

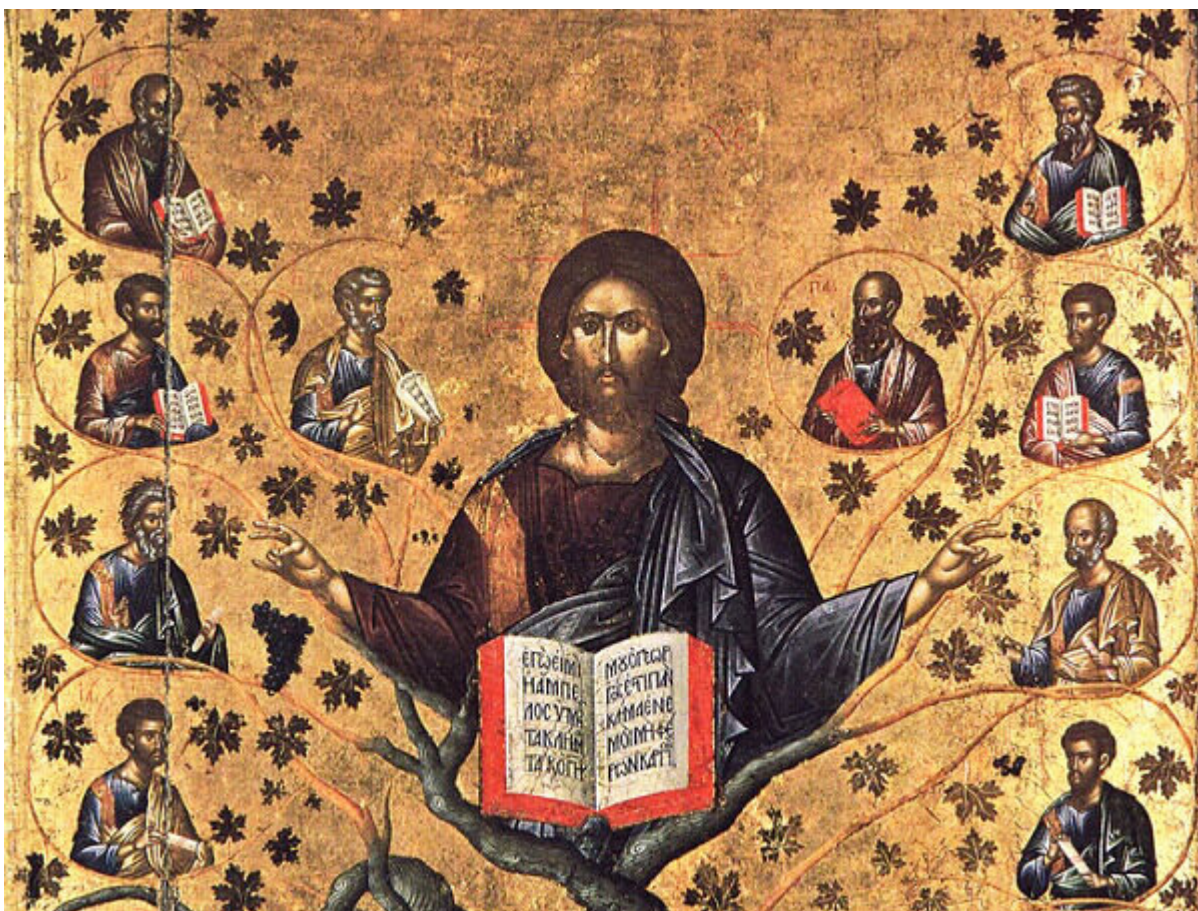
The Creative Word of God (Archimandrite Peter, Abbot of Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex UK)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The word of God has four meanings: 1. In the bosom of the Trinity, the Only-begotten Son of the Father is called the Word of God because He was the One Who delivered to us the revelation of God the Father. 2. Also in the bosom of the Trinity, the word of God is the energy, the power of God by which all things in heaven and on earth came into being: 'God said, Let there be light: and there was light' (Gen. 1:3). 3. On the historical level, the word of God is Holy Scripture. 4. The fourth meaning has to do with the human word: when it is integrated into the perspective of the divine word, the human word can become an instrument of regeneration. Our Holy Fathers would receive the word of God in their heart, and through this word they would regenerate those around them. It is about this fourth meaning that I would like to speak today.

Even after the fall, the image of God is preserved in man and so it is natural for him to seek for the absolute in his life. The tragedy of the contemporary man is that, just with one click, he has access to an ocean of information, but in that ocean he cannot find the one thing he has been created for: to receive the revelation, the life of God by grace in his heart. Therefore, man is now starving: 'The days come... that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread,... but of hearing the words of the Lord' (cf. Amos 8:11). When the Lord was tempted in the desert, His infallible mouth uttered these words: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' (Matt. 4:4). Therefore, the word of God is the source of life, without which man's soul is completely dried up. Even through music, entertainment, cinema or theatre, man is seeking in fact for the word of God. These substitutes give him only temporary pleasure, but can never fill the void in his soul. It is so unfortunate that he remains with these earthly pleasures, not knowing that only the word of God accompanied by prayer can elevate his life to the uncreated.



In the Gospel of Saint John, Christ says that He is the vine and we are the branches. A branch can bear fruit only if it is united with the vine, but what is the fruit it will

bring? The Lord explains this, saying: 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you' (John 15:7). If the word of Christ abides in man, it will surely lead him to prayer: it comes as a light and in the light of this word, man sees the holiness of God, His ineffable love and therefore is naturally attracted to Him. Man also sees that he is fallen, distorted and not fit for this love of God, and this urges him to turn to God with a strong cry. The words of Christ were uttered in the power of the eternal Spirit of God, and if we allow this word to dwell in us, then our own prayer will be uttered, keeping the proportions, in the same power of the Spirit of God, for we will speak to Him in the same language He spoke to us. If Christ's word dwells in us, we shall turn to Him with prayer and whatever we shall ask, it shall be done unto us. This is how we will bear much fruit (John 15:8). This means that without the word of God we remain fruitless. He who does not read the word of God, will be poor in prayer.

The word of God also has the power to transmit new life and give a new birth to the one who listens. Saint Paul says that through his Gospel, he has begotten the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:15), for his fatherhood was established in his relationship with Christ. He was feeding the Corinthians with what he was being fed by Christ, with his Gospel. We must not despise the word of God because Christ chose to bring to us God's revelation in this humble manner. When some people are asked if they believe in God, the first immediate response they give is, 'Where is He? If I see Him, I will believe in Him.' Yet, He has appeared on earth and has conversed with men, and His words have been passed on to us. It is through the word of God that we come to know and receive Him in our very heart, and we must not be scandalised by the humble manner in which He decided to come to us. All the mysteries of the coming of Christ on earth have been actualised in a secret manner, in silence: His birth, the Annunciation of the Mother of God and even His own Resurrection happened in a mystical, humble way so that we follow Him, if we want to. As Christ said to the young rich man, 'If thou wilt be perfect, follow me' (see Matt. 19:21). In all the mystery of His coming on earth we keep hearing His humble calling 'If thou wilt...' This is how He calls us to salvation without violating our freedom. Christ always attracts through His humble love and we are never forced.

According to Father Sophrony, the commandments of God are a projection of the eternal life of God into the world, but at the same time they become gateways to divine life. This is why, through the keeping of the commandments, man acquires likeness to God. The revelation of God is first imparted to the heart, which is the spiritual core of every man. From the Parable of the Sower we see that, the fruit that the word of God will bring depends on the state of the earth of our heart. The

Jesus Prayer and the humble tears of repentance are a plough, wherewith we can cultivate our heart so that it can receive the word of God and bring fruit. The eye of the soul to understand the Scripture is not the intellect. With his intellect, man can only make some scholastic observations, which may be useful on a practical, historical level. Yet, if we are to understand the mind of the Scriptures, we must approach with humble faith that helps the word enter into the heart. If man is to receive the word of God, his heart must be free to follow the path of the commandments of the Lord. When the heart is enslaved to the passions, it is unable to hear and accommodate the word of God, and it can even reject it. Father Sophrony's teaching about this union of mind and heart as a precondition to understand the Scriptures transmits in an authentic way to our epoch the hesychastic and Philokalic tradition of the Church.

If the event of the Fall had not intervened, the Holy Spirit would have continually imparted a new fulness of knowledge to our hearts. Saint John Chrysostom writes that if we had purity of life, we would not need books. He who is a true teacher does not read books, for his own heart is an open book wherein God writes His words, as Saint John of Sinai says. A true teacher looks in his heart and he speaks. Christ did not leave writings to His disciples, but His word was imprinted in their hearts. The Lord Himself is well-pleased to bestow His messianic dignity upon all flesh (Joel 2:28), so that all may become taught of God and bear in their heart the witness of the Comforter. We see how the word of God is born in the heart of the saints. However, man cannot reach this state without reading the Scriptures diligently: if written record of divine revelation has become indispensable after the Fall, then surely negligence to study and assimilate the Scriptures alienates man from any knowledge of God.

If we are to understand the creative power of the word of God, we all need to be careful what we do with our eyes, with our ears and with our time. If we dedicate the time of our life to expose both our eyes and our ears to other forms of knowledge and information, we waste it. This seems to be a small detail, but it is a great trap. We often hear people say, 'I have no time to read the Gospel.' We must be mindful what we do with our eyes and ears. Our times are very difficult, evil is ploughing the earth, but on the other hand, our times also give us many facilities. For example, now we have very easy access to the word of God and to the word of all our Fathers. In a little ipad one can have more than 100 books. We simply need to offer our eyes, our ears and our time to read and listen to the divine word. God deserves this honour. It is such a privilege, such a gift to call upon the Name of God, and just as we should honour His Name, we must also honour His word, which is the path He chose to come and reveal Himself to us. Even a little child can read

the Gospel, but to assimilate and follow the word of Christ, we need to hate our own self. Then we will discover the eternal divine power concealed in it. If we honour the word in this way, the word will become a light to our life and elevate us from things earthly to things heavenly, from things visible to things invisible and incorruptible, from man to God.

Question: It is difficult to live without Holy Communion nowadays.

Answer: We must not forget that we have many ways to have communion with God. Prayer with the Name of Christ and the word of God are very powerful ways to have communion with God. God cannot be mocked, neither is He blind. He sees the conditions of our life, He sees that we are not allowed to go to church. If we use the other means, He will surely give us all the grace of the Liturgy through them. This can be even an inspiring period, if we use it to prepare, because it will teach us a great lesson: that the benefit of the Holy Liturgy depends on our preparation. In Great Lent we cannot perform the Divine Liturgy from Monday to Friday every week. The Church ordained this as a period of preparation which gives us the opportunity to taste a bit of death, in the image of Christ Who died for us. Likewise we can use this present period to prepare ourselves through the possibility we are now given to pray more in our room in silence. I am confident that if we do that, the first Liturgy in which we will partake, will be an explosion of joy.

Question: How would you advise the faithful to read the word of God?

Answer: We said that the Jesus Prayer prepares us to receive the word of God. The ancient tradition of the Egyptian monks in the fourth century was to perform their Liturgy when they wake up in the morning. They called 'Liturgy' the prayer of the monk in his cell. They would perform their Liturgy, their prayer and then they would sit down to read the Scripture, because after prayer the heart is soft, illumined and open. In the beginning it needs an effort. Some people make it their rule to read every day some chapters, for then the heart is conquered by the attraction to the Divine word and it becomes a constant occupation. Then, even if you want, you cannot leave it. However, we must begin by making it a purpose to offer some time to read the word of God, and not think, 'I will do it later, later, tomorrow – never.'

Question: Are the Jesus Prayer and the word of God a preparation for each other?

Answer: Our Fathers suggest a preparation even for the Jesus Prayer. Saint Theophan the Recluse writes that, before the Jesus Prayer, it is good to sit on a stool and bring to your mind a spiritual thought that brings contrition. If you are able, allow yourself time first to weep, because the tears will warm and purify the heart. Just as in baptism there is first the washing with the water and then the

anointing with myrrh, so also if man washes his heart with tears, then the Name of Christ falls like myrrh upon his heart. The Fathers recommend the tears as a preparation for the Jesus Prayer, and the Jesus Prayer as a preparation for reading the Gospel. Once Elder Charalambos answered a great theologian, who had asked him with some contempt if he ever read the Gospel: 'I will tell you how I read the Gospel: I pray with the Jesus Prayer for four hours. Then I sit down, I read one paragraph from the Gospel and before I have ended the paragraph, I am on my knees on the floor sobbing with tears.' It is as if the Name of Christ 'hatches' the heart just as the Spirit of God was hovering above the face of the earth in the beginning of creation (Gen. 1:2). The Jesus Prayer thus opened the heart to the word of Christ, Whose Name Elder Charalambos had been invoking for four hours and, of course, His word came like a thunder that shook his heart, so that he could reject all the 'rust' of this world. Indeed, he who invokes the Name of Christ with diligence discovers the true power of the word of God and the exchange of his life with the life of God in the Liturgy.