

# The Good Word

PUBLISHED WITH THE BLESSING OF BISHOP AUXENTIOS OF ETNA AND PORTLAND



## FOUR EXTRAORDINARY HIERARCHS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ABROAD (ROCA)

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The late Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Etna often commented that we live in an era of theological, ecclesiological, and liturgical mediocrity. And while the statement is a model of the restraint typical of His Eminence, what was meant is that in our time the outrageous and unthinkable have become a reality, even a commonplace. From the standpoint of religious bodies outside of Orthodox Christianity the description is obviously and without any doubt true. Sadly, it is also true, to a large degree, regarding much of what is called “World Orthodoxy,” the Orthodoxy that is involved, directly or indirectly, in the so-called ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches, and in the promotion of the “new” or Papal festal calendar, all flagrant betrayals of Holy Orthodoxy and of her Holy Canons. The accuracy of the Metropolitan’s observation about mediocrity, and much worse, becomes crystal clear when one reviews the final three quarters of the twentieth century, and the first decades of the twenty-first, during which the abuses mentioned above appear and then over time have become ever more pronounced within World Orthodoxy.

However, God does not abandon his people, as the Metropolitan knew well. Holy Scripture informs us: *“Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”*<sup>1</sup> And Christ Jesus Himself spoke the words *“Fear not”* many times, instructing us to believe in Him,<sup>2</sup> belief in Him being the antidote to fear. And so, God gives us holy men to protect us from evil and to direct us toward the good. We see proof of that in the lives of a number of Holy Church Fathers of the twentieth century, several of whom we discuss here and all of whom, in this case, were hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox

Church Abroad. Reading the biography of Archbishop Averky, which follows, one will note that Father Seraphim (Rose) refers to him as among the last of the giants of the contemporary Orthodox Church. All of the men featured here were precisely that; giants of the Church, giants standing courageously athwart the path of the heresies of our age.

### 1. BLESSED ARCHBISHOP ANDREI, OF ROCKLAND & NOVO-DIVEEVO




ARCHBISHOP ANDREI (RYMARENKO) 1893-1978

Archbishop Andrei of thrice blessed memory was born March 15, 1893 (O.S.) in Romny, Poltava, Russian Empire (now part of Ukraine). At his Baptism, he was given the name Adrian — Adrian Adrianovich Rymarenko. The Archbishop commented himself that he grew up

*surrounded by that Orthodox way of life which for generations had been created by Holy Russia. In our*

<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 31:6.

<sup>2</sup> e.g., St. Luke 8:50.



family, life proceeded according to the Church calendar, according to the yearly Church cycle.<sup>3</sup>

He goes on to say,

*Our family was wealthy. And the religious outlook with which our life was penetrated was naturally reflected in deeds as well: we participated in the building of churches, set out tables with food for poor people, sent donations to prisons, hospitals, work-houses.*<sup>4</sup>

The Revolution of 1905 gave rise to a severe diminution of morale in Russia. The Archbishop writes that it caused much disillusionment and desolation in society. People tended to live more frivolously, their attention centered on what the Archbishop refers to as “egoistic interests.” Feeling this atmosphere of cold alienation, he became dissatisfied with the direction of his life, which aimed at secular success, and instead felt that he needed the same Orthodox *Way of Life* that had surrounded him during his childhood and youth.

During this stage of his life, he came across a group of Orthodox students led by Archpriest John Egorov. This group of about twenty-five students were given lectures by Father John on the traditional Orthodox way of life based on the Holy Church Fathers and their writings. The Archbishop explains that, among other things, he came to understand that the Divine Services are not merely ritual, “but that in them are revealed the dogmas of faith. They are the foundations of man’s reception of Divinity.”<sup>5</sup> Upon completion of these lectures and studies, he states that he had come back to life. He then came across Father Nektary, a disciple of Elder Saint Ambrose of Optina, who, he says, showed him the path of pastoral service. Thus, in the early 1920s he married and was ordained a Priest.

His pastoral duties began in his hometown, Romny, at the local Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky. However, in 1926 the Soviet authorities closed the church and sent Father Adrian to Kiev, where he was under surveillance. The Archbishop describes the reign of the militant Communists as “the frightful time of the reveling of the atheists, against a background of demonic carnivals, in the heat of persecution against the Church and believers, of massive arrests and executions.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1941 the Germans occupied Kiev and immediately reopened the churches and other Orthodox institutions including the Protection Hospital Convent,

where he served as Priest, and a home for the crippled and aged. That time of the resurrection of Orthodox Church life lasted but a brief two years. With the return of the Soviets those associated with the Church or with any anti-Communist activities were evacuated, eventually finding themselves in war-torn Germany.

Father Adrian was assigned head of the Orthodox cathedral in Berlin where he assured that Divine Services were celebrated every day, despite the continuous bombings. The Archbishop comments,

*The Lord helped us to preserve the Divine gift of the Eucharist of Christ so as to strengthen and confirm in faith the souls of our Russian people who had fled from communism or had been brought by force to Germany. The church was constantly filled with Russian youth, who for the most part knew neither their homeland nor God nor the Orthodox way of life, but now instinctively were drawn to the Church, to Christ. One had to help them, caress them, teach them, instruct them.*<sup>7</sup>

As the war drew to a close and the communists began to occupy Berlin amidst the most horrifying Bolshevik atrocities, Orthodox clergy and people were evacuated, in the case of Father Adrian, to the small town of Wendlingen in the State of Württemberg. There was still danger, however. British and American leaders had signed a disgraceful repatriation agreement with Stalin, promising to return to the USSR, and to the “tender mercies” of the Red dictator, forcibly if necessary, all former Soviet citizens, and even Russians who had left Russia before or during the civil war and were never Soviet citizens. Thanks be to God, Father Adrian was not included in the “repatriation.”

Father Adrian and other Orthodox clergy were eventually allowed to immigrate to America. There, he was given the duty of establishing a convent for Orthodox nuns scattered about various countries by the revolution and the war. Thus, he founded Holy Dormition Convent, known also as Novo-Diveevo,<sup>8</sup> in Nanuet, New York.

In 1968 Father Adrian’s wife, Matushka Evgenia, reposed in the Lord and therefore, later that year, he was tonsured a monk, with the name Andrei, and consecrated Bishop of Rockland. He continued to serve as spiritual father to the nuns at Novo-Diveevo. He was also Spiritual Father to Saint Philaret, Metropolitan of New York. Archbishop Andrei reposed in the Lord July 12, 1978.

3. Archbishop Andrei of Novo-Diveevo, *The One Thing Needful* (Liberty, TN: The Saint John of Kronstadt Press, 1991), p. 5


4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.* p. 6.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

8. “New-Diveevo.” Called this after a famous convent and spiritual center in Russia, Diveevo, near Nizhny Novgorod. Saint Seraphim of Sarov served as spiritual Elder for the nuns during his lifetime.



Blessed Archbishop Andrei is known for his excellent book *The One Thing Needful* which is a collection of his sermons for an entire year. The sermons are concise yet are sharply focused on matters important to our salvation. An example of this is his sermon for the Fifth Sunday After Pentecost, on which he speaks on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew 8:28-9:1. This Gospel lesson involves Christ's encounter with two men possessed by demons.

The two demoniacs were, the Gospel says, "exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way."<sup>9</sup> In other words, the two demon-possessed men were very dangerous so that people avoided passing by that area, and for good reason. Being controlled by demons, they were capable of any evil and could easily injure or kill passersby. Moreover, they lived in tombs which, of course, were unclean, but were a natural environment for these hellish creatures. And so, these passages from Holy Scripture testify to the existence of demons and of evil. The Archbishop notes,

*In our time such a reality doesn't even require proof. Every day, every newspaper tells us about a whole list of crimes which simply cannot be explained without recognizing that the person [committing such crimes] is possessed by an external, evil power.*<sup>10</sup>

Knowing that Christ is the Son of God and saying so, and knowing too that He has the power to cast them out of the two men, they ask if they might be allowed to enter into a herd of swine. Christ tells them to go. The swine were so violently agitated when the demons entered them that they rushed down a steep place and into the sea, perishing all.

Archbishop Andrei then comments,

*Here is the most terrible passage in this Gospel. First the demons were in two possessed men. Later, we saw them in an entire herd of swine. And then, a whole town—possessed. With what? With a passion for profit. According to Jewish law, raising pigs was unlawful, sinful. But it made money, and huge amounts of money. And here an entire herd perished.*<sup>11</sup>

The Gospel says that "the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts."<sup>12</sup>

The Archbishop states,

*And the people seemed to be saying to the Lord: "You have only set foot on our land and have caused us a terrible loss. What will happen next if you stay here*

*any longer? You will ruin us completely! We see, we understand your greatness: even the devils are obedient to you! But what does that do for us? What do the two healed men matter to us? We don't need your miracles. We need thousands, millions of dollars. You are not for us. Go away, go away at once.*"<sup>13</sup>

Since the people of that city rejected him, the Gospel says that "he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city."<sup>14</sup>

Archbishop Andrei tells us to examine our own souls and then asks a painful question,

*Doesn't the same thing happen with us? Some kind of passion takes possession of us, but Christ becomes an obstacle. And in our soul, we whisper the same terrible words: "Go away from us." May the Lord keep us from this! May our words directed to Him always be: "Come to us and never leave us."*<sup>15</sup>

All kinds of things can become passions. All of us must earn our livings, but earning money can become a passion if it goes too far. If it goes too far it can damage our relationship with our family, with friends, or, most serious from a spiritual standpoint, with Christ and His Church. Immoral thoughts or actions can easily become a passion so strong that it ruins our ability to think clearly and logically, almost like a form of insanity, blinding us, depriving us of the ability to see the consequences of our activity. Those passions obviously require a rejection of Christ. Sports and hobbies can become a passion if taken so far that they rob us of precious time which, at least in part, we owe to Christ. Let us be cognizant of the fact too that some of these passions can, so to speak, creep up on us without us realizing how serious they have become.

On this subject of unbridled passions leading to a rejection of Christ, the Archbishop writes, "May the Lord keep us from this! May our words directed to Him always be: 'Come to us and never leave us.'"<sup>16</sup>

Blessed Archbishop Andrei was a true Church Father, like those in the early years of the Church and no different from those of the Golden Ages of the Fathers. We learn from him, by his life and by his writings. Another true Holy Church Father of our time, Saint Philaret, Metropolitan of New York and First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad until his repose in 1985, said of Archbishop Andrei in his Foreword to *The One Thing Needful* that he "possessed a most rich spiritual experience and a vast knowledge

9. St. Matthew 8:28

10. *The One Thing Needful*, p. 94.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

12. St. Matthew 8:34.

13. *The One Thing Needful*, p. 95.

14. St. Matthew 9:1.

15. *The One Thing Needful*, p. 95.

16. *Ibid.*

both in the realm of pure theology and in the realm of the spiritual-ascetic writings of the Holy Fathers.<sup>17</sup>

Let us study his writings and gain from his experience and knowledge.

## 2. BLESSED ARCHBISHOP AVERKY, OF SYRACUSE & HOLY TRINITY MONASTERY



ARCHBISHOP AVERKY (TAUSHEV) 1896-1976

Father Seraphim (Rose) of Platina refers to Archbishop Averky as “one of the last of the giants of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Orthodoxy, not merely of the Russian Church Outside of Russia, or even of Russian Orthodoxy—but of the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Orthodox Church.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed so! He was born Alexander Pavlovich Taushev on October 19, 1906 (O.S.) in Kazan, Simbirsk Province, Russian Empire. His family was of the Russian nobility. While still quite young, he especially preferred reading books of a spiritual nature which motivated him towards a monastic life.

Upon the outbreak of civil war after the revolution of 1917, the family left Russia, settling in Bulgaria, in the city of Varna. A major influence on young Alexander’s life at this time was Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, whom Father Seraphim describes as “a strict monk, a man of prayer, and theologian in the true

Patristic tradition.”<sup>19</sup> It was with the blessing of Archbishop Theophan, that Alexander entered the Theological Faculty of the University of Sofia, from which he graduated *magna cum laude* in 1930. The following year he was tonsured a monk with the new name Averky and a year after that ordained a priestmonk. During this time he served several parishes in the Carpatho-Russian region of Czechoslovakia until that area was occupied by the Hungarians in 1940. From there he moved to Belgrade where he served under Metropolitan Anastassy, Chief Hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

With the seizure of Yugoslavia by the communists at the conclusion of the Second World War, the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad moved to Munich, in the American-occupied zone of Germany. There he centered his activities on the religious education of the young. In 1951 he came to America where he taught courses in the New Testament, Liturgics, and Homiletics to students at the newly established Holy Trinity Seminary at Jordanville, New York. On May 25, 1953, Archimandrite Averky was consecrated Bishop of Syracuse and in 1960 was appointed Abbot of Holy Trinity Monastery and elevated to the rank of Archbishop. He served his remaining years as Abbot and as teacher, transmitting all that he learned in his lifetime to his monks and his students. Vladika Averky reposed in the Lord on March 31, 1976 (O.S.).

Archbishop Averky wrote an impressive body of works. Currently available in English language editions are his massive three-volume *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament* and *The Struggle for Virtue: Asceticism in a Modern Secular Society*. Other of his works have yet to be translated. Those include *A Guide to Homiletics*, *True Orthodoxy in the Contemporary World*, *Archbishop Theophan of Poltava and Pereyaslav*, and *Present Times in the Light of God’s Word*.

Let us now read some excerpts from Vladika Averky’s book, *True Orthodoxy in the Contemporary World*, excerpts that have been translated from the Russian.


“The Christian world, it is frightful to say, presents today a frightful, cheerless picture of the most profound religious and moral decadence,”<sup>20</sup> says His Eminence. That observation is, without doubt, more true today than it was when the author wrote it decades ago. The decadence takes several forms including greed, on the

<sup>17</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup>. Archbishop Averky, *The Apocalypse of St. John: An Orthodox Commentary*. Father Seraphim Rose, Trans. Introduction by Father Seraphim Rose. (Platina, CA: Valaam Society of America, 1985), p. 11.

<sup>19</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 15.



one hand, and moral depravity, on the other. Obviously, social subversion also plays its important part.

We are rightfully obligated to donate money in support of our church. However, congregations with thousands of members are gulled by preachers into giving their money for the sole purpose of enriching the preachers, who live in multi-million-dollar palaces and travel about in chauffeur-driven limousines, while Christ Himself was poor and “had no place to lay his head.”<sup>21</sup>

So-called churches demolish centuries of liturgical tradition in favor of clown masses, rock and roll masses, jazz masses, and other blasphemous exhibitions designed to bring things into perfect conformity with the *Zeitgeist*, the “spirit of the times,” or, one might say, the *Weltgeist*, the “spirit of the world.” Thus, the promoters of such “churches” seek to satisfy the most vulgar of tastes.

The most basic moral laws are overturned to attract degenerates who transform everything, wishing to remake God in their own fallen image. Christ Himself is remade from the Son of God, consubstantial with the Father, and One of the Holy Trinity, into simply a nice man with nice ideas (though here and there a bit impractical) or remade into a political and social revolutionary wishing to overturn civilized ways, or remade thoroughly human with all of the faults of ordinary people, or remade into one’s “buddy” to whom sin is not taken seriously and therefore becomes a laughing matter. And even such men as Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin are mutated into modern apostles of “progress” but whom in reality are apostles of a totally murderous and satanocratic creed. To make matters even worse, practically every sect of what is loosely termed “Christianity” has enthusiastically embraced the heresy of ecumenism (even, sad to say, some in certain Orthodox national jurisdictions!), in which confessional differences are ignored, the truth is mingled with falsehood, and participants happily build what is, truth be told, the new religion of the Antichrist. Christ warned us, “Take heed that no man deceive you,” He warned, “for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.”<sup>22</sup> Vladika Averky was certainly correct that contemporary Christianity is decadent. It is decadence itself!

What is the purpose of this deliberate march towards decadence? In this matter Vladika is crystal clear. He writes, “All that is happening today of the highest levels of religion, government, and public life ... is nothing

else than an intense work of preparation for the servants of the coming Antichrist for his future kingdom.”<sup>23</sup>

When the Archbishop wrote these words the façade of normality was such that most people could not detect the sinister undercurrent in the course of events. That was true in part because of the threat posed by the Soviet Union, the evil empire, as it was rightly called by then American President Ronald Reagan.

To those living in what was called the “free world” it seemed as if they stood for all that was good. To a certain extent that was true, but life outside of the Communist world was still extremely materialistic. For example, the sign of our superiority to Communism was not that the free world encouraged a worldview that recognized God and the reality of the spiritual, but rather the fact that the non-Communist world could produce more material goods than the Communist. That is why, recognizing that an excessively materialistic outlook on life is antithetical to a Godly outlook, the Archbishop wrote as follows:

*The servants of Antichrist more than anything else strive to force God out of the life of men, so that men ... might not remember God, but might live as though He did not exist. Therefore, the whole order of today’s life in the so-called “free” countries, where there is no open bloody persecution against faith, where everyone has the right to believe as he wishes, is an even greater danger for the soul of a Christian (than open persecution), for it chains him entirely to the earth, compelling him to forget about heaven. The whole of contemporary ‘culture’, directed to purely earthly attainments and the constant state of emptiness and distraction which gives no opportunity for one to go at least a little deeper into his soul and so the spiritual life in him gradually dies out.*<sup>24</sup>

He goes on to say,

*Under the covering of a deceptive outward appearance that looks good and leads many into error, in actuality there is occurring everywhere today a hidden persecution against Christianity... This persecution is much more dangerous and frightful than the previous open persecution, for it threatens a complete devastation of souls – spiritual death.*<sup>25</sup>

21. St. Matthew 8:20.

22. *Ibid.* 24:4-5.

23. <https://mindofthefathers.wordpress.com/2021/10/31/true-orthodoxy-and-the-contemporary-world/>

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

Today, in what was once called the “free world,” there are now open attacks by the mass media and government on believers in more traditional forms of Christianity. The persecution is no longer hidden. For simply speaking words of truth, for example quotations from Sacred Scripture, these believers are, at the least, condemned as “rabid extremists” or “potential terrorists,” and at worst threatened with arrest, prosecution, and prison sentences, threats which in some places are actually carried out. In Archbishop Averky’s time the plans of the devotees of the Antichrist were better concealed, though he was not thereby misled.

How must we react to His Eminence’s warning? There can be no doubt that his answer to us is binding, that is if we truly believe:<sup>26</sup>

*Now is the time of confession—of a firm standing, if need be even to death, for one’s Orthodox faith, which is being subjected everywhere to open and secret attacks, oppression, and persecution on the part of the servants of the coming Antichrist.*<sup>27</sup>

We quote again from the pen of Father Seraphim (Rose) on the subject of Blessed Archbishop Averky:

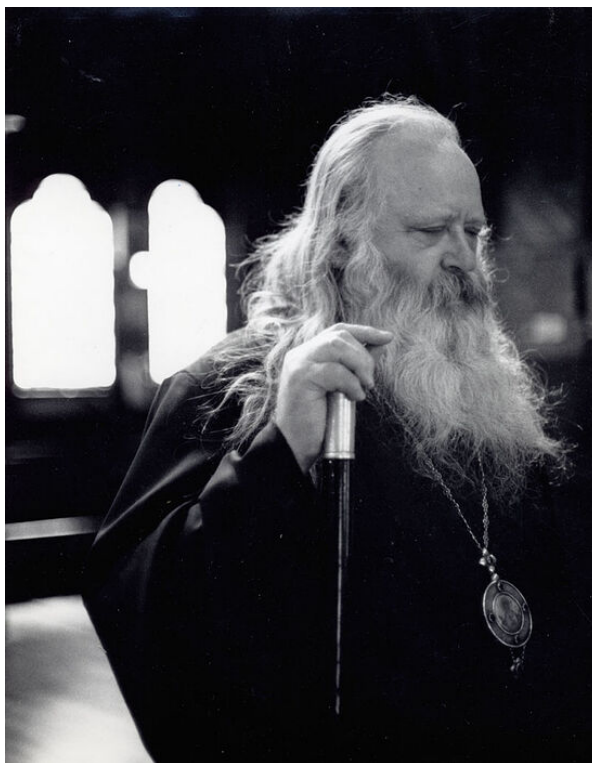
*There are few saints left in our pitiful times. But even if we do not see about us now such upright and righteous ones as he, his teaching remains with us and can be our guiding beacon in the even darker days ahead which he foresaw, when the Church may have to go into the wilderness ... the Church of the last times.*<sup>28</sup>

Let us thank God for giving us such men as Blessed Archbishop Averky.

### 3. BLESSED BISHOP NEKTARY OF SEATTLE

Born Oleg Mikhailovich Kontsevich in 1905 in Latvia, then part of the Russian Empire, while still a young man, Bishop Nektary was able to visit the Optina Hermitage before its closing by the Bolsheviks in 1923. While it was open he was under the spiritual guidance of Elder Saint Nektary of that monastery, a gift of God that dramatically altered the direction of his life. Upon graduating from school, Vladika entered the Communications Engineering Institute, earning a graduate degree. In 1930 he was tonsured a Reader by a Bishop of the suffering Russian Church. Near the close of the Second World War he was evacuated to Germany with millions of others to escape the clutches of that very embodiment of evil, Josef Stalin. There, in Berlin, he served at the Russian Orthodox Cathedral as a

subdeacon under Father Adrian Rimarenko, who later became Archbishop Andrei of Rockland and Novodivevo.



BISHOP NEKTARY (KONTSEVICH) 1905-1983

In 1953, Vladika Nektary emigrated to the United States where he was tonsured a monk and given the name Nektary in honor of his spiritual father. Following that, he was ordained to the diaconate, and, a week later, ordained to the holy priesthood. He was assigned at that time to the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in San Francisco. In 1962, he was consecrated Bishop of Seattle, Vicar of the Western American Diocese. In that role, he served the needs of the faithful in the more northerly region of the Western Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.


Although he resided in San Francisco, he traveled frequently to Seattle to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Feast Days and for other matters requiring his presence. He encouraged Father Seraphim (Rose) in the establishment of the monastery in Platina, California and ordained him to the Holy Priesthood. After the repose of Father Seraphim on September 2, 1982, Vladika came to the monastery in Platina on the fortieth day to serve Divine Liturgy after which he spoke warmly of the deceased Hieromonk, calling him a Holy Righteous One.

Blessed Bishop Nektary, who had been ill for some years with heart ailments, reposed in the Lord only five months later, on February 6, 1983.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. Archbishop Averky, *The Apocalypse* St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 1995, p. 23.



Vladika is remembered by those who knew him for, among other things, his beautiful sermons. One year, on the twenty-ninth Sunday after Pentecost, he spoke on the appointed Gospel for that day, which was from the seventeenth chapter of Saint Luke (17:12-19). That Gospel lesson deals with Christ's healing of ten lepers, nine of whom were Jews and one, a Samaritan.

The Bishop relates that,

*One could not but look with sympathy at these unfortunate men, for they suffered a terrible infectious disease which was at the time widespread and caused untold hardship. Victims were covered in putrid sores, their bodies rotting and decaying, and parts of their bodies would actually fall off, their faces turned unrecognizable. The sick also suffered bitterness, for by Mosaic law, they were obliged to show themselves to the priests, who, confirming their disease, were driven out from society and had no right to enter towns and villages, fated to wander the wilderness; they were even prevented from drinking from the same water sources. So, these ten 'living corpses,' rejected by all, dared not approach Christ, but believing in His great healing power, cried out: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests.' For by the same law of Moses, the priests could declare them free of their ailment and they could return to society.<sup>29</sup>*

As we know, the Lepers went to the city, where the priests were, and on their way discovered that they had been healed, healed so fully that the priests declared them free of disease. From having perhaps the most horrifying of diseases to being suddenly in perfect health, one can scarcely imagine the joy that must have overwhelmed each of these men.

Vladika then says,

*Imagine their amazement, having been rejected by their relatives, their mothers, fathers, children and friends. Having lost all hope for healing, they had no choice but to wander the desert. Now by the word of the Lord, they headed to show themselves to the priests and saw their bodies miraculously healing, their pain subsiding, their limbs restored, and they became healthy human beings once again. Undoubtedly, this miracle and living joy of healing allowed them to sense the omnipotence of Jesus. Restored in body, they were purified and could return to the joys of life.<sup>30</sup>*

The healing of these ten men was a kind of resurrection. The fullness of life had returned to them

29. [https://www.synod.com/synod/engrocor/enser\\_bpnektaryo10prokazhennikh.html](https://www.synod.com/synod/engrocor/enser_bpnektaryo10prokazhennikh.html)

30. *Ibid.*

who were previously almost dead, with bodies that were decaying even while technically alive. One could easily picture them jumping up and down from pure unmitigated delight.

But then we come to the crux of the story. Of the ten who were healed, only one thought it necessary to go back to thank the Lord for the miracle He had worked, and that one man was a Samaritan. Remember that the Samaritans were, to the Jews, outsiders, foreigners, a thoroughly detested group. So, according to the Savior Jesus Christ, the nine Jews did not return to thank him but the Samaritan did. And not only did he thank the Lord, but the Gospel says he "fell down on his face at his feet."

Bishop Nektary comments:

*It would seem that a just sense of gratitude would have compelled them to return to their Benefactor and thank Him with all their hearts, which were now filled with joy over their healing. The Lord would have received this gratitude and given them the new light of His grace. But as the Gospel tells us, only one of them returned and with a loud voice praised God and fell to His feet, and that man was a Samaritan. How close is he to our hearts today. How good was he in his trembling and inspired elation, having seen himself healed, without hesitation hurrying back to his Savior. And how the Lord doubtless rejoiced over the return of this once lost lamb. But only one of them returned. What of the rest? They left, probably forever. The Lord was sorrowful over these nine and He said: "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." For if they did not remember Him directly after being cleansed, would they remember Him when they return to the pleasures and cares of this world?<sup>31</sup>*

Did Christ tell this story for the single purpose of condemning a group of Jews while exalting a Samaritan? No, that was not His purpose. That is why Vladika then says,

*Let us not seek answers to this crude ingratitude of the healed Jews. Let us turn to ourselves, and alone with our conscience, with pure heart compare ourselves to those who were healed. Can we not join the Samaritan who humbly fell to the Savior's feet in gratitude? How bold would that be of us! We are like the successors of the nine ungrateful Jews, and together with them we do not thank the Lord for His great mercies and His all-gracious providence for us sinners. The gifts and mercies of the Lord to us unworthy people are countless. The Lord summoned us from non-*

31. *Ibid.*

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*existence, creating us in His image and likeness. The Lord granted us a Divine gift—free will. He gave us the ability, in continually making ourselves more perfect, to approach our Creator. But when we abused this gift and willingly submitted to evil, caught and enslaved by the devil, God then sent His Only-Begotten Son for the absolution of our sins with at the dearest Cost—His Own Blood. If only we would repent. The Lord bestowed upon us countless material, physical, emotional and spiritual goods, leading us by His Providence towards salvation. But how often do we notice, with every single step we take, the Hand of the Savior in our lives? Even the fact that we live in this country, well-fed and free; that we now stand in church and are present at Divine Liturgy, is a great mercy of God. Shall we not fall to His feet in gratitude?<sup>32</sup>*

However, not only do we fall down before Christ in thanks for the good things, the pleasant, happy things that He gives us, but also for the difficulties and hardships. You see, these He gives us for our benefit, to shape our characters and to shape our souls, making us fit to receive Him in this life, and, when the time comes, in the next life. Here he quotes from Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (5:20) instructing us that whatever comes to us we must give "thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." And, quoting from Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians (5:18): "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." To underscore this advice to give thanks in all circumstances, he provides the following edifying example:

32. *Ibid.*

*There was a certain Hieromonk (now Saint) Nikon, who was arrested by the Bolsheviks in Optina Hermitage and sent to Turkistan. Suffering from tuberculosis, weak and feeble, enduring beatings and an unjust trial, sent to hard labor in a terribly hot region, this holy martyr wrote to his friends that he was limitlessly grateful to God that He allowed him to endure all this in His Holy Name. He wrote that he deemed the following words as though addressed to him personally: "Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."<sup>33</sup>*

And so Vladika concludes by reminding us that "in thanking the Lord we should not just do so for joys and pleasures, but even for sorrows, even grave sufferings. For through great sufferings one can enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

We hear from these excerpts from his sermon on the healing of the ten lepers how skillful and profound Blessed Nektary was in speaking to his spiritual children. May Almighty God continue to give us such wise and holy men for the sake of the salvation of our souls.



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33. *Ibid.*