes to knowledge of the only true God through the Church and then believes and professes the faith and is sanctified by being united to the Church by baptism in this life. Saint Basil explains the beginning of our salvation thus:

*Whence is it that we are Christians? Through our faith, would be the universal answer. And in what way are we saved? Plainly because we were regenerate through the grace given in our baptism. How else could we be? And after recognizing that this salvation is established through the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, shall we fling away "that form of doctrine" which we received? Would it not rather be ground for great groaning if we are found now further off from our*

*salvation "than when we first believed," and deny now what we then received? Whether a man have departed this life without baptism, or have received a baptism lacking in some of the requirements of the tradition, his loss is equal. And whoever does not always and everywhere keep to and hold fast as a sure protection the confession which we recorded at our first admission, when, being delivered "from the idols," we came "to the living God" constitutes himself a "stranger" from the "promises" of God, fighting against his own handwriting, which he put on record when he professed the faith. [ "On the Holy Spirit" Chapter 10, by Saint Basil the Great]*

The treatise quoted above was written in defense of the doctrine concerning the divinity of the Holy Spirit, but it is one of many quotes from the Holy Fathers that illustrates that we must confess the true faith and be united to Christ by holy baptism in this life in order to have a sure hope of salvation.

This is the teaching of the Church.

Saint Mark the Ascetic explains that works without faith in Christ will not save a man:

*22. When Scripture says 'He will reward every man according to his works' (Matt. 16: 27), do not imagine that works in themselves merit either hell or the kingdom. On the contrary, Christ rewards each man according to whether his works are done with faith or without faith in Himself; and He is not a dealer bound by contract, but God our Creator and Redeemer.*

This quote is from the treatise, "On Those who Think that They are Made Righteous by Works," by Saint Mark the Ascetic.

Saint Mark the Ascetic further explains that any work or virtue that we practice is not a cause of boasting, but it is simply an effort to avoid sin.

*23. We who have received baptism offer good works, not by way of repayment, but to preserve the purity given to us. 24. Every good work which we perform through our own natural powers causes us to refrain from the corresponding sin; but without grace it cannot contribute to our sanctification.*

Thus, according to Saint Mark we must be sanctified by the Church first for our works to have any meaning. He further explains that:

*25. The self-controlled refrain from gluttony; those who have renounced possessions, from greed; the tranquil, from loquacity; the pure, from self-indulgence; the modest, from unchastity; the self-dependent, from avarice; the gentle, from agitation; the humble, from self-esteem; the obedient, from quarreling; the self-critical, from hypocrisy. Similarly, those who pray are protected from despair; the poor, from having many possessions; confessors of the faith, from its denial; martyrs, from idolatry. Do you see how every virtue that is performed even to the point of death is nothing other than refraining from sin? Now to refrain from sin is a work within our own natural powers, but not something that buys us the kingdom. 26. While man can scarcely keep what belongs to him by nature, Christ gives the grace of sonship through the Cross.*

The saint is saying here that without sonship and adoption our works in this life do not sanctify us and are not a cause of salvation.

I am going to repeat a story that many of you have heard in the past, but I think that we need to get back to some basics because of some of the ideas that have been proffered recently.

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There is a story of a conversation between the Elder Ieronymos and a Turkish Judge. At the time this took place the Elder Ieronymos was a

deacon and had the name Vasilios. The Turkish Judge began the conversation thus:

*'Your Reverence, I am a Turk, a Moslem. But from the salary I take, I keep what is necessary for me and my family, and the rest I spend in charities. I help widows, orphans and the poor, I give dowries to destitute girls who are ready to get married, I assist the sick. I keep strictly the fasts, I pray, and generally I try to be conscientious in my faith. Also when I judge, I try to be impartial. I am not bought by anyone, no matter how high of a position one might have. Do you think that these things that I do, are sufficient to gain for me paradise, as you Christians call it?'*

*Fr. Vasilios was impressed by what the Turkish judge had told him, and his mind went immediately to the Centurion Cornelius (Acts 10). He discerned in them both parallel lives. He understood that he had before him a righteous and good-willing man, and perhaps his mission was the same with that of the Apostle Peter toward the Centurion. He therefore decided to give testimony to his faith.*

*'Tell me, your Honor, do you have children?'*

*'Yes I do.'*

*'Do you have servants?'*

*'Yes, I have servants also.'*

*'Who obeys better your commands, your children or your servants?'*

*'For sure my servants, because my children sometimes, with the confidence they have, disobey me and do whatever they want, but my servants do always whatever I tell them.'*

*'Tell me, your Honor, when you will die, who is going to inherit you: Your servants, who obey faithfully your commands, or your children,*

*who disobey you?’*

*‘My children of course. Only they have inheritance rights, not my servants.’*

*‘Well then, whatever you do, your Honor, is good, but it only puts you into the category of the good servant. If you want to inherit paradise, the kingdom of heaven, you must become a son. And this is accomplished only through baptism.’*

*The Turkish judge was impressed by the example that Fr. Vasilios related to him. They talked about many other things, and in the end he asked him to instruct him in the faith and to baptize him. Some time later the Turkish judge was baptized and became a Christian.*

We see that the Elder Ieronymos was very clear in expounding the Traditions that have been handed down to us about salvation and because of this he said words that might be taken as harsh by some, but because of his “harsh words” this Turkish judge was illumined and united to Christ by baptism.

In an Epistle written to Cledonius, Saint Gregory the Theologian explained, *“That is saved which is united to God.”* It is for this reason the Holy Apostles were given the command by Christ Himself, *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of time. Amen.”* (Luke 28: 19-20) We must be united to Christ in this life. This is the Gospel message of Christ Himself and we must reject any teacher, no matter who he is, if he goes against the teachings of Christ.

We live in an era of confusion and it is filled with the spirit of the

antichrist. The word “anti” in Greek means “against,” thus this spirit is against Christ. Saint John the Theologian wrote concerning the antichrist in his epistle:

*Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. (1 John 2:18)*

The antichrist will seek to establish the ultimate personality cult wherein he is against Christ and seeks to replace Christ. Yet, Saint John testifies to the fact that throughout history and especially today, there are many who seek to replace Christ, as it were, as an object of veneration and overturn Christian dogma concerning salvation. One of the hallmarks of the many antichrists that have arisen throughout history is that they seek to isolate their followers from the authentic Church and authentic Church Tradition.

It is not in isolation that the truth is discerned, but rather truth is made manifest by the Church in council.

The temptation to follow a charismatic personality arises because there is a basic desire in the human soul to find an extraordinary man, a holy man who can guide us in an extraordinary way to spiritual truth and holiness. This desire was described quite well by Dostoevsky in his book, “The Brothers Karamazov.”

*...For Alyosha there was no question of why they loved him [their spiritual father] so much, why they prostrated before him and wept so tenderly just at the sight of his face. Oh, how well he understood that for the humble soul of the simple Russian, worn out by toil and grief, and, above all, by everlasting injustice and everlasting sin, his own and the world's, there is no stronger need and consolation than to find some holy*

*thing or person, to fall down before him and venerate him: "Though with us there is sin, unrighteousness, and temptation, still, all the same, there is on earth, in such and such a place, somewhere, someone holy and exalted; he has the truth; he knows the truth; so the truth does not die on earth, and therefore some day it will come to us and will reign over all the earth, as has been promised."* (From *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodore Dostoevsky, North Point Press, 1990, San Francisco, Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, page 30.)

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One can sympathize very much with this human desire, but we have to have a balance in our approach to the spiritual life. We cannot be carried away by seeking such a consolation without being first grounded in the teachings of the Holy Fathers. We cannot get carried away with the personality of any one man. It is the consensus of the Holy Fathers that is our safeguard to spiritual truth and the preservation of Apostolic Tradition.

The potential problem with such high regard for any individual personality is if the followers of such a man put him on too high a pedestal, this will tempt most men with pride. The Holy Fathers had a saying, "Call no man blessed before his time." We are still contesting in this life and the evil one seeks to bring down virtuous men through pride.

The Elder Ieronymous would dramatically express the frailty of all men by holding a handkerchief up in his hand and then dropping it, while adding the words, such is man. Without the hand of God to support us, we easily fall.

There are many who started out well and through the machinations of the devil, the source of all temptation, they fell away.



Saint Paul warned that it was possible for any man, including himself, to fall away from correct doctrine, in his epistle to the Galatians :

*... though we, or an Angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we said before, and I say now again, If anyone preach any other Gospel unto you than that which ye have received, let him be anathema. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet sought to please men, I would not have been a servant of Christ.*  
(Galatians 1:6-10)

From this we must conclude that there is one Personality that we focus on in Christianity, and that is the Person of Christ. The Church has a spiritual hierarchy and we have people who spend their time in prayer and asceticism who become spiritual guides; but we have to be sober and careful. These are very difficult days and many are they that have gone astray from the faith.

In a letter written to a spiritual child the Elder Joseph gave certain insights concerning the process of falling into spiritual error and heresy by demonic influence:

*...The nous is the purveyor of the soul, for it brings every appearance and perception of a noetic movement to the heart, which in turn filters it and gives it to the intellect. Therefore, the nous can be deceived just as the spring was polluted in the example. That is, the unclean spirit stealthily pollutes the nous, which in turn, as usual, gives whatever it has to the heart. If the heart is not pure, it gives the murk to the mind, and then the soul is darkened and blackened, constantly accepting fantasies henceforth instead of theorias. In this manner, all the delusions arose and all the heresies occurred...*

*...For when someone gripped by delusion obeys someone else, it is possible for him to be delivered from it, and for the evil one to lose control of him. This is why the devil advises and persuades him not to believe anyone anymore and never to obey anyone, but henceforth to accept only his own thoughts and trust only in his own discernment.*

The concept of obedience is the key to understanding this passage. If we resolve in our hearts that we will always follow the consensus of the Holy Fathers and refuse to become too daring in our thoughts, then the devil can never grab hold of us and throw us down.

The Elder Joseph concludes:

*Lurking within this haughty attitude is that huge ego, the Luciferian pride of the heretics and of all who are deluded and do not want to return to the truth. So may our Christ, Who is the true Light, enlighten and guide the steps of each person who wants to approach Him. (The Elder Joseph the Cave Dweller, Monastic Wisdom, 36th Letter)*

And in the 48th Letter the Elder Joseph comments further:

*Read, if you want, the Ecclesiastical History by Meletios of Athens, and see how many teachers –Origen and thousands of others – were at first great luminaries of the Church possessing extensive learning. But since they gave themselves over to the sea of knowledge before receiving in hesychia the purification of their senses and the peace and tranquility of the Spirit, they sank in the ocean of the Holy Scriptures. They thought that their scholarly learning was sufficient.*

*Thousands were lost and anathematized by the Councils, of which they had previously been champions. Read and you will see. (The Elder Joseph the Cave Dweller, Monastic Wisdom, 48<sup>th</sup> Letter, page 240)*

Therefore, no matter what progress a man makes in the spiritual life, no matter who we are, we all need to be careful and we all need to practice humility and remain obedient to the teachings of the Church.

When I heard that the general theme of the Conference would be enduring in the faith, I thought of the following passage from a letter of Saint Mark the Ascetic to the Solitary Nicolas, which is very insightful. I think that we should all carry these concepts with us in our daily thoughts.

*...This, my son, is how you should begin your life according to God. You should continually and unceasingly call to mind all the blessings which God in His love has bestowed upon you in the past, and still bestows for the salvation of your soul. You must not let forgetfulness of evil or laziness make you grow unmindful of these many and great blessings, and so pass the rest of your life uselessly and ungratefully. For this kind of continual recollection, pricking the heart like a spur, moves it constantly to confession and humility, to thanksgiving with a contrite soul, and to all forms of sincere effort, repaying God through its virtue and holiness. In this way the heart meditates constantly and conscientiously on the words from the Psalms: 'What shall I give to the Lord in return for all His benefits towards me?' (Ps. 116: 12)*

Thus, in order to persevere in the spiritual life, we must humbly count our blessings in a spirit of humility.

Saint Mark next provides for us all a very helpful insight into three things we all must struggle against if we are to succeed in the spiritual life.

*... Imagine that there are three powerful and mighty giants of the*

*Philistines, upon whom depends the whole hostile army of the demonic Holofernes (cf. Judith 2: 4).*

When these three have been overthrown and slain, all the power of the demons is fatally weakened. These three giants are the vices already mentioned: ignorance, the source of all evils; forgetfulness, its close relation and helper; and laziness, which weaves the dark shroud enveloping the soul in murk. This third vice [laziness] supports and strengthens the other two, consolidating them so that evil becomes deep-rooted and persistent in the negligent soul.

We have these three topics: ignorance, forgetfulness and laziness.

The first part of my talk so far demonstrates that if we are to endure in the faith, we cannot allow ignorance and forgetfulness to be the cause of our being led astray. We must be grounded in the Faith. We must apply ourselves! These are difficult times and every last Christian needs to study and know his or her faith.

The Apostolic Constitutions tell us that we are all responsible:

*I shall judge the bishop and the layperson. The sheep are rational and not irrational, so that no layman may ever say that, "I am a sheep, and not a shepherd, and I give no account of myself, but the shepherd shall see to it, and he alone shall pay the penalty for me." For even as the sheep that follows not the good shepherd shall fall to the wolves unto its own destruction, so too it is evident that the sheep that follows the evil shepherd shall acquire death; for he shall utterly devour it. Therefore, it is required that we flee from destructive shepherds. (Apostolic Constitutions, Page 1,633)*

Thus, we all must make the effort to overcome ignorance and struggle to

learn the "faith once delivered unto the saints," and once learned we must practice a way of life wherein we do not become forgetful of the essential points of the doctrines of our faith. We cannot allow ourselves to become spiritually lazy, lest we be swept away by one of the many heresies that undermine Holy Tradition, especially in our day.

The Holy Fathers have handed down to us a list of the eight bad thoughts that we must overcome: Gluttony, lust, avarice, dejection (*lypi*) [sorrow], anger, [sloth] despondency (*akidia*), vainglory, and pride.

I wish to focus on two passions from this list that can be a source of spiritual loss during a time of affliction and they are related to the third giant that we struggle against, laziness. Laziness in this context is not merely a state wherein we are negligent in doing work. The word in Greek in this context is *akedia*, and it has been translated laziness, sloth, despondency.

For ascetics living in solitude, *acedia* or despondency is an affliction born of the isolation and demonic attack. For the layperson it can be said that sloth or *acedia* or despondency is a sin that is born from a failure to pursue God and the lack of making the effort to seek out the joy of God.

Life is filled with many temptations and we all can become overwhelmed at times, but we need to make the effort to seek out spiritual joy. With this in mind, please consider the meaning of the word "slothful" when you listen to the words of our Savior's parable that compares the Kingdom of the Heavens to when a man traveling to a far country called his servants And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his ability, and then he departed. Upon the man's return he asked the man who he entrusted with one talent for an account of his activity and this man replied,

*Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast what is thine. (Matt 25:24-25)*

*And his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with interest. (Matt 25:26-27)*

You have probably read or heard different gospel interpretations wherein this trading with the talent is described as practicing the virtues of prayer, showing mercy, almsgiving, etc. There is an additional spiritual explanation for this verse, that is, the basic cause of this man not trading with his talent could very well have come from a slothfulness and despondency that sprang from a failure to make the effort to seek out the joy of God. If we allow the devil to lay us low with sloth and despondency, then we will not be able to work any of the virtues. Thus, in a certain sense, the first virtue we must work in order to be able to work the other virtues is to seek out God with joy, to seek the message of joy in the Holy Gospel.

Because this man was found "slothful" he unfortunately heard the words:

*28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath the ten talents.  
29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. 30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.*

If we desire to be united to Christ and become sanctified, the foundation of our work is to seek joy. In saying all of this, I do not trivialize the sorrows and temptations that you all have gone through or that any

Christian goes through. I am saying that we must make the effort to establish our hearts in the true promises of our Savior and find a way to participate in the joy of His triumph over sin and death. This joy can overcome all adversity.

In his treatise “On the Virtues and Vices,” Saint John of Damascus teaches that worldly dejection can be overcome by spiritual joy and sloth-*acedia* can be overcome by patience, perseverance, and offering thanks to God. Once again, we begin to trade by counting our blessings. We have to find a way to not become overwhelmed by sorrow and despondency.

We must remember that at the very time of the beginning of our Savior’s voluntary Passion, he exhorted the Apostles to be of good cheer, saying:

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)*

“*I have overcome the world.*” – Our Savior has given us the word of truth, He has accomplished all things so that we might have peace. Yes, we will have tribulations in this life, but be of good cheer. He has triumphed, He has overcome. Our Savior has achieved the ultimate and everlasting victory and that victory is certain. But it is our task to work out the details of our participation in this victory in our own life. Seek joy, count blessings, look to things above. We should constantly remind ourselves of the promises that have been given us.

As Saint Paul said:

*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for*

*them that love him. (1 Cor 2:9)*

Our contest is not for the riches of this world or for fame or for any ephemeral thing, as saint Basil wrote:

*The contest for virtue is the struggle for one to become God and a son by the illumination of the most pure light of that day which is uninterrupted by darkness. He that shines forth with the true light has made virtue as another sun, which having once shined upon us no longer hides itself in the west; but having clothed all things with its illuminating power, it grants an unceasing and perpetual light unto the worthy and makes into other suns those who partake of that light.*

We must, in the words of Saint Ignatius the God-Bearer:

*Weigh carefully the times. Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes; impalpable and impassible, yet who became passible on our account; and who in every kind of way suffered for our sakes. (The Epistle of Saint Ignatius to Saint Polycarp)*

It is written in the Acts of the Apostles, that when the Apostles were jailed and beaten for the name of Christ, *“they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.”* (Acts 5:41)

They suffered indignities for Christ, but they were so filled with joy that they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ. These men communed with Christ in their inner man and participated in the Mystery of the Cross of Christ so that they were filled with spiritual intoxication, the intoxication of co-suffering love. Outwardly they were oppressed and inwardly they had traded, they had made the effort and were rewarded.



In closing I want to quote from a more modern example of this love for God found in the life and martyrdom of Bishop Maxim of Serpukhov, the first Catacomb bishop in Russia.

*The common spiritual father of the entire Catacomb episcopate and secular clergy on the island of Solovki was the remarkable confessor, and later also martyr, Archpriest Nicholas Piskanovsky (from the city of Voronezh). Vladika Maxim deeply revered him and called him an “adamant of Orthodoxy.” Once Vladika Maxim, with great agitation of soul and heartfelt tears (he was rarely received from his wife and young son. On this postcard was written: “We always rejoice, thinking of your sufferings in the camp for Christ and His Church. May you too rejoice that we also have become worthy again and again to be persecuted for the Lord.*

We see in the lives of the saints how people have found a way throughout every century to find joy in the Lord, even in affliction. Let us all strive to be attached to our Savior, let us thank Him every day of our life so that we might endure unto the end and receive sanctification in the faith.

Amen.

[Source: <http://orthodoxyinfo.org/OctoberConference/2011Conference.html> ]