

In Step With Sts. Patrick and Gregory of Tours

A Homily by Fr. Seraphim Rose of Platina

EDITOR'S NOTE: *As an example of Fr. Seraphim's simple, down-to-earth approach to spiritual life, we present here a faithful transcription of one of his "unprepared" recorded talks. It was given on St. Patrick's day, March 17, 1977, to monks and pilgrims at the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery.*

1. A PERSPECTIVE ON ST. PATRICK

THE CONFESSION OF ST. PATRICK is a very simple document about how he planned to serve God and a few of the trials and sufferings he went through. From what St. Patrick writes, we see that in his lifetime he did not have the universal glory that surrounds him today. He apparently did miracles and many people had great respect for him, but he still had difficulties with bishops and church people, and there was controversy over whether he was doing things the way he should be doing them. This shows us that even those who later become quite glorious have to go through—in their own lifetimes—the same struggles that each one of us must go through; and it's not seen until the end whether a person even saves his soul.

It is extremely important that we look at St. Patrick, not from the point of view of glory in the eyes of men, but as he is: that is, spiritually—his spiritual worth. It is of absolutely no significance that today everybody wears green on his day. When I was going to school, you had to do something to anyone who didn't wear green—tie him up or something. It was obvious that those who did this had no idea of what St. Patrick meant, or what kind of Orthodox saint he was; it was just that the general opinion had been formed in society that he was very important. Gradually he is deprived of all religious meaning, and in the end the honoring of his memory becomes something close to superstition, some kind of a totally meaningless ritual. Of course, this is not what we should look at St. Patrick for. He was a burning apostle of Christ, and because he was close to God, and because God chose him, he was able to convert the whole of Ireland's people.

All of us are very inspired by lives like his, and this makes one want to do something oneself. What can one do? The inexperienced convert gets the idea: "Oh! I'll go to Ireland and do something." Of course, it will not work out. It will not be like St. Patrick because it could only be done once. In a small way it is possible to imitate him, but in general such literal imitations do not work out. We should look to lives like that of St. Patrick for some kind of inspiration or guidance as to what we can do ourselves in our own conditions.

What is realistic? What can we do to be burning with that same apostleship in the conditions we have today? We look around, and we see that there does not seem to be too much of the inspiring phenomena of St. Patrick's era: whole countries being converted, great monastic revivals, great movements towards Orthodoxy. On the contrary, we look around and see things which may very easily make us discouraged. One asks why there are no great apostles like St. Patrick today. Of course, it is very realistic historically. There was an age of apostles, there was an age when whole peoples were unconverted and apostles were sent out to them. Today, virtually the whole world has heard about Christ, and there are very few totally pagan

peoples left who are not getting the Word preached to them. In Africa, as we continue to hear, the Orthodox Gospel is being preached to those wild tribes, from one country to the next, in East and Central Africa. But in most places, the peoples of the world have become rather weary, tired, worn out people who once heard of Christianity and have now got bored with it. It is very difficult to inspire oneself with that. Here and there are a few converts who find that Christianity is something fresh, that it is not the same as the ordinary idea of it. Nevertheless, not too much is very inspiring when you look around the world, from the point of view of Orthodoxy.

2. THE CONDITIONS OF MODERN LIFE

There are, of course, definite reasons for this. The conditions of the world today are quite different from what they were in the past. The whole phenomenon of the apostasy, of the falling away from the truth, means that people do not know how to accept the Gospel freshly. They have already heard about it and have been inoculated against it. Therefore, very few of them—when they hear the message of Orthodoxy—come.

Another thing in the air today that is different from earlier times is this "Mickey Mouse" atmosphere. It is the lack of seriousness that one sees in the air, in just everyday customs. For example, when people part, they say, "Take it easy"—the sort of thing that indicates: "Relax, take it easy, there's nothing important going on. Just go along with whatever happens." We used to say things like: "God be with you." "Goodbye" even comes from the word "God".

The young people of today are very much absorbed in the whole fantasy world of television. "Mickey Mouse's" place is even called Disneyland, Disney World. Our whole spiritual and sober outlook is affected by this—even religious views. There is a very sincere fundamentalist Protestant in Florida who has a big parcel of land right next to Disney World, and who is going to make a replica of the Temple of Jerusalem, in order to attract the people going to Disney World to come over there for a spiritual thing, on the same level. They'll be saying "ah! " and "ooh! "—It will be the same thing as all the fairy castles they saw in Disney World. This whole atmosphere—this unreal, movie-type atmosphere is very much in, not only the air, but our very homes. It affects the whole seriousness of life, the way children are brought up—though children are obviously not brought up anymore. The whole idea of bringing them up, of raising them in a certain mold, is gone now. They just raise themselves, go into whatever influences are around, and the result is something very unserious. This is the chief reason why, when young people become independent, so many of them simply go crazy and get involved with various wild religions and drugs, why they run into crime and all kinds of mad things. In childhood they never had down-to-earth contact, either with spiritual life or simply with the seriousness of living from one day to the next. That is one of the chief things that makes our times different and much more difficult for spiritual efforts.

Another thing is all the modern conveniences which surround us and which, without a doubt, depersonalize and cause people to be less concerned for each other, more concerned about things, gadgets. The very idea of the telephone means that you can instantly have contact with someone for the sake of a message—nothing personal about it. If you have to go to great lengths to get to him, your soul is different than it would be if you just had to dial a number. All this makes our times different and very unfavorable to any kind of spiritual

activity such as apostleship, missionary activity, leading just an ordinary spiritual life, monastic life and the rest.

Something else also is in our air which we Orthodox Christians have to be mindful of, and that is the weight of tradition. If we accept all that the Church hands down to us simply as something already accomplished, something given to us without our effort, as if it is just there and we can take it for granted—this already deadens us spiritually, because everything that is high must be fought for, must be struggled for. That is one reason why modern conveniences only depersonalize. The whole effort to make everything more convenient takes away the element of struggle, which is the fabric, the fiber of life.

With all these things in view, the whole of modern life becomes extremely oppressive. For a long time now, as far back as William Butler Yeats, seventy-five years ago or so, everything in the modern age had been accomplished and done, all the seeds had been sown. The twentieth century can add almost nothing of its own. It has only put into effect that which has already been sown in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The result was that there was nothing more to do. Everything is done, it's hopeless. As William Butler Yeats, a sensitive Irish poet, expresses it in his poem *The Second Coming*:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand
The Second Coming! Hardly are these words out
When a vast image of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?

This is a kind of factual view of life: the worst people are simply immersed in evil deeds and the best people are going frantic, because there is no more spirituality left, there is nothing left to strive for, everything is taken away, materialism is triumphing, there is no hope for the world, and "the beast slouches toward Bethlehem to be born"—the vision of Antichrist. The world is going hopelessly down and there is no hope of getting out.

3. THE TIMELESS SPIRITUAL LIFE

All of this is the negative side we see surrounding us today, and it is a very real part of the atmosphere we breathe every day. On the other hand, we have the Orthodox Christian

revelation; that is, the revelation of God to His Church. It has come down to us now these two thousand years, very richly, with many testimonies of Scriptures and Holy Fathers, giving us a definite spiritual outlook, a definite spiritual law of life. The spiritual life and its aim do not change from one time to the next. In fact, we know that from the very beginning, from the time when the Gospel was first preached until now, there are being gathered out of the world citizens of one kingdom, all going towards the heavenly kingdom. All these citizens will speak the same language, and know each other, because they have gone through the one, same Orthodox life, the same spiritual struggle, according to the laws of spiritual life.

The Holy Fathers spoke about the latter times as times of great weakness, in which there would not be the great signs which were performed in the early times of the apostles and in the desert by the first monks, when thousands of miracles were being worked, great Fathers were raising people from the dead, many supernatural events were occurring; and these very Holy Fathers said that this dazzling age of miracles would fade away, and in the end there would be almost nothing at all like that. In fact, those who would be saving themselves would seem totally indistinguishable from everybody else, except that they would somehow keep alive the struggle against all these temptations. Just keeping alive the spark of the true Christian Faith, without making miracles without doing anything out of the ordinary, would already make them, if they endured to the end, as great as or even higher than those great Fathers who worked miracles.

Therefore, in our times, it seems that outward activity for Orthodox Christians is greatly limited in comparison with past times. It seems that way. Still, the inward spiritual activity must be just as possible for those who are willing to struggle. And, in fact, we look around us and we see rather spectacular examples in our century: St. John of Kronstadt, who worked thousands of miracles, probably more miracles than anyone in the history of the Church; St. Nectarios in Greece, a very humble person, in complete disgrace as a bishop, but a wonder-worker especially after his death; and our own Archbishop John [Saint John of San Francisco, glorified in 1994], who lived and actually walked our very soil and passed within forty miles of here many times, undoubtedly blessing all this area, especially with the icon of the Kursk Mother of God. And so it's obvious, in looking at these people and realizing they are spiritual giants, that it is possible to do something even in our evil times.

4. AWARENESS

This brings us to some of the practical considerations concerning the qualities needed for being spiritually creative and fruitful. There are a few important things which come to mind. One thing is that we must see things the way they are; that is, not go off blind, acting blindly without knowing what's going on in the world. We must be aware that there is such a thing as apostasy, that there are many different kinds of people who call themselves Christians, that they are acting in different ways and some of them are definitely in conflict with each other and with us, and that it can't be that all of them are right and are on the right path. We can see historically how many different kinds of errors, wrong views, wrong kinds of actions got mixed in with Christian faith. We see the frightful modern revolutionary movement; that is, the movement totally away from religion, aiming towards a great world empire of atheism, a foreshadowing of which is seen in Communism. This is not just among the unbelievers or among those who don't believe in the Orthodox way, but even among

Orthodox people. We look around and see that many Orthodox people are simply, totally worldly and do not think about the higher side of their Faith. They take it for granted. "It's all automatic. That's what has been handed down. There's always a priest somewhere. If he's not in this town, he's in the next one. He has sacraments and Holy Communion. We just go to him and get what we need and that's all.... You go home and you're satisfied..."

By reading and getting a historical perspective, we see that in past ages this was not considered enough, even by ordinary laymen. They were constantly doing things out of the ordinary. They were getting up very early in the morning. Every village had daily services. At four or five o'clock in the morning, Matins would begin. The people woke up and they went to church every morning, and again to Vespers in the evening. We take many, many Lives of Saints, and we read how they heard the church bell when they were children. If the child was very zealous for God, he would be the first one up in the morning and he would wake the parents up and get them ready for church. If the father could not go because he had to work in the fields, the child would get the mother up and they would go to church. Sometimes he went by himself. The whole atmosphere was penetrated with churchliness. And now, we see worldliness. Very seldom can one find a place where even daily services are celebrated in the world. People have grown unaccustomed to the idea that there is supposed to be an everyday church, everyday church services.

This, then, is one of the very great things which we see in front of us: this worldly attitude of people who are themselves in the Church. We must look at it realistically and see it the way it is: apostasy, error, evil, demonic activity and worldliness such as never before in the history of the world. These things are all anti-spiritual, anti-Orthodox. They lead down; and if anyone follows these paths, they do not lead one to salvation.

Then, once having done this—that is, having looked at things the way they are and been realistic about them—one must learn to fight on the right battlefields. The whole spiritual life is struggle. One must learn to know where one must fight, what one must do. This is extremely important, because it is very easy in the beginning stage to go totally off, by picking up and reading a book that talks about spirituality, hesychasm, and so on.

5. IMITATION SPIRITUALITY

Bishop Theophan the Recluse [+1894], when quoting some of the Holy Fathers, deliberately omitted many of the passages which dealt with the physical sides of prayer. He did this knowing that—even in his time, the 19th century—many people would take those physical aspects as the end and begin imitating without getting the essence. Therefore he just left those writings out of his published works. Now, however, many of them are being published in English and you can read how you are supposed to sit on a stool with your head down, etc. People begin to imitate; they begin to think "this is it!"—and it is a matter of fact that if you fast for a long time and do certain exercises, you begin to have all kinds of things happen to you. But that is not spiritual life. It is almost guaranteed, on the contrary, that it is the activity of demons. The spiritual life is much more serious, much more down-to-earth, and therefore that is not the place where you are supposed to find it first of all.

Usually one can spot people who are not serious and are imitating. We even have a story from the early history of our brotherhood.... In San Francisco there was one who got on fire with the idea of the Jesus Prayer. He began adding prayer to prayer, and he finally came to,

in the morning, 5,000. Right in the middle of the world, in the middle of the city, in the morning, before doing anything else, before eating, he was able to say 5,000 Jesus Prayers on the balcony, and he felt wonderfully refreshed and inspired. It happened one morning that somebody else came out right underneath the balcony and began busying himself and doing something while this person was saying his last thousand, and it so happened that this person was so put out by this that he ended up by throwing dishes at him! How can you deal with a person occupying himself with the spiritual life, with the Jesus Prayer, when all of a sudden, while he is saying it, he is able to start throwing dishes?

This means that inside of him the passions were free, because he had some kind of deceived idea or opinion that he knew was right for himself spiritually. He acted according to his opinion, but not soberly, not according to knowledge; and when the opportunity came, the passions came out. In this case it is more profitable *not* to say those 5,000 Jesus Prayers, but to do something else that is spiritual.

This, then, is not where we should be fighting the battle. We should begin fighting the battle right on the level of awareness, by being aware that we are surrounded by worldly forces. We must fight them by keeping our minds constantly up rather than down; that is, having in mind heavenly things. (I will explain shortly what is involved in this). For all practical purposes, in our times this means that we will have to be a little crazy; that is, we will not be in step with what ordinary church people are doing. We will be considered a little, at least a little, out of the ordinary, or even crazy. This is an absolutely essential thing. I'll come back to this theme.

6. LOOKING UPWARD

The Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Holy Fathers, the examples of Saint's lives, the services of the Church—all these things have to do, not with worldliness in our daily life, but with conducting us to heaven. By looking above to these things, we are enabled to have zeal; that is, to see that there is something above this routine of worldliness, which is very boring, discouraging, and leads nowhere. But these higher things—these services, tales of people who have come back from the dead, Lives of Saints, writings of the Holy Fathers, Holy Scriptures, the interpretations of the Holy Fathers on passages of Scripture, which are very profound sometimes—these things always make us very zealous, if we have a spark of love for God within ourselves. We want ourselves to be living in such a state and to be going to heaven. But this zeal, by itself, must be of such a kind that it does not come just in a spurt and then eventually fade away. It must be of such a kind that it will last. This means the zeal must be tempered by something deeper, and that something deeper is what St. Seraphim calls *determination*; that is, zeal that is constant and keeps going—a sort of constant point for your whole life. It keeps you going even when you're discouraged, because you see that there is something above towards which you are striving, and which does not depend upon your moods or your opinions. It is something which must be your constant possession. It is your determination to get to heaven. And this determination, or rather this zeal which becomes determination, must be constant, so that it will not go up and down and burn out.

In everything that happens, we must look at the higher side, that is, the spiritual side; because if we are sometimes looking at the higher side and sometimes at the lower side, we will be up and down. And the lower side is so powerful, operating even through what we

saw in the life of St. Patrick in the golden age of Christianity: even through bishops, through those who are supposed to be the very ones leading the flock to heaven. They can be contrary, because they are human beings also. They can be actually discouraging, keeping people away from that goal in our times, of course, it is even worse.

Therefore, if we are sometimes looking above and sometimes below, if we are going one foot forward, one foot back, and then one foot forward and two feet back, we will simply not get to the gate of heaven. We must be at all times where we are in some way looking at the spiritual reality. I have an interesting quote from Abba Dorotheos of Gaza which we read just recently in church, and which gives a little hint about this. He says: "It is good, O brethren, as I always tell you, to place your hope for every deed upon God, and to say nothing happens without the will of God. Of course, God knew that this was good and useful and profitable, and therefore He did it, even though this matter also had some outward cause. For example, I could say that inasmuch as I ate food with pilgrims and forced myself a little in order to play the host to them, (that is, he overate) therefore my stomach was weighed down, and there was a numbness caused in my feet, and from this I became ill. I could also cite various other reasons for one who seeks them. For one who seeks them there is no lack of them. But the most sure and profitable thing is to say: in truth, God knew that this would be more profitable for my soul, and therefore it happened in this way. For out of everything which God creates, there is nothing of which it can be said that it is not good. For in the beginning He created all, and behold, they were all very good. And so no one should grieve over what happens, but in everything he should place his hope in God's Providence, and be at ease."*

7. FINDING THE REAL CAUSES

There is a very interesting book from the same period of Abba Dorotheos (the sixth century) by St. Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, which is all about the life at the court of that time and religious people. There are very many interesting lives of Saints in it, as well as the lives of the kings. The kings of that time were particularly unedifying spectacles. They were constantly poisoning each other. The women were even worse.... There was one Brunehild and her sister Fredegund. They were trying to get their sons and grandsons on the throne, and what they didn't do to get them there! They were dragging people by horse's tails and killing them off, and lying and cheating and fantastic things—very uninspiring. But this bishop, St. Gregory, was there and was writing a history of this people, writing in such a way that it actually comes out very inspiring. Behind everything there is a meaning. St. Gregory is constantly on the lookout for comets, earthquakes, and such things. When a king does something wrong, there is an earthquake nearby, or if he goes and kills a person or a whole village unjustly, then there is a famine: and St. Gregory always sees that God is looking out. There is always something spiritual whenever something happens—a comet is seen, the king dies, etc. There is always a connection between what happens in the world and the moral state of the people. Even when the moral state is very bad, all the constant earthquakes and famines and everything else remind us that it is the wrong way to behave, and inspire people to behave correctly. Nowadays, the historians say that this is a horribly outmoded way of looking at things, that it is very "quaint" and "naive" and unsophisticated, and that of course nobody can think like that now. They think it's very cute, in fact, to look at this after all these centuries and to see how people used to think. "But of course," they say, "we serious historians are looking for the real causes." By real causes they mean what a person ate and

what it caused his feet to do and so forth. The Christian point of view, however, is that these are not the real causes, but the secondary causes. The real cause is the soul and God: whatever God is doing and whatever the soul is doing. These two things actualize the whole of history, and all the external events—what treaty was signed, or the economic reasons for the discontent of the masses, and so forth—are totally secondary. In fact, if you look at modern history, at the whole revolutionary movement, it is obvious that it is not the economics that is the governing factor, but various ideas which get into people's souls about actually building paradise on earth. Once that idea gets there, then fantastic things are done, because this is a spiritual thing. Even though it is from the devil, it is on a spiritual level, and that is where actual history is made; all the external things mean nothing.

Thus St. Gregory is actually looking at history in the correct way, because he sees that there is a first cause, which is what God does in history and how the soul reacts to it, and that the secondary cause is ordinary events. Therefore, whenever he sees some great event like a comet or an eclipse, he tries to give it meaning. At one point, in telling of a strange sign that was seen in the sky over Gaul, he says in all simplicity, "I have no idea what all this meant."** Of course, from the scientific point of view we know that we can predict these things, that they are caused by the shadow of the moon and so forth; but from St. Gregory's point of view, why does God choose to frighten us like this? What is the moral meaning of it? He was constantly looking *above*, not below.

8. CONSTANT CHEERFULNESS

Our whole modern outlook is to look below to find the causes, the secondary causes. The whole Christian outlook is to look above, and that is why such people as St. Gregory as we can see by reading their writings and their lives—are constantly cheerful. This does not mean that they are overly happy, but rather that they are in a state of deep happiness, because they are constantly looking above and keeping in mind, with determination and constancy, to get to a certain place, which is heaven, and thus they see all the details in the world in that light. If what they see has to do with evil, with the nets of demons, with worldliness, with boredom, with discouragement, or just with ordinary details of living, all that is secondary and is never allowed to be first. In fact, we are told by the Holy Fathers that we are supposed to see in everything something for our salvation. If you can do that, you can be saved.

In a pedestrian way, you can look at something like a printing press which does not operate. You are standing around and enjoying yourself, watching nice, clean, good pages come out printed, which gives a very nice sense of satisfaction, and you are dreaming of missionary activity, of spreading more copies around to a lot of different countries. But in a while it begins to torture you, it begins to shoot pages right and left. The pages begin to stick and to tear each other on top. You see that all those extra copies you made are vanishing, destroying each other, and in the end you are so tense that all you can do is sort of stand there and say the Jesus Prayer as you try to make everything come out all right. Although that does not fill one with a sense of satisfaction (as would watching the nice, clean copies come out automatically), spiritually it probably does a great deal more, because it makes you tense and gives you the chance to struggle. But if instead of that you just get so discouraged that you smash the machine, then you have lost the battle. The battle is not how many copies per hour come out: the battle is what your soul is doing. If your soul can be saving itself and

producing words which can save others, all the better; but if you are producing words which can save others and are all the time destroying your own soul, it's not so good.

9. DAILY SPIRITUAL INJECTIONS

Again, in everything one must be looking upward, and not downward, at the kingdom of heaven and not down at the details of earthly life. That is, the details of earthly life must be second, and this looking upward must be with zeal, determination and constancy. Constancy is something which is worked out by a spiritual regime based upon wisdom handed down from the Holy Fathers—not mere obedience to tradition for tradition's sake, but rather a conscious assimilation of what wise men in God have seen and written down. On the outward side, this constancy is worked out by a little prayer, and we have this basic little prayer in the church services which have come down to us. Of course in different places they are performed according to one's strength, more or less.

Constancy involves also a regular reading of spiritual texts, for example at mealtime, because we must be constantly injected with other-worldliness. This means constantly nourishing ourselves with these texts, whether in services or in reading, in order to fight against the other side, against the worldliness that constantly gnaws at us. If for just one day we stop these other-worldly "injections," it is obvious that worldliness starts taking over. When we go without them for one day, worldliness invades—two days, much more. We find that soon we think more and more in a worldly way, the more we allow ourselves to be exposed to that way of thinking and the less we expose ourselves to other-worldly thinking.

These injections—daily injections of heavenly food—are the outward side, and the inward side is what is called spiritual life. Spiritual life does not mean being in the clouds and saying the Jesus Prayer or going through various motions. It means discovering the laws of this spiritual life as they apply to one in one's own position, one's situation. This comes over the years by attentive reading of the Holy Fathers with a notebook, writing down those passages which seem most significant to us, studying them, finding how they apply to us, and, if need be, revising earlier views of them as we get a little deeper into them, finding what one Father says about something, what a second Father says about the same thing, and so on. There is no encyclopedia that will give you that. You cannot decide you want to find all about some one subject and begin reading the Holy Fathers. There are a few indexes in the writings of the Fathers, but you cannot simply go at spiritual life that way. You have to go at it a little bit at a time, taking the teaching in as you are able to absorb it, going back over the same texts in later years, reabsorbing them, getting more, and gradually getting to find out how these spiritual laws apply to you. As a person does that, he discovers that every time he reads the same Holy Father he finds new things. He always goes deeper into it.

10. PRESERVING ZEAL

If one has all this in mind, having the possibility of constant spiritual nourishment, then one must say that it is not true that the whole church situation is hopeless today and that one can do nothing. In fact, the possible activities for today are quite surprising and unexpected. What might come out, we don't know, but there are all kinds of possibilities. We should always learn to expect what is the unexpected, to be prepared for something that might not have been the same way just a little while ago, but that is still within the possibility of true Christianity. This is only done by looking up and not down. We have right in front of us an

example of somebody who was like that constantly, and that's our Archbishop John. It is obvious that he was constantly in a different world. He himself, I recall once, gave a sermon on the spiritual life, the mystical life, in which he said: "We have no such thing as some of the later saints of the Latin Church who were sort of up in the clouds—some kind of a realm of sweetness and light and pink clouds—that's *prelest*. All of our sanctity is based upon having your feet straight on the ground, and, while being of the earth, constantly having the mind lifted upward." It's obvious that Archbishop John was himself like that. He would come from time to time to our shop next to the Cathedral [in San Francisco], and would always have something new and inspiring to say. He would come with a little portfolio, and would open it up and say, "Look! Here is a picture of St. Alban and here is his Life." He had found it somewhere. He was collecting these things: the lives of Rumanian saints and all kinds of different things which were very inspiring and had nothing to do with everyday business or the administration of the diocese. In fact, some said he was a bad administrator, but I don't know. I doubt it, because I know that whenever anyone wrote him a letter, that person always got a reply back in the language he wrote it in, within a very short time; therefore, when it came to things like that, he was very, very careful. But the first thing he was careful about was being constantly in the other world, constantly inspired and constantly living by that. The opposite of this is to make even the Church into some kind of business, to be looking at only the administrative side or the economic side or the lower, worldly side. If you do that long enough, you will lose the spark, you will lose the higher side. Archbishop John gave us the example of constantly looking up, constantly thinking of the higher things. In the end, the deeper you get into this, the more you see that there is nothing else possible. If you are an Orthodox Christian, you can do this and have people call you crazy or say that you are a little bit touched, or something like that; but still you have your own life—you lead it and you get to heaven. The alternative is to be bogged down in this boring world, which is totally overrun by machines and conveniences and opinions. You would be surprised at how these, opinions about what is right and what is wrong, what is the way to act and so forth, have no contact with reality. It even happens that there is a certain opinion in the air—I'd say it is universal among church people if they ever stopped to think about it—that of course, when you come to church you must be warm, because you cannot think about church services and prepare yourself for Communion when you have to think about cold feet. People tell us this. "It's a very great draw back," they say. "You cannot go and have cold feet and expect to have any spirituality come out." This happens to be an opinion, and it's totally off. The Holy Fathers have been living throughout the centuries in all kinds of conditions; and, though there is no deliberate plot of torturing oneself with cold feet—still, this is something which helps to make one a little more sober about the spiritual life, perhaps to help one to appreciate what one has, and not to just take for granted that one is going to be comfortable and cozy and that's it. In our time, if one undertakes anything in the Church, and does not have in mind to be looking constantly to the heavenly realm, one will lose the spark of zeal, the interest in doing spiritual things, and will become worldly. Worldly means dead, spiritually dead.

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. 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.

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.

Endnotes

* *The Counsels of Abba Dorotheos*, chapter 12 (translated from the Russian version by Fr. Seraphim Rose).

** *The History of the Franks*, V, 23.