

Spiritual Paternity: The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Birth

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Our Lord, the Word of God, gave us an intimation of the life of the Heavenly Kingdom when He spoke to His disciples, saying, "It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and Life" (John 7:63), and in His discourse with Nicodemus He also spoke of the same; "And Jesus answered him, 'Amen, amen, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit'" (John 3:5). Christ prefaces His teaching on spiritual birth with an "Amen, Amen" – highlighting its importance. He states that it is an absolute necessity and prerequisite for life in the Kingdom and therefore a requirement for participation in the Divine Life of the Holy Trinity.¹

In the Church, being born of water is clearly seen in the Sacrament of Baptism, the Christian's mystical entrance into Christ's own death and Resurrection, and in like manner, being born of the Spirit is expressed mystically through Chrismation – the giving of the

¹ A. Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical study of Baptism*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995) p.106.

Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. In this sacrament, the Holy Spirit is given “fully, abundantly, overwhelmingly”², since God’s gifts are always given in fullness. “It is not by measure that He gives the Spirit” (John 3:34), and “of His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16). This seal of the Gift or *charisma* of the Holy Spirit is bestowed on all God’s people, not just the bishops and the clergy.³

The Apostles at Pentecost became bearers of this Holy Spirit and were shown to be “partakers, fathers and ministers of everlasting light and life, who bring us to new birth for eternal life.”⁴ The Apostles in turn bestow the Spirit and His Gift to the faithful. St Symeon the New Theologian writes:

We are baptized from on high and born anew and made into children of God. As Paul says ... “God has given His Spirit in our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Galatians 4:6)... Similarly the Spirit says, “I will live in them and move among them” (2 Corinthians 6:16).⁵

The grace and power to appropriate and live the Divine Life of the Holy Spirit in our own lives has been given.⁶ St Mark the Monk writes: “Everyone who has been baptized in an orthodox manner has received secretly the fullness of Grace; and if he then goes on to perform the commandments, he will become consciously aware of this grace within him.”⁷ The Gift has been given in fullness, but it must be made manifest and revealed increasingly in our lives as we grow “to

² Op. Cit. p.107.

³ Bishop Kallistos (Ware), *The Orthodox Way*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995) p.94.

⁴ St Gregory Palamas, “On How the Holy Spirit was Manifested and Shared Out at Pentecost”, *Your Diocese Alive in Christ: The Magazine of the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania*, Vol. XIX, No.1. Spring 2004. p.59.

⁵ St Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses*, Classics of Western Spirituality, tr. C. J. deCantezaro, (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p.343

⁶ *Of Water and the Spirit*, p.107.

⁷ St Mark the Monk, quoted in Bishop Kallistos (Ware), *The Orthodox Way*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995) p.103.

the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Those given the Divine Gift of being born of the Spirit are now called to "bear fruit that befits repentance" (Matthew 3:8), making manifest the reception of this New Birth. But in echoing Nicodemus, one asks, "How is this done?" What now entails the active participation in this birth? How is this gift of sonship actualized?

On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, the Apostle Peter, emboldened by the indwelling of the Spirit, spoke the Word of God to the crowd that had gathered. His listeners were:

cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'... And he testified with many other words and exhorted them... So those who received his word were baptized ... And they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:37-38, 40-42).

In this short passage we see the living witness of the life of the Church exemplified and are given the key unlocking the mystery of Christian living – the newly baptized Jerusalem faithful, after being born anew of water and the Spirit, make manifest this new life in the Spirit by "devoting themselves to the Apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). In this, we are shown the "narrow path" of becoming children of God.

The biographer of St Symeon the New Theologian, Nikitas Stithatos writes:

Such a rebirth comes through obedience to a spiritual father; for if we do not first become conceived by the seed of the Word through the teaching of such a father and through him become children of God, we cannot be spiritually reborn. For in this way the twelve [Apostles] were born of one, that is, Christ and the seventy were born of the twelve and were made children of God the Father,

according to our Lord's words, 'You are the children of my Heavenly Father' (Matthew 5:45). Thus St. Paul, too, says to us, 'For though you have ten thousand instructors, you have not many fathers; I have begotten you; be imitators of me (1 Corinthians 4:15-16).⁸

The key is obedience to a spiritual father. The Holy Spirit, guiding the Church "into all truth" (John 16:13) has made manifest the divine *charisma* of the spiritual father (or mother, as the case may be) for the living of the life in Christ – the way of perfection, as St John Cassian calls it:

And even St Paul, despite the fact that Christ had Himself called him and spoke with him, and could have immediately opened his eyes and shown him the way of perfection – despite this, God sent him to Ananias [the Bishop of Damascus] and left him to learn from Ananias the way of truth, saying to him: "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told you what you must do" (Acts 9:6). With this the Lord teaches us that we should follow the instructions of those who have progressed in the spiritual life. Having been taught this, the Apostle himself realized it in his deeds, thus describing himself, saying, 'I went up again to Jerusalem...[to see Peter and James]... and communicated unto them the Gospel which I preach..., lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain' (Galatians 2:1-2). O, the chosen vessel! He who ascended to the third Heaven and heard from God Himself words which one cannot express in normal language, he who was always accompanied by the grace of the Spirit ... admits that he had need of the counsel of those Apostles who had preceded him in the Apostolic office... The Lord reveals to no one the way of perfection, except only if he be guided to it by the counsel and assistance of a spiritual father; for this reason, God commands us through His Prophet [Moses] saying: 'Ask your father and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you (Deuteronomy 32:7).⁹

⁸ Nikitas Stithatos, *On the Inner Nature of Things in Philokalia*, vol. IV, ed. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), p.122.

⁹ St John Cassian in *The Evergetinos, A Complete Text*, vol. II of 1st Book, tr. Bishop Chrysostomos, (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1991), Hypothesis XX, pp. 137-138.

The Apostle Peter, through the power of the Holy Spirit, became a spiritual father to the Jerusalem converts on the Day of Pentecost, begetting children to God. In his 1st Catholic Epistle, writing from Rome, the Apostle Peter refers to St Mark the Evangelist – whom tradition holds to be the son of Aristobulos (Romans 16:10) – as “my son Mark” (1 Peter 5:13) indicating that the Apostle Mark was St Peter’s spiritual son and disciple. The Apostle Peter likewise became the father of the Church of Rome. His spiritual fatherhood to the Roman Christians is attested to by the mere fact alone that they gave him the affectionate title of ‘Papa’ – which is translated as ‘pope.’ (In like manner, the bishops of the major cities of the East were given the title of ‘Patriarch’ or ‘first father’).

The celibate Apostle Paul expresses his spiritual paternity in referring to Apostle Timothy as his “true son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2), and to Apostle Titus as “my true son in our common faith” (Titus 1:4), and in his Epistle to Philemon, he speaks of “my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.” The Apostle Paul also acknowledges his spiritual fatherhood – not only of individual disciples – but of entire churches. In writing to the Galatians concerning their precarious state in the Faith, he expresses the distress he is experiencing as their spiritual father: “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). The Apostle John also addresses the Christians of his archdiocese in Asia in terms of spiritual paternity, “My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin” and “No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth” (1 John 2:1, 3 John 4).¹⁰

Our God is a God of humility. “And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient [to the Father] unto death, even death upon a Cross” (Philemon 2:8). In like manner, the Holy

¹⁰ H.H. Pope Shenouda III, *The Priesthood*, tr. G. Younan (Cairo: Dar El Tebaa El Kawmia, 1991) p.124-127.

Spirit is a Spirit of Humility who “does not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears [from the Father], He will speak” (John 16:13). Acting out of His “meek and lowly” Loving Nature, God communicates His ‘Words of Life’ to His people through the spiritual father, since He respects our free will and never forces Himself or His will on anyone. Fr. Sophrony of Essex, the disciple of St Silouan the Athonite, writes:

The Spirit of God suffers neither violence nor argument... Only the man who accepts these words of his spiritual father with faith as being pleasing to God, who does not submit them to his own judgment, or argue about them, has found the true path, for he genuinely believes that ‘with God all things are possible’ (Matthew 19:26).¹¹

Therefore, as followers of Christ and “partakers of the Divine Nature” (2 Peter 1:4), we are to emulate Christ’s example of “obedience unto death.” However, this is obedience not as the world knows, but rather obedience that is Christ-like. “I do not seek my own will, but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30). The “free and voluntary”¹² obedience of the Son of God is motivated by love for His Father. It is an obedience that is devoid of any coercion or fear. The Apostle Peter exhorts the faithful in general, saying, “You that are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). The Apostle Paul also enjoins the faithful to “obey those who lead you and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account” (Hebrew 13:17). So we see that obedience is not just the personal domain of monastics or a feat of excessive ascetic practice. St Basil the Great admonishes his listeners to submit themselves to a spiritual father who would serve as a guide in the work of following Christ’s commandments and

¹¹ Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *St Silouan the Athonite*, tr. R. Edmonds, (Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 1991), p.81.

¹² Archimandrite Zacharias (Zacharou), *Christ, Our Way and Our Life: A Presentation of the Theology of Archimandrite Sophrony*, tr. Sister Magdalen (South Canaan, PA: St Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2003), p.135.

leading a holy life, warning that “to believe that one does not need counsel is great pride.”¹³ St Silouan the Athonite writes:

The spirit of obedience is necessary **not only in monks but in everyone else, too.**¹⁴ Even the Lord was obedient. The proud and those who are a law unto themselves prevent the indwelling of grace and therefore never know peace of soul; whereas the grace of the Holy Spirit enters with ease into the soul of the obedient, bringing joy and quiet.¹⁵

He adds:

Brethren, let us dwell in obedience to our pastors, and then there will be peace in the world, and the Lord through the Holy Spirit will dwell in us all.¹⁶

Nikitas Stithatos again clearly states: “If you are not obedient to a spiritual father in imitation of the Son who was obedient to the Father even unto death and the Cross, you cannot be spiritually born anew.”¹⁷

As the tradition of the Church demonstrates, the role of the spiritual father in a Christian’s life was instituted by the Holy Spirit working through the Apostles. St Symeon the New Theologian, in demonstrating the divine institution of the *charisma* of spiritual paternity – and therefore its divine authority – presents the teaching of St Peter on the subject:

[The Chief Apostle] commands us saying, “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied

¹³ St Basil the Great quoted in Joseph J. Allen, *Inner Way: Eastern Christian Spiritual Direction*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p.35.

¹⁴ Emphasis by Monk Samuel (ed).

¹⁵ *St Silouan the Athonite*, pp.420-421.

¹⁶ Op. Cit. p.401.

¹⁷ *On the Inner Nature of Things in Philokalia*, vol. IV, ed. cit., p.122.

grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters the oracles of God; who ever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies" (1 Peter 4:10f). Therefore, brethren, it is the Spirit who speaks, not I, as the Lord and His faithful disciple assure us.¹⁸

Throughout the history of the Church, the office of spiritual father has manifested itself in various ways and in various people, the common thread being that the gift shows itself in those who themselves have "trodden the path of obedience for long years."¹⁹ In most cases it has been in a monk or nun, or a hieromonk, that this particular *charisma* of spiritual paternity has shown forth, but it may also be in a married parish priest or his wife, or in a lay man or woman living in the world that this fruit of prayer, inner peace and self-denial makes itself known.²⁰ If one has a spiritual mother, or a spiritual father that is not a priest, after speaking God's Word to the inquirer – if need be – they will ask that person to go to a priest to receive the Church's sacramental confession and absolution.²¹

The path of obedience to a spiritual father is one of faith, for it necessitates a heart burning with love for God and a yearning to be obedient to the Word of God – obedient to the counsel coming forth from God's servant. Therefore, when approaching one's spiritual father, desiring to "repent earnestly," the grace of the Holy Spirit flows freely. Fr. Sophrony recounts that when St Silouan would go to see his spiritual father, he would:

pray that the Lord through His servant might have mercy on him, reveal to him His will and the way to salvation. And knowing that the first thought that comes to the soul after prayer is a sign from on high, [St Silouan] would seize on his confessor's first words, his first intimation, and go no further. In this lies wisdom and the secret of true obedience, the purpose of which is to know and fulfil

¹⁸ *The Discourses*, pp.351.

¹⁹ *Christ, Our Way and Our Life*, p.143.

²⁰ *The Orthodox Way*, p.95.

²¹ *Ibid.* p.96.

God's will, and not man's. Spiritual obedience of this kind, with no objections, no resistance, expressed or unexpressed, is the *sine qua non* for receiving living tradition.²²

St Silouan further taught that if a person, from the onset, comes in prayer to a spiritual father, with faith in his father's *first* words, then the "spiritual father's counsel would always be right, beneficial, pleasing to God."²³ St Seraphim of Sarov, in speaking of how the Holy Spirit gives inspiration, likewise expresses the same thought saying: "What the Lord bids His servant say, I give to the suppliant the first thought that arises in the soul."²⁴ However, if the person came forward, not intending to submit oneself to the "easy yoke of Christ" (Matthew 11:30), then neither would the Will of God be disclosed to the spiritual father.²⁵ This is also expressed in the teaching of St Dorotheos of Gaza on the subject:

If anyone really in truth desires the Will of God with all his heart, God never leaves him [to himself] but always guides him according to His [Divine] Will. If a man really set his heart upon the Will of God, God will enlighten a little child to tell that man what is His Will. But if a man does not truly desire the Will of God, even if he goes in search of a prophet, God will put into the heart of the prophet a reply like the deception in his own heart.²⁶

The Desert Father, Abba Ares, speaks the same:

How I send them away depends upon what the brethren came to seek. Now it is for the sake of God that this one comes to hear a

²² *St Silouan the Athonite*, pp.84-85.

²³ Op. Cit. p.79.

²⁴ A.F. Dobbie-Bateman, *St Seraphim of Sarov in A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, Collected Works of George P. Fedotov, vol. II, (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975), p. 252.

²⁵ *St Silouan the Athonite*, p.82.

²⁶ Dorotheos of Gaza, *On Consultation*, in *Discourses and Sayings*, tr. E. P. Wheeler, (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1977), p.129.

word, for he is a hard worker and what I tell him he carries out eagerly. It is because of this that I speak the word of God to him.²⁷

St Symeon the New Theologian, quotes his own spiritual father, St Symeon the Studite, concerning the role that faith plays in spiritual sonship:

[The elder] spoke to me ... [saying] 'I am confident that God, who has bestowed abundant grace on me, will bestow a double portion thereof on you simply because of the faith you show toward Him and toward my humble self.' So I received his word as though it came from God Himself.²⁸

It is only through a firm conviction and faith in "God dwelling among us" (Matthew 1:23) that one can receive the words of a spiritual father as true and life-bearing, for, as Fr. Sophrony describes:

This process is often subverted because the inquirer, seeing before him an 'ordinary man', hesitates, loses his faith a little, and so does not accept the *first* word of his spiritual father and raises objections, putting forward his own opinions and doubts.²⁹ The instant the spiritual father encounters resistance, however slight, the thread of pure tradition is broken and the preceptor's soul closes up.³⁰

Herein is reflected the fallen state of man, the sin of Adam – the sin of Disobedience – repeating itself over and over when presented with God's Holy Will.³¹ "But of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil you shall not eat..." (Genesis 2:17). And the Adamic response to this: "So when [Eve] saw that the tree was good for food ... and that

²⁷ *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, alphabetical collection, Ares 1, tr. Benedicta Ward, (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1984), p.35.

²⁸ *The Discourses*, pp.199-200.

²⁹ *St Silouan the Athonite*, p.80.

³⁰ *Op. Cit.* p.85.

³¹ *Christ, Our Way and Our Life*, p.132.

the tree was desired to make one wise, she took ... and ate" (Genesis 3:6)! "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them" (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Word of God is life-giving, but it requires self-denial and sacrifice in order to be received. Fr. Zacharias of Essex, the disciple of Fr. Sophrony writes:

If the word of God is to bring about the regeneration of man and not 'grind him to powder' (Matthew 21:44), the one receiving the word must be ready to make sacrifices...The spiritual father is pre-eminently a dispenser of the word of God, and the word given from Above is 'not after man' (Galatians 1:11). It goes beyond man's measure and thus appears 'hard'... 'it cuts [a man] in two' with the sword of the Spirit.³²

The Apostles call the Christian flock to submit freely to the authority of their spiritual fathers that they may receive from them, through the Holy Spirit, the 'Words of Life' from the Father, just as Christ spoke the Words of the Father to the Apostles. "The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and Life" (John 7:63). "Now we have received... the Spirit that is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak" (1 Corinthians 2:9). The spiritual father is the New Testament prophet (1 Corinthians 12:10) – he becomes God's spokesperson – communicating His Divine Will to those who come in faith,³³ and communicating only those words which are spoken by the Holy Spirit. There is a Desert Fathers 'saying' that relates how two monks came to see the great Abba Pambo to question him about their thoughts, but he gives them no response. Four days pass and the elder still has given them not a word. Finally the two monks decide to leave, but as they are leaving, they are told by Pambo's disciples to keep their hope

³² Op. Cit. p.145.

³³ St Neilos the Ascetic, *Ascetic Discourse* in *Philokalia*, vol. I, ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p.224.

in God and remain a little longer since "It is the old man's custom not to speak readily till God inspires him."³⁴

In describing his spiritual father, St Isaac the Syrian writes: "His speech was very simple, but his knowledge was illumined, his heart profound, and he spoke those things which grace gave unto him."³⁵ St Symeon the New Theologian testifies to this living reality of the Spirit's action of inspiration in spiritual fathers when he writes:

Listen to the Lord Himself as He says, 'For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of God speaking through you' (Matthew 10:20). You see that it is not I who speak ... but the Spirit of God who speaks in us. To this Peter, the chief [apostle], bears witness as he says, 'No prophecy ever came by impulse of man, but holy men of God spoke, moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21).³⁶

"We are God's fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9). In the mystical process of spiritual rebirth and spiritual fatherhood, there is a synergistic relationship that takes place between both parties and the Holy Spirit. If a spiritual father is to beget spiritual children, then, in the image of Christ, he must love with Christ-like love each one personally, and likewise, the spiritual son or daughter must open their hearts in loving trust to their spiritual father, springing from a sincere faith in God.³⁷ Both must put spiritual effort into the work of calling down the grace of the Holy Spirit. The renowned elder of Gaza, St Barsanuphios the Great, speaks of this synergy in this way:

Since our Lord Jesus Christ has said: 'Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened for you' (Matthew 7:7), then pray to this good God in order that He might send His Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to us. When [He] comes, [He]

³⁴ *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Pambo 2, p.196.

³⁵ St Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), Homily 21, p.106.

³⁶ *The Discourses*, pp.351.

³⁷ *The Orthodox Way*, p.97.

shall teach us about everything and reveal all of the mysteries to us... Let us beseech that the Holy Spirit may come to us and guide us in the whole truth (John 16:13).³⁸

Again, St Barsanuphios speaks of this synergy, but this time expressing the need for spiritual effort in relation to the deifying nature of rebirth:

Listen, beloved brother, and dedicate your heart to keeping the sacred words spoken to you not from mortals but from the Holy Spirit... I am asking [Christ] to grant you not only your requests but exceedingly more than you request or imagine; and He tells me, "If he too desires this, then I shall grant it." ... I am asking Him to illumine your heart in order to understand how He desires to make you prudent as well, through my nothingness... I am asking for you to be a son of God; you, too, should labour with me and sweat... The Son of God became human for your sake; you, too, should become god through Him. For He wants this, especially when you want it.³⁹

The prophetic vocation of spiritual paternity entails becoming "a collaborator of God in the creation of immortal gods,"⁴⁰ and this is possible only through long struggling in prayer for his children. Fr. Zacharias notes that,

A spiritual father who prays for people receives in his heart a sensation, 'information', about the psychological state and the spiritual state of those for whom he supplicates God. He experiences the spiritual joy of 'the few' and the desolation of 'the many.' By the painful experience of the states and misfortunes of the people he serves, he becomes extended, so as to encompass the whole of mankind throughout the ages... The spiritual father follows Christ into the garden of Gethsemane and goes up with Him

³⁸ *Letters from the Desert: Barsanuphios and John*, tr. John Chyrssavgis (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), Letter 196, pp.97-98.

³⁹ *Op. Cit.* Letter 199, pp.98-99.

⁴⁰ Prayer for Spiritual Fathers, quoted in *Christ, Our Way and Our Life*, p.144.

to Golgotha... to drink the 'cup of Christ'... so that his spiritual service becomes identified with the Lord's redeeming work... he enters 'into the wide expanses of "hypostatic" forms of being, conquering death and participating in divine infinity'⁴¹

One finds expression of this cosmic dimension of spiritual paternity, fatherly intercession and the fulfilling of Christ's words "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13) in the life and witness of the Hieromonk Arseny, who suffered under the Communist regime in Russia. Upon succumbing to illness and actually dying in a Soviet prisoner-camp, Fr Arseny recounts his "out of body" vision (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2), how he is taken to the first parish he served in, and on entering the church, finds the interior all luminous and filled to overflowing with bishops, clergy, spiritual children, former parishioners, and camp inmates, all whom he had known, but had died. They were all praying fervently and joyously and he was told to serve the Divine Liturgy in his prisoner clothes, which in the meantime had become luminous white and transfigured. He saw his own spiritual father there, Bishop Theophil, who looked at him with joy. After completing the Liturgy, he knelt before the Icon of the Theotokos and prayed, asking for her intercession before her Son, since he knew that he had died. Furthermore,

as he prayed ... he also begged the Mother of God not to leave all those who were still alive. He prayed for his spiritual children, for the prisoners with whom he had lived and who were still in the camps... He lost the concept of time and prayed so hard that he felt that all those praying in this church prayed with him; repeating again and again, 'O Birthgiver of God! Do not forget them, the longsuffering!' He cried, he sobbed and tears flowed all over his face.

Father Arseny's heart ached and was tight in his chest – how would they survive, all those who were there? Again he asked the Mother of God not to forget them, whose suffering is beyond what

⁴¹ *Christ, Our Way and Our Life*, pp.154-155.

man can bear... And suddenly he heard a voice ...gentle, but firm ... saying, 'The time of your death has not yet come, Arseny... God is sending you back to help His people! Go and serve. I will not leave you.⁴²

The Holy Spirit is life and life-giving – it is Divine Life itself. In those humble and obedient Christians who are “born of the Spirit” this presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives is experienced, as St Basil writes, as:

our restoration to Paradise, our ascension to the Kingdom of heaven, our adoption as God’s sons, our freedom to call God our Father, our becoming partakers of the grace of Christ, being called children of light, sharing in eternal glory, and in a word, our inheritance of the fullness of blessing, both in this world and the world to come.⁴³

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⁴² *Father Arseny 1893-1973, Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father*, tr. V. Bouteneff, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998) p.47.

⁴³ St Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, tr. D. Anderson, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980) p.59.

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