

Acquisition of the Holy Spirit as the Goal of the Christian Life

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Introduction

In this essay I shall focus on the acquisition of the Holy Spirit as the goal of the Christian life. My intention is to make it possible for the Fathers and saints who experienced transfiguration in Christ by the Holy Spirit, to teach us on this subject. By quoting from the saints, with my own brief comments, I want to provide the reader with continuing resources, and with possibilities for interaction with the saints, should the reader desire to pursue fuller communion with the Holy Spirit.

In a previous article in the winter 2006 issue of this journal, I gave a sketch of how the fullness of the Holy Spirit is present in a continuing Pentecost within the Orthodox Church.¹ I provided a quick overview of how it is possible for those seeking the fullness of the Holy Spirit to find within Orthodoxy all the resources needed for fulfilling their quest.

¹ Spencer Estabrooks, "A Continuing Pentecost: The Experience of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Christianity," *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity*, Vol. I, No. 1, Winter 2006.

This companion article has been written to describe the means by which we can be filled with the Holy Spirit, as taught by the saints. The saints are not concerned with momentary experiences of the presence of God, and certainly not with emotional indulgence, but with making our souls and bodies permanently capable of being a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, through continual repentance and our co-operation with the grace given us by God in the Holy Mysteries or Sacraments.

My spiritual experience before entering the Orthodox Church was like continually trying to fill a sieve (or leaky cistern) with water. I was always left seeking a new experience of God's presence to renew the fading reality, rather than adding to spiritual life, and gradually preparing, through much effort and attention, to be filled with the Spirit through a steady progress in the spiritual life.

One goal of this article is to explain to those outside the Orthodox faith how spiritual fullness is gained according to Orthodox teaching. A second goal is to provide for interested Orthodox Christians who are hungering and thirsting after life in communion with the Holy Trinity, some of the rich teaching about means available to them for co-operating with the working of the Holy Spirit given to them in baptism and chrismation. Through the writings of the saints there is also help for those who have buried this grace through negligence and ignorance and sins, to find the path of awakening to spiritual life again.

I shall briefly outline the Orthodox teaching that the acquisition of the Holy Spirit is the goal of the Christian life, made possible through salvation in Jesus Christ. Then I shall gather some teaching of the saints about how the journey to the fullness of life in the Spirit is rooted in the Holy Mysteries of the Church. Finally, I shall provide some of the wisdom of the saints about how this goal is reached through our co-operation with the grace given in the Holy Mysteries. When we describe the goal of the Christian life as the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, it is important to remember that the Holy Spirit is not

separate from the goal of Christ being fully formed in us. Rather our movement toward full salvation (or divinization or deification) is simply being looked at in relation to another Person of the Holy Trinity.²

The Gift of the Holy Spirit as the Outcome of Salvation in Christ

Orthodox teaching is clear that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Church is the purpose and intended fruit of the incarnation and the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. St. John the Forerunner told his followers and questioners:

I indeed baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8).

Our Lord Jesus Christ told his disciples:

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:8).

And in the 14th century St. Nicholas Cabasilas says of the outcome of Christ's life and work:

What is the effect and the result of the sufferings and works and teaching of Christ? Considered in relation to ourselves, it is nothing other than the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church.³

However it is not only the Church as the Body of Christ or only her hierarchy which receives the Holy Spirit, but all of its members personally, and it is indeed Orthodox to desire the experience of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. In the first century the promise of the restoration of the Holy Spirit as a gift to believers in Christ was announced by the apostle St. Peter to the crowds after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost:

² In the quotations which follow I emphasize certain phrases by use of italics to keep the reader focussed on the main points being illustrated through the quotations.

³ Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* (London, SPCK, 1983), p. 90.

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call (Acts 2: 38-9).

In the fourth century St. Athanasius the Great speaks similarly:

. . . the Word took on flesh so that we might receive the Holy Spirit.⁴

St. Symeon the New Theologian, a 10th century saint, reminds us of the same truth:

. . . the goal and purpose of all of Christ's work of salvation for us was that believers should receive the Holy Spirit.⁵

In the 19th century, St. Seraphim of Sarov spoke of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit as the goal of the Christian life:

Prayer, fasting, works of mercy – all this is very good, but it represents only the means, not the end of the Christian life. The true end is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.⁶

St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833) made this comment in speaking to his disciple Motovilov, who recorded the experience of the Divine Light in which St. Seraphim was transfigured before Motovilov's eyes, and within which Motovilov was embraced as well. St. Seraphim had summoned Motovilov to meet him. He said that the Lord had revealed to him Motovilov's search since youth to know the goal of the Christian life, and that no one had given him a satisfactory answer. In a long conversation St. Seraphim explained, with reference to biblical saints, how through a life of spiritual effort and focus and simplicity of

⁴ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 8

⁵ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Discourse #38*.

⁶ Valentine Zander, *St. Seraphim of Sarov* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), p. 85.

heart and faith, one could know and walk with God, and commune with Him. Motovilov replied to this teaching of St. Seraphim:

I still don't quite grasp how it is possible to be absolutely sure of living in God's Spirit. How can it be proved?⁷

Motovilov continues his account of this conversation:

The Staretz [Elder] reiterated: 'Friend of God, I've already told you that it's very easy: I've told you that some men found themselves filled with the Holy Spirit and were able to be convinced of his presence; what more do you want?' 'How I long to understand completely!' Then Father Seraphim gripped me firmly by the shoulders and said: 'My friend, both of us, at this moment, are in the Holy Spirit, you and I. Why won't you look at me?' 'I can't look at you, Father, because the light flashing from your eyes and face is brighter than the sun and I am dazzled!' 'Don't be afraid, friend of God, you yourself are shining just like I am; you too are now in the fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit, otherwise you wouldn't be able to see me as you do.'⁸

St. Seraphim quietly explained that God, in His goodness, had granted poor Seraphim's silent prayer that Motovilov be given experience and vision of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which God bestows on His servants in His condescension. He again told Motovilov to look at him. Motovilov writes:

Then I looked at the Staretz and was panic-stricken. Picture, in the sun's orb, in the most dazzling brightness of its noon-day shining, the face of a man who is talking to you. You see his lips moving, the expression in his eyes, you hear his voice, you feel his arms round your shoulders, and yet you see neither his arms, nor his body, nor his face, you lose all sense of yourself, you can see only the blinding light which spreads everywhere, lighting up the layer of

⁷ Ibid., p. 90

⁸ Ibid., p. 90

snow covering the glade, and igniting the flakes that are falling on us both like white powder.⁹

What Motovilov experienced in that encounter has often been discussed in terms of the brilliant Divine Light, like the experience of our Lord's transfiguration, which radiated in and around the saint. But St. Seraphim kept questioning Motovilov to discover what he was experiencing. As Motovilov responded, much of what is described as the fruit of the Holy Spirit by the apostle St. Paul in the letter to the Galatians, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness . . ." was elicited from Motovilov, along with a heavenly fragrance like nothing that he had ever experienced on earth, and a warmth, which did not melt the snow that was falling on them and was deep around them. St. Seraphim had already spoken to Motovilov about these evidences of the Spirit in our lives, and what contributes to or hinders their presence.

Many other accounts of the experience of the Light of God that transfigures from within those who are pure of heart, from the earliest days of the Church can be recounted. Beginning with the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ recorded in the Gospels, these witnesses provide the basis for Orthodox iconography which depicts life transfigured in God.

The Basis for the Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Chrismation

St. Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894) speaks of baptism together with chrismation as the basis for our co-operation with the work of the Holy Spirit in us. In Baptism we receive the Holy Spirit through union with Christ in His death, and Resurrection. In Chrismation we have the Holy Spirit sealed in us through anointing with ointment prepared by the leading bishop of an autocephalous Orthodox Church, as equivalent of the original laying on of hands of

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91

the apostles. Regarding this sacramental basis from which we can journey to full consciousness of the Holy Spirit's working in us, St. Theophan the Recluse has the following to say:

Life is the strength to act. Spiritual life is the strength to act spiritually, according to the will of God. Man has lost this strength; therefore, until it is restored to him he cannot live spiritually, no matter how much he intends to. That is why *the flow of grace into the soul of the believer is essential for a true Christian life. True Christian life is the life of grace* [emphasis added here and elsewhere]. A man makes some religious resolution: but in order to be able to act according to it, it is necessary that grace be united with his spirit. When this union is present, moral strength, hitherto evident only temporarily in his first enthusiasm, is impressed on his spirit and remains there always. *This re-establishment of the moral strength of the spirit is effected by the regenerating action of baptism*, through which man is granted justification and the strength to act 'after God in righteousness and true holiness' (Eph. 5:24).

A mystical communion with our Lord Jesus Christ is granted to believers in the holy sacrament of baptism. *At baptism and chrismation grace enters into the heart of the Christian, and thereafter remains constantly within him, helping him to live in a Christian way and to go from strength to strength in the spiritual life.*

All of us who have been baptized and chrismated, have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is in all of us, but he is not active in all of us.¹⁰

St. Theophan's description of the need for the strength to act spiritually, without which our desires to do good are not realized, is reminiscent of the comments of St. Nicholas Cabasilas (1322 - 1387?) in his work *The Life in Christ*, in which he speaks of baptism as a new birth, of chrismation as giving the power of movement and action to

¹⁰ Quoted in *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 172.

the newly born by the Holy Spirit, and of Holy Communion as being the constant nourishment which is needed for growth:

Baptism confers being and in short, existence according to Christ. It receives us when we are dead and corrupted and first leads us into life. *The anointing with chrism* perfects him who has received [new] birth by infusing into him the energy that befits such a life. *The Holy Eucharist* preserves and continues this life and health It is therefore by this *Bread* that we live, and by *the chrism* that we are moved, once we have received being from the *baptismal washing*¹¹

And again

Baptism, then, is birth. The chrism conveys the principle of energy and movement; the bread of life, and the cup of thanksgiving are true food and drink (cf. Jn. 6:55). Before being born it is impossible to be moved or fed. . . . Accordingly, we are first washed, then anointed, and thus the banquet receives us in a state of purity and with a sweet odour.¹²

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (+386) tells us that the anointing of the Holy Spirit is for action, for power to overcome the enemy, and to gain dominion over oneself, and then for service in the world. We need not be passive slaves to sin, but we have been given the spiritual power to struggle against and overcome it by asking for the Holy Spirit within us to help us, and co-operating with the grace given by the Holy Spirit. Speaking of Chrismation, which gives us the power to become "christs," anointed ones, St. Cyril says:

For as Christ *after His baptism, and the descent of the Holy Spirit*, went forth and vanquished the adversary, so likewise, having, *after Holy Baptism and the Mystical Chrism*, put on the whole armour of the Holy Spirit, do you stand against the power of the enemy, and

¹¹ Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press: 1974), pp. 49-50.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

vanquish it, saying, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."¹³

Here we see again how it is the power of the Holy Spirit, sealed in Chrismation and abiding in us, which helps and strengthens us in desiring and acting according to our new and true nature in Christ. We have been given the Holy Spirit, not in order to become complacent and to think that all is accomplished, but as a weapon to overcome evil, and to act as Christians. Through the anointing of the Spirit we are given our vocation as prophets, priests, and kings in creation, able to act freely and for good, as co-heirs with Christ of all creation.

St. Seraphim of Sarov explained to his disciple, Motovilov, how the grace of the Holy Spirit, lost by Adam, was restored at Pentecost and is restored to us in baptism and sealed by chrismation.

When our Lord Jesus Christ, after his resurrection, vouchsafed to complete the work of our salvation, he sent to his apostles that breath of life which Adam lost, and *he gave the grace of the Holy Spirit back to them*. On the day of Pentecost he bestowed on them the power of the Holy Spirit which entered them in the form of a mighty wind and in the appearance of tongues of fire, filling them with the strength of his grace. This light-filled breath, received by the faithful on the day of their baptism, is sealed by the rite of the chrism on the members of their body so that it becomes a vessel of grace. That is why the priest accompanies the anointing of the chrism with these words: "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit." *This grace is so great, so necessary and life-giving, that it is never withdrawn: even the lapsed retain it until death*. Thus we know that if we did not sin after baptism we should remain holy, free from every taint of body and soul, like God's righteous ones. The tragedy is that as we grow older we don't go on growing in grace and intelligence but, on the contrary, by our mounting perversity we separate ourselves from the grace of the Holy Spirit and become great sinners. But, the wonder is that Wisdom is ever seeking our

¹³ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1986), pp.65-66.

salvation. If at her entreaties man listens to her voice and resolves for love of her to be vigilant, *if he gives himself to good works and attains true repentance, then the Holy Spirit acts in him and builds in him the kingdom of God.*

*The grace of the Holy Spirit, given at baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, continues to shine in our heart as divine light in spite of our falls and the darkness of our soul. It is this grace that cries in us to the Father: 'Abba, Father!' and who reclothes the soul in the incorruptible garment woven for us by the Holy Spirit.*¹⁴

Co-operating With the Holy Spirit Within Us

It is important to experience, to be aware of, and to co-operate with the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. As St. Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you" (Philippians 2:12-13).

St. Mark the Monk (or Ascetic), from the early 6th century, discusses how the Spirit's presence is rooted in us and how we co-operate with that grace.

Everyone who has been baptized in an orthodox manner *has received the fullness of grace*, and if he then goes on to *perform the commandments*, he will become consciously aware of grace within him.

However far a man may advance in faith, however great the blessings that he attains, he never discovers nor can he ever discover, anything more than *what he has already received secretly through Baptism*. Christ, being perfect God, bestows upon the baptized the perfect grace of the Spirit. We for our part cannot possibly add to that grace, but *it is revealed and manifests itself to us increasingly, in proportion to our fulfillment of the*

¹⁴ Valentine Zander, *St. Seraphim of Sarov* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), pp. 88-89.

commandments. Whatever, then, we offer to him after our regeneration, was already within us and came originally from him.¹⁵

St. Diodochos of Photiki (c. 400-489?) speaks of how the cleansing of the image of God in us in Baptism must be built upon and filled in with colour and detail, as an icon painter fills in the original sketch which has been produced. In this manner the image of Christ in us is expressed, through our co-operation in the life of virtue and prayer, so that the likeness of Christ is given form in the uniqueness of each person's life and existence.

Divine grace confers on us two gifts through the baptism of regeneration, one being infinitely superior to the other. *The first gift* is given to us at once, when grace renews us in the actual waters of baptism and *cleanses* all the lineaments of the soul, that is, *the image of God in us*, by washing away every stain of sin. *The second – our likeness to God – requires our co-operation*. When the intellect begins to perceive the Holy Spirit with full consciousness, we should realize that grace is beginning to paint the divine likeness over the divine image in us. Artists first draw the outline of a man in monochrome, and then add one colour after another, until little by little they capture the likeness of the subject down to the smallest details. In the same way *the grace of God* starts by *remaking the divine image in man into what it was when he was first created*. But when it sees *us longing with all our heart* for the beauty of *the divine likeness* and humbly standing naked in its *atelier*, then by making one virtue after another come into flower and exalting the beauty of the soul "from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18), *it depicts the divine likeness* on the soul. *Our power of perception shows us that we are being formed into the divine likeness*¹⁶

St. Diodochos uses the distinction, referred to by a considerable number of the fathers and saints, between *the image of God* and *the likeness of God*. In this understanding man was created innocent and

¹⁵ St. Nikodeomos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. 1, transl. by G.E.H. Palmer et al. (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p.33.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

sinless, but not mature. He was to grow up through co-operation with grace, which was not so difficult before the fall, and to achieve divinization by active participation in the life of God. Thus, we are created in the image of God, with a sketch of what we are to be like, so to speak, implanted in the core of our being, but we must actively acquire the full likeness of the Word in whose image we were created. This we do by "fleshing out" in our own specific life, the life of Christ, so that, with the apostle Paul, we may say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," not because we have ceased to exist as unique persons, but because we fully co-operate with Christ, who is the core of our life and the fulfillment of our own unique lives.

The use of the word-picture of the artist sketching the outline of his subject, and then filling it in with layers of colours and detail until it clearly depicts the unique person who is sitting for a portrait, is also indicative of the way an icon (from the Greek *ikon* meaning "image") is developed by Orthodox iconographers. Our lives are a work of art being formed by the Holy Spirit, but this work depends on our willingness to co-operate with the Artist.

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain (1748-1809) explains how rooting out of sin and effort in prayer uncover the grace of the Holy Spirit which we were given in baptism, but which we have buried under forgetfulness of God and actions contrary to His commandments.

Because, brethren, we have fallen into sins after baptism and consequently have buried *the grace of the Holy Spirit which was given to us at Baptism, it is necessary that we make every effort to recover that original grace which is found deeply buried underneath our passions, like an ember in the ashes. This ember of grace we must fan into a new flame in our hearts. In order to do that, we must remove the passions from our hearts as ashes from a fireplace, and replace them with the firewood of obedience to the life-giving commandments of the Lord. We can blow upon the spark with heartfelt repentance of the mind and with the repetition of this prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son and Word of God, have mercy on*

me." When this prayer remains permanently in our heart, it cleanses us from the ashes of the passions, and finding the ember of grace within, it strikes up a wondrous and strange fire. This fire, on the one hand, burns away the temptation of evil thoughts, and on the other, it sweetens the whole inner person and enlightens the mind.¹⁷

St. Theophan provides an interpretive framework and basis for understanding the experience of the receding or loss of awareness of the feeling and fruit of the Holy Spirit's presence in us ("quenching of the Holy Spirit") on the one hand and, on the other hand, the quickening or re-awakening of awareness of the Spirit's power and fruit working in us. His words are very clear and worth quoting in full.

The Spirit of grace lives in Christians from the time of baptism and chrismation. And to participate in the sacraments of repentance and communion--is not this to receive the most abundant floods of grace?

To those who already have the Spirit it is obviously appropriate to say: "Quench not the Spirit" (I Thess. 5:19). But how can one say to such people: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18)? The grace of the Holy Spirit is indeed given to all Christians, because such is the power of the Christian faith. But *the Holy Spirit Himself, but works together with the free actions of each individual*. In this sense the Christian can offend or extinguish the Spirit – or else he may contribute to the perceptible manifestation of the Spirit's action within him. When this happens, the Christian feels himself to be in an extraordinary state which expresses itself in deep, sweet, and quiet joy, sometimes rising to the rejoicing of the spirit: this is spiritual exultation. Contrasting it with intoxication from wine, the Apostle says that we must not seek the exultation of wine, but the exultation which he calls 'being filled with the Spirit'¹⁸ [see Eph. 5:18].

¹⁷ Quoted in *Partakers of Divine Nature* by Archimandrite Christoforos Stavropoulos, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Light and Life Publishing), 1976, p.78

¹⁸ St. Theophan the Recluse, quoted in *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo and translated by E. Kadloubovsky and E.M. Palmer, (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), pp. 173-4.

St. Theophan concludes that

. . . to 'be filled with the Spirit' is simply an injunction to behave and act in such a manner as to *cooperate with or allow free scope to the Holy Spirit*, to make it possible for the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself by perceptibly touching the heart.¹⁹

The way in which the grace of the Holy Spirit is known and maintained is by continual prayer and by continual fulfillment of the commandments of God according to St. Theophan:

In the writings of the men of God, who were honoured with this grace of the Spirit and even lived permanently under its influence, we find that two things in particular are required. If a man is to achieve this: *he must cleanse his heart from passions, and turn to God in prayer*. The Apostle Paul stressed these two things, as does St. John Chrysostom. Prayer, he says, allows the Holy Spirit to act freely on the heart: 'Those who sing psalms, fill themselves with the Spirit.' And he speaks later of the cleansing from the passions which leads to the same end: 'Is it in our power to be filled with the Spirit?' he asks. 'Yes, it is in our power. When we purify our soul from lies, cruelty, fornication, impurity and cupidity, when we become kind hearted, compassionate, self-disciplined, when there is no blasphemy or misplaced jesting in us – when we become worthy of it, then what will prevent the Holy spirit from drawing near and alighting within us? And He will not only draw near, but will fill our heart.'²⁰

It is important to make clear that St. Theophan is not suggesting that we seek experiences or feelings related to the presence of the Holy Spirit, as has often become the focus in the modern "charismatic" movements. Rather, he is telling us that when one co-operates with the grace of the Holy Spirit through overcoming the passions, through

¹⁹ Ibid., 174

²⁰ Ibid., 174

obeying the injunctions of life in Christ, and through prayer, one becomes consciously aware of the fruit of the Spirit's presence, in a deep peace, quietude of the powers of the heart, an overflowing love for others, patience, kindness, and so on.

As one consciously seeks to co-operate with grace, and remains watchful as to how sin occurs in his or her life, and how it affects one's feelings and spirit within, one becomes aware of the quiet and constructive presence of the Spirit at work within oneself, and also becomes aware of the noisy, confusing, and tumultuous effects of sin on one's inner being, and on people around one.

St. Innocent of Alaska (1797-1879), Enlightener of North America, has some very simple, practical and wonderful advice about living the Christian life. He says that the only way of salvation is Jesus Christ. We must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. St. Innocent explains carefully what this means in detail. But how can we live the Christ-life? We need the help of the Holy Spirit who is sent to us by Jesus Christ as our Helper. He discusses at some length and in practical detail what the Holy Spirit makes possible when He comes to dwell in us, including faith and light, true love, wisdom, peace, true humility, and true prayer, as divine qualities beyond human capacity by itself. He also explains how we acquire the help of the Holy Spirit. Careful and repeated meditation on this whole section of St. Innocent's work, *The Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven*, is most profitable. St. Innocent sums up his advice:

These then are the ways of receiving the Holy Spirit: viz. purity of heart and integrity of life, humility, attentive listening to the voice of God, prayer, self-denial, reading and listening to the Word of God, and Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. Of course, each of these means is effectual for receiving the Holy Spirit, but the best and surest way, is to use them all together; then you will undoubtedly receive the Holy Spirit and become holy.

Here it needs to be said further that if anyone of you receives the Holy Spirit and then somehow falls and sins, and thereby loses the

Holy Spirit, do not despair and think that all is lost; but quickly and fervently fall down before God with penitence and prayer, and the Holy Spirit will return to you again.²¹

Finally, as a last witness I refer to St. Silouan of Mt. Athos, who died in 1938. In his characteristically humble and simple way, he speaks much in his writings about how the Holy Spirit's presence is gained and lost in our lives. He gives first place to prayer but says that we won't pray if we don't keep remembrance of God in our hearts. And we won't keep remembrance of God in our hearts if we are given to practices which are not in keeping with His will. He says that spiritual life is a constant battle, until the Holy Spirit abides in us regularly. He tells us how we lose grace and the Spirit withdraws, and on what basis He returns:

If you have upbraided or passed judgment on or vexed your brother, your peace is lost. If you have been boastful, or have exalted yourself above your fellows, you have lost grace. If you do not drive away forthwith the wanton thought that comes to you, your soul will lose the love of God and confidence in prayer. If you are fond of power, or of money, you will never come to know the love of God. If you have followed your own will, then you are conquered by the enemy, and despondency will come upon your soul. If you hate your fellow it means that you have fallen away from God, and an evil spirit has taken possession of you.

But if you will do good unto your brother you will gain rest for your conscience. If you subdue your own will your enemies will be driven off and you will receive peace in your soul. If you forgive your brother the affront he puts upon you, and love your enemies, then you will receive forgiveness for your sins, and the lord will let you come to know the love of the Holy Spirit.

And when you have humbled yourself entirely you will find perfect rest in God.²²

²¹ St. Innocent, *The Indication of the Way Into the Kingdom of Heaven* (Jordanville, New York: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1994), p. 43.

In these simple words, as well as in the advice of all the saints and fathers, who from their own experience of the Holy Spirit give voice to His revelation, there is a wealth of practical help in learning to co-operate with the Holy Spirit, and in strengthening His working in us. It is up to us to develop ways of ensuring that these counsels become rooted in our being and practised. As we do so, with many falls, and many struggles, much patience and faith, we learn experientially the quiet, peaceful presence and fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We learn how love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are lost and recovered, and hopefully established more continuously in us. We learn how the living of the beatitudes gives us experience of the Kingdom of God.

Conclusion

The great saints and teachers of the Orthodox Christian faith make clear to us that it is the conscious awareness and continuous presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives which is the goal of the Christian life, and at the same time the means for new life in Christ being possible and for Christ being fully formed in us. We must co-operate with the grace of the Holy Spirit given in Baptism and sealed in Chrismation and renewed through participation in the Eucharist. The more we do so, the more we shall become aware of the presence and fruit of the Holy Spirit and the more life in Christ becomes a joy and the burden light, as our Lord says. At the same time, the saints remind us that prayer is a struggle until we die and that the more progress we make in the spiritual life the more temptations, and fierce attacks we can expect from the evil one). However, when we do not co-operate with, and stir up, the Holy Spirit's working within us, the more we live according to the "flesh," according to ungodly ways and patterns of behaviour, the more the Spirit withdraws, and does not return until we show repentance and sorrow, and seek His return with

²² Archimandrite Sophrony. *Wisdom from Mt. Athos: The Writings of Staretz Silouan 1866-1938*. (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), pp.115-6.

our whole heart. According to the fathers and saints, the major means by which we co-operate with the Holy Spirit in our lives are prayer and obedience to the way of Christ set out in the New Testament, that is, the way of humility, continual repentance, and love of neighbour. But the saints and Fathers who teach us this, also assume as a matter of course, as St. Innocent of Alaska states very clearly, regular participation in the whole life of the Church, and most importantly, regular participation in the Eucharistic offering and communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, for apart from Christ living in us, we cannot become like Him.

Of course the Holy Spirit cannot be forced or commanded to be active in us simply by our efforts. The Holy Spirit always comes as gift and ‘blows where it will,’ but He will come to comfort us when we make a sincere and sustained effort to acquire conscious co-operation with Him in making our lives holy, as God is holy.

The apostle St. Paul says that “the Kingdom of God” (which is the reality of those who learn to live in the spirit of the Beatitudes) “is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:7).

All of the commandments and teachings of the Scriptures are useful for training in righteousness, for correction, for encouragement, and for repentance. In all of our efforts to seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit, it is important that we be dependent on our father confessor, and above all seek to sorrow for our sins and to learn humility above all, for God dwells in the heart of the humble and contrite. According to the Fathers and saints we ought not to seek miraculous signs or gifts or visions. Rather, we ought to seek to be holy, to acquire the way of life and attitude of mind and heart in which the Holy Spirit may live, and to avoid all that quenches or drives away the Spirit’s presence.

Though only the great saints may reach the point of acquiring the Holy Spirit’s constant presence and guidance in full consciousness, with permanent deliverance from the passions, it is my experience that

in the Orthodox Church, as Fr. Thomas Hopko, former Dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York, so eloquently puts it, the way to experiential knowledge of, and communion with God, is fully open. All of the resources are there to live the Christian life, and to pursue acquisition of the Holy Spirit in His fullness, in Whom we are conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through Whom in turn we know God as Father.

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