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## Teaching on the prayer of the heart (Elder Ephraim of Arizona)

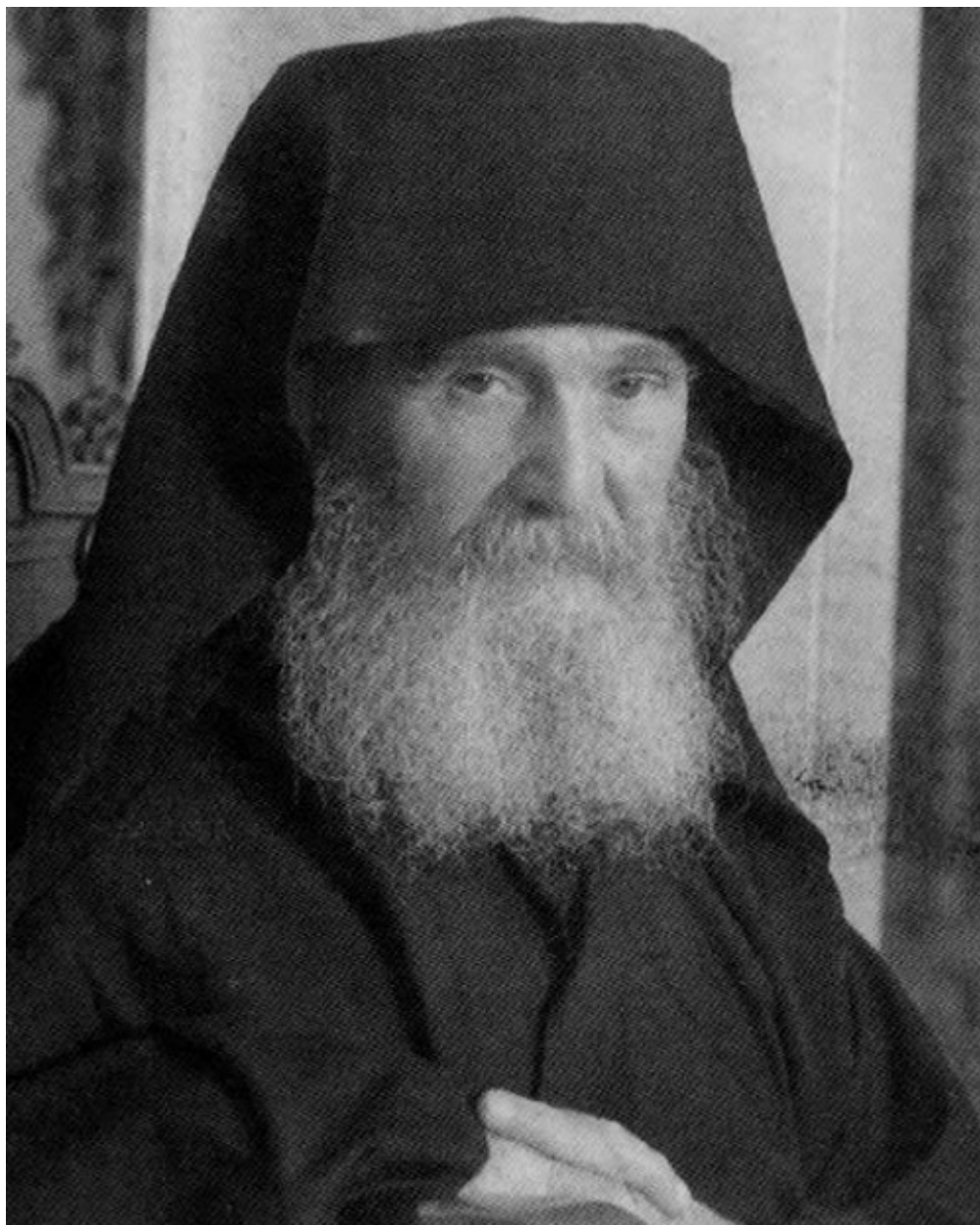
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I haven't spoken to you about this before. That's my omission and, let's say, my responsibility.

Our heart's the centre of supernatural, natural and unnatural movements. Everything starts from the heart. If the heart's been cleansed, then God is beheld, we see Him. How shall we see Him? Is God perhaps anthropomorphous, i.e. does

He have human form so that we can see Him? No. God isn't visible. God is Spirit, and as total Spirit is present everywhere. And He's also to be found in the human heart, provided that's become an acceptable vessel. To become such, it has to be cleaned. Not that we should wash it with water, but that it should be cleansed of impure thoughts. In order to be thus cleansed, however, it needs to swallow some medicine. And that medicine's prayer.



Wherever the King goes, his enemies flee, and wherever Christ goes- His Holy Name- the ranks of demons flee. And when Christ is firmly enthroned, then everything is under obedience. Just as when a king has taken control of a state and goes to be enthroned in the capital and has subdued all the rebels beforehand and filled the state with soldiers and weapons, putting down all internal unrest. He's then in a position to reign over his subjects in peace and joy. The king sits on his

throne, sees everything is under control and then rejoices and is glad.

This is how it is with the state of our heart, as well. Within it, there are enemies, rebels, bad thoughts, passions, weaknesses, one thing and another, a proper muddle, storms, tempests, disturbances and rivalries. Everything happens in the heart. And for this state of the heart to be brought to order and subjection, Christ the King has to come with His army, to take over the state, to expel the devil, to calm every unease caused by our passions and weaknesses, to rule as emperor and the Almighty. Then, according to the Fathers, this condition is known as tranquillity of the heart. This is what tranquillity of the heart means: for prayer to reign without interruption and for prayer to have created purity and a calm heart.

There are many ways to pray. Of course, there's praying out loud, saying the words of the prayer with our mouths. This is the way we should use in the beginning, when we start 'working the prayer', so that in the end we'll achieve our aim.

Because the mind is in continuous motion and since, not by nature, but by abuse and indifference and, to a large extent, through ignorance, it wanders all over the place, it goes all around the world and finds repose in a variety of sensual pleasures. Sometimes it goes to the pleasures of the flesh, sometimes to some other passion. Because it can levitate, as it were, it can float off to wherever it wants to and gape at things, so to say. But wherever it goes, whatever it thinks, it's always thinking about some pleasure or enjoyment.

This is why, if your aim's to acquire unceasing prayer and to clean out your dusty mind- that vagabond that slinks about all the alleyways- so that it does as it's told and becomes the master of the house, you have to offer it something, to sweeten it, because otherwise, as we've said, it'll be off seeking pleasure and enjoyment all over the place. We have to attract it back with something pleasurable. The beginner, who's being taught the prayer, has to start with the mouth and say 'Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me' and to make an effort to drag the mind away from worldly things. The voice which emerges, the sound of the voice, will attract the mind towards prayer. The sound created by moving the tongue gradually gathers together the mind, which has been scattered. The good intentions, the effort, the care and the aim we wish to achieve- unceasing prayer- all help us to begin to focus our mind.

But as we continue to say the prayer over time, it begins to create a certain satisfaction, a joy, a peace, something spiritual. Well, that's God. This enjoyment attracts the mind. As we progress, this oral prayer pulls the mind inwards. There's

a freedom given to the mind to say the prayer, too, without the mouth being opened. In other words, some fruit begins to be borne. Then we start to say the prayer sometimes with the mouth and sometimes with the mind. And gradually the mind begins to dominate. With the mind being constantly occupied with it, the prayer begins to enter the heart. That's when we see the heart saying the prayer.

***(to be continued)***