

archpriest Sergiy Baramov

GOD, WHO IS

essays on the Jesus prayer



Orsk, Russia

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Orsk

The Iveron Monastery

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we will see darkness.

However, this darkness is not endless.

There is a light in it.

I am not talking about the light

that strikes through blood vessels,

which fills our eyelids.

This is a natural red light.

There is also white Light of Transfiguration

in the inconspicuous darkness.

It fills the darkness of space.

It exists, but we should see it.

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Lord, bless me!

God Who Is!

(Essays on the Jesus prayer)

The existence of some notions becomes objective due to certain reasons. There should be reasons without which nothing comes to life and begins to be. Objectivity of a space depends on one important condition. In this space or this domain, there should appear objects, the relationships among which determine this space, its width, approach and distance. No objects, no space. It exists neither like a unit of being, nor like a philosophic notion.

In the “space” of God, which the Holy Fathers call Divine darkness (or an inconspicuous state), there should appear objects, which will actualize the being of this sphere. There should be two such objects. One is not enough. The two of them are God and I. This is God, Who out of His love reveals Himself to me and becomes an immanent God, God, Whom I determine through the relationship with Him, but not through my reflections on Him. Otherwise, Divine darkness becomes a black hole absorbing and turning me into nothing and

ceasing to exist itself. A hole is something; no object, no hole. There is only death, not like an absence of existence, but like an absence of notions. Death as nothing.

If we believe in a living God, His existence should reveal itself somehow to us. I do not want to believe in “something” which is close to “nothing.” I am not satisfied with talking to emptiness. Being an object, I need another object, the relationship with which makes my existence objective not only in the format of this earthly, physiological, life, which becomes an illusion at the moment of death, but beyond its limits. If only apophatic notions determine Divine darkness, then personally for me, God becomes a God-Who-Is-Nothing, or more exactly, a God-Who-Is-Nobody. But I am not agnostic, I am a Christian, and I am not going to die in this black hole, which is called death. Death was trampled down by My God, Whose name is Life. Life, Who exists not only in Himself, but for me and in me. To make a realm objective, there should be at least two objects. God understands this and becomes an Object for me. The relationship between us begins. However, He is an Object only in His part, as any object is limited, while God cannot be limited by anything. He is God. When in the Old Testament

He tells Moses, “You shall see My back,” He means “only a part” and not to the full extent. “A part” is already something. A part of infinity is already an ocean. An ocean, in which I will not see the end, whether it exists or not.

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There is no nation on earth, which does not have a notion of God. But this notion is filled with fear for the unknown and inconceivable. Only Christians shift their fear to awe before the One, Who touched your heart not like a notion, but like a Being. All monotheistic religions accept the phrase “No one has seen God at any time,” while only Christians have its continuation “The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” This is our essential difference. We can be in awe of Him, because we enter into a relationship with Him.

The Word becomes Flesh. The meaning of these evangelic words is very delicate. The most important moment is that He becomes Flesh, but does not stop being God to the full extent. This is why many people who surrounded Christ saw only His flesh and did not see anything else. And, on

the contrary, Saint Paul the Apostle says he saw something, but cannot explain what, and this something is very definite and objective for him.

A human is created in the image and likeness of God, but being a limited object, he or she has a form, compared to a perfect and limitless God. In order to become understandable and “tangible” for His creation and out of His Divine love, God puts on a limited form and becomes human. He does not do this to remain like this, but He does this to take a human by his arm and lead him beyond the limits of the rational into the Divine darkness, which lives by drastically different sensations in comparison to common psychophysical notions of this material world. Objectiveness of this space is out of the question for those unique people, who pierced the border between the two realms through the feat of their spiritual lives blessed by the Grace of God.

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God does not come into the Sacrament of transubstantiation to become bread and wine, but He comes into it to make the bread and wine His Body and Blood. The Savior mystically dwells

in His Name not because He is Name, but because the Name of God is God. For those who do not practice the Jesus prayer these phrases might sound like a tautology. This will be so if we try to understand instead of experience this.

The phrase of Father John of Kronstadt “the Name of God is God” is very deep. It reflects his real spiritual experience. Unfortunately, some monks on Athos, who followed onomatodoxy, tried to acquire this experience through their intellect. They contemplated those things, which were beyond their comprehension (“Spiritual knowledge without spiritual experience is a demonic theology,” St. Maximus the Confessor). As a result, they were damaged and this was seen in their spiritual result, their spirit. It was aggressive, unpeaceful, and argumentative. The delusion developed itself through their strong opinion, which, in its turn, incited categoricity towards the other part of the issue. Everything related to the Name of God was met with inexpiable aggression. However, the Righteous Saint John of Kronstadt could not say an irresponsible phrase. What was the essence of it?

When a hermit, who practices noetic prayer a lot and ideally without ceasing, gets into the habit of

holding it inwardly and inconspicuously in his heart, at a certain moment, it leaves the realm of a word and comes into the Person of Christ. This means that at every invocation, the person who says the prayer does not experience the word (name), but begins to experience Christ Himself, to Whom this Name belongs. This means that when we say the word, we do not pray to the name, but to the One, to Whom it belongs. The Theological Committee, created specifically for consideration of onomatodox disputes, summarized its attitude to the issue in one short sentence, “The Name of God is God, but God is not a name.” This formula was born by the Holy Spirit and it is very precise.

In addition, I would like to speak about one more aspect of the name of God. Being a Perfect Being, God cannot be limited by any form. He is the Purest Spirit. However, a human was created by God in the format of this world and we do not need an idea of God. A human always seeks God Himself and The Loving God, out of His great love, always comes to meet us. He humbles Himself and becomes a form in part.

When Saint Gregory Palamas argued with his opponent Barlaam, who was a theoretic and did

not know the practice of the Jesus prayer, Barlaam firmly insisted that a human might fathom God only apophatically and there is no other way. Having separated the notions of “the essence of God” and “Divine energies,” the Venerable Gregory explained the essence of the question through the Holy Spirit. The essence of God is unfathomable for a human, but the Lord reveals Himself in this world through His energies. These are the energies which may fill with themselves some forms. The Uncreated Light is not an illusion, this is not “a kind of light,” but this is a light. The nature of God-Man Christ was fully Divine and it was fully human, except for sin. Before leaving His disciples through His Divine Ascension, Christ gives them His Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine. Here, he enters into the form with His substance. The same Sacrament holds true in the Orthodox tradition of the veneration of icons and holy relics. A limitless and transcendental God enters into a limited form with His energies. This form becomes God by Grace.

The Lord does not enter only material forms. In the Mystery of the noetic prayer, He enters into the form of the word, or in the form of His Divine Name, filling it with energies. In this sense the

name of God becomes God by Grace. The Uncreated Light is a light of Divinity. But God is not only Light. The Name of God is God, but God is not a name.

The most precious part of the Jesus prayer is its mystical side. There are also totally practical moments there, such as the organization of our mind, which is damaged by distraction, inactivity, and disarray. It is the mobilization of our mind for the fight against thoughts, for being considerate and attentive in this struggle; the training of our will for being stable and functional. All this concerns our purification and aspiration for having a chaste soul. Nevertheless, our main goal is not chastity. Chastity for chastity is pointless. Chastity is preserved for a Bridegroom, as a gift for Him, in order to unite with Him. This is why the main thing in the Jesus prayer is the Bridegroom, everything else is secondary. Jesus Christ is, first of all, a Mystical Person. First, He is Perfect God, then, He is Perfect Man. Coming into this enigmatic Mystery, we should understand the final goal from the beginning. We are not simply striving after purification. Purification comes through unification and deification. Otherwise, we will repeat the sin of our First Parents, who wanted to become gods without God, or we will

repeat the mistake of those people who were building the Tower of Babel. Having sincerity, stability and working hard, they tried to reach the heavens on their own. In fact, through its practical exercises, the Jesus prayer allows the attaining of some psychophysical results, but without the main point, Christ, this will be a work of the antichrist.

...

“The Kingdom of God is within you,” this is what Christ says. But the Kingdom of God is Himself. The Kingdom is not “what,” but the Kingdom is “who.” This is why we do not seek a state (or what) in the Jesus prayer, but we seek Him (or Whom). The first mistake that the beginners make is seeking different states (peace, tenderness, enlightenment).

If He, being the Kingdom, is within us, then our mind, while seeking Him, should change its direction from outside to inside, in the heart. Saint Nicephoros the Recluse says a very important thing in the “Philokalia,” “After the Fall, the human mind made for the outwards.” In order to come back to God, we need to change the direction of our mind inwards. The faster the mind

runs forward while seeking God, the faster God recedes into the distance from it. Change your direction and God will come from the outwards inside of you. This is why the Jesus prayer is called the prayer of the mind and heart. Our mind becomes united with our heart and begins to experience or live Christ.

I use a strange expression “to live Christ,” deliberately making an emphasis on the difference between the notions “to think about Christ” and “to live Christ.” We usually think about an external object, which is before us, but we live by something that we have inside of us. The Old Testament righteous people walked before God (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were righteous and walked before God). This was in the Old Testament, and in the New One, with the coming of Christ, a new notion appeared, “to live in Christ” or “to have Christ inside of you.” “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” One of the main conditions of the Jesus prayer is a life directed inwards, to the place where the Kingdom is. The Kingdom is Christ.

The thing that I call “a life directed inwards” has its particularity. Logic and logical reasoning, which we mistakenly use and limit our mind. This

kind of thinking has a linear outward direction, from a thought to a thought and from an image to an image. Because of its complexity, it is not very precise. While a mind directed inwards, into the heart, forces thoughts into simplicity and this is why it lives very precisely. “Jesus, Jesus” and that’s it, without any assisting thoughts, images and impressions. For the inexperienced, this might seem as the dying of a mind, which is used to living by the breadth of thoughts and impressions. This is true in the beginning and every dying brings crisis and discomfort. But apparently, there is life beyond this point of psychological death. This is a life through Christ. It is amazing, rich and limitless, because He is limitless.

...

We, in our community, do not practice a very slow prayer with pauses for “reflection.” We simply do not allow our mind to reflect. Reflection is complex. While God is simple and is experienced simply. We say the prayer directing it inside of us and this is the opposite direction of reflection. We say and say it and do not think about anything. This is what our attention is concentrated on. I have tried to fight against thoughts a lot. I came

to meet them and contradicted them, but everything was in vain until I realized that I should direct my mind inwards, into my heart, find Christ there, embrace His feet, close my eyes and ears, and stay motionless, repeating the same, “Jesus, Jesus...” A thought goes around you but cannot approach and in time, recedes, covered with shame. Thoughts require muddy water, which is many ideas. Running away from a thought, we stop our logic and keep one short thought in our mind, “Jesus...,” which does not go linearly forward, but in a circle, one changing another. Thinking and praying are two different states of mind. Noetic prayer is not about thinking, but it is about living. Do not confuse attention with reflection. We simply keep our mind in the words of the prayer and that’s it.

God enters the form of a word, but in time, when the mind becomes accustomed to experiencing (or to living) God in the heart inconspicuously and without creating images, in the Divine darkness the name of God leaves the form of the word and becomes experienced as God Himself. “Jesus, Jesus...” I already perceive this not like a name, but like Him Himself, to Whom I address through the name. But at a certain moment, the name ceases to be and only the essence or He remains.

At this moment, the Divine darkness turns into the Light. The form ceases to be and the substance remains.

...

The Jesus prayer begins with its verbal form, in other words, we begin to pronounce it aloud, “Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” as frequently and as much as we can to acquire the habit of walking with God all the time. It is not by chance that the purpose of the Jesus prayer is a prayer without ceasing. There are 24 hours in a day and night. If we devote only some short time to prayer in the morning and in the evening, the rest of the time will remain empty and something alien will come into this vacuum. It will be good if it is something neutral, but it will be worse if there comes something sinful. Nature allows no emptiness. Surely, this will not happen at once and in a perfect way. “The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence,” and those who apply effort will have a result. The result will not come soon. Only illusions caused by psychological ardor come soon. A real spiritual result is attained gradually, through long patience and stability. While illusions fall into pieces as soon as they come.

...

There is an opinion that inattentive prayer is blasphemous, this is why it is better to say some prayers attentively, instead of repeating a lot of them with your tongue. In this case, people more often refer to Saint Paul the Apostle. In his statement about prayer, the Venerable John of the Ladder gives the following answer to this question, “I wish I could also say the prayer attentively in my mind, but you will have to put up with the fact that before you become accustomed to a noetic and attentive prayer, you will have to endure a period of an imperfect, distracted prayer, which you will say aloud.” This is a fact and you can do nothing about it. You will commit a sin, if you voluntarily neglect attention. However, if this happens because you have not got the habit yet, this is natural. The habit comes in time, it does not come by itself, but it comes when you compel yourself again and again. The skill is gained through diligence and persistence.

Frankly speaking, I hardly believe in the result of those people who pray little by little. Has anyone seen a great musician, an artist, or a scientist who would dedicate little time to his work? This is a mere fable. If the Holy Fathers call prayer a

science of sciences and an art of arts, how much effort should it require then? The Holy Fathers dedicated their whole lives to it. Besides, if a person prays a lot, ideally without ceasing, in time prayer goes over the realm of logic to the realm of intuition and becomes natural. Habit is second nature.

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Often people wonder, “ We are busy with many things during the day, including mental work. How can this be in harmony with unceasing prayer?” Your body is busy with physical work, your logic with mental, and your intuition with prayer, if, through long practice, prayer has become a part of your intuition. You should not be confused that a prayer, taking place in your intuition, seems to be inattentive. It is just attention of another nature. Logic exists by long thoughts; intuition lives by short impressions. They are short, but very exact.

God’s radio station operates on short waves, while satan’s works on long ones. It is not by chance that in the Gospel the Lord encourages us towards laconism of word, “Let your Yes be Yes, and your No, No. For whatever is more than these

is from the evil one.” Our long thoughts, which bring a lot of complexity, are profitable for the evil one. Woe from wit, it goes something like this. Prayer (if there is a habit of it), dwelling in the realm of intuition, is very short and exact. The Jesus prayer, which has a short form, in comparison to psalmody, which consists of complex texts, is very convenient for intuition. Complex texts of psalmody stimulate visual and logical thinking. A short and simple form of the Jesus prayer dwells in the unconscious, in the very heart. “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” A hundred times, a thousand times. At first, it is dry, inattentive, then it is even boring, repulsive, and almost unbearable. However, in time and with increasing of number, the flywheel comes to a critical point and goes over it. The unusual gradually becomes usual and the unpleasant becomes pleasant, natural and necessary. This resembles breathing: we do not plan our breathing in and breathing out, we simply breathe and logic is not responsible for this. Air brings life to our physiology. Prayer revives the soul, gives it “oxygen” and reanimates it.

The Venerable Symeon the New Theologian writes that many people still live physiologically, as if by inertia, but their souls have long been

dead. The Lord, in the Gospel, tells Nicodemus about the necessity to be born from above. He tells a living man that he should come to life. Come alive in the realm of the Spirit.

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In the material world, people experience space through five rational senses, but the spiritual world is irrational and one cannot see, hear, smell or touch it. A human comes through the sixth or spiritual sense there. This is our intuition, the nature of which is charismatic. Yet, this sense is almost atrophied in contemporary humans due to a lack of development. Humankind has chosen the way of rational science and limited itself by the boundaries of intelligibility. Trying to understand this world, we divide it into details, like a forensic pathologist, and lose the ability to see the whole, the essence. A pathologist sees the heart, the kidneys, the vessels, the muscles, and the bones, but cannot see life, which unites everything, as biomaterial is rational, while life is irrational, yet objective.

Practicing the Jesus or noetic prayer, we leave the realm of the five senses and come into inconspicuousness and imagelessness, trying to

stop our mind in the Divine darkness, and thus stimulating and reviving our sixth sense, which is able to experience the spiritual world objectively and truly, but in another format.

Saints do not guess the will of God; they simply know it in their state of pure prayer, which is free from reflection, both bad and good ones. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. A pure heart is a heart, which is not free from sin or free not only from sin! In a state of noetic prayer, it is free from the five senses and logic. It stands still with awe in the realm of the spiritual, without being distracted by anything external, except for “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.”

Do not create God for yourself and do not invent Him. Stop, stand motionless and hardly breathe. He is here, very close, you simply do not let Him in. You dwell in stereotypes about Him and this prevents Him from coming in.

When people talk firmly about attention, this might become an obsession, which will at first oppress a person and then it will stimulate him or her to achieve artificial and untimely states through ardor. Attention will not come immediately due to a lack of skill. A person

becomes angry, begins to apply pressure and artificially stimulate the things which should come naturally and gradually. Do not be in a hurry, keep cool, Say a lot and for a long time, with patience, again and again, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” A hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand times. The Kingdom of God suffers violence. This is a very exact word “suffers,” instead of “taken hurriedly.”

...

Some spiritual guides give to those who are eager to practice the Jesus prayer not more than twenty or thirty prayers, out of fear of delusion. If so, the most deceived person was Saint Paul the Apostle, who said, “Pray without ceasing.” Prayer is a natural life of people; it is like breathing; and otherwise, the absence of prayer is unnatural for our life.

The Holy Fathers differentiated between the notions of prayer and psalmody, calling the Jesus prayer a prayer. People cannot sing psalms without ceasing, but they can keep the noetic prayer in their heart. This is what the Apostle was talking about, “Pray without ceasing.”

On Athos, there still exists the tradition of vigilance, when the Service is held for a long time on weekdays. It is mostly served at night and on holidays, it may last for ten, twelve, and even fourteen hours without breaks. It is impossible to keep one's mind in full attention for such a long time. What is the point of vigilance? At this time, monks practice patience and long patience. Patience is a foundation of prayer. It can be compared to a house having a stone foundation instead of a sand one. If you lay your prayer on a foundation of patience, you will have it both in comfortable circumstances and in peril. This is why you should not despair, if attention does not accompany your prayer. You practice patience at this time. You do not give it up and do not become desperate, but keep doing it with humility, again and again, laying a foundation, which is patience.

In a feat, thoughts exhaust us more than anything else. In fact, our physiology has reserves. But a thought begins to go into hysterics, "There, inside of you, everything is bad. This is the end, a disaster!" The Jesus prayer gives us the means. Our mind remains in our heart and repeats, "Jesus, Jesus..." disregarding the thoughts, just not paying them any attention. Attention is occupied by Christ, and there is no place in Him for

anything else. This is like a full vessel, with no more empty space in it where one cannot add anything.

Moreover, endurance of a burden during prayer is a proof of our selfless doing. We pray not because this brings pleasure to us. It should be pleasant for us that we endure work for Christ's sake without asking for a reward, neither at a certain moment nor in a special amount. However, in the end, He always gives back in abundance. God does not give His Grace by some measure, but He gives it to the humble and selfless. Besides, the burden wears out our emotionality, which interferes with prayer and incites our sensitivity, giving birth to emotions and false states, which we trust and thus come into delusion. The whole science of asceticism presupposes the wearing out of emotionality and training of patience.

...

Setting about the Jesus prayer, we start to practice its verbal form as much and as often as we can. In the beginning, because of saying it without ceasing, we become tired, but in time, it becomes habitual and natural. However, those who practice only the verbal prayer, come to

realize that this form of the prayer does not release one from thoughts. It is not a spell acting by itself. Thoughts remain and exist simultaneously contaminating our heart. The Lord compares this state to whitewashed tombs, which are beautiful on the outside, but full of bones and decay inside. An external feat is not enough. Christ expects the purity of heart from us. Trying to answer to His call for inward purity, we begin our struggle with thoughts and at a certain moment, come to desperation. A thought is light like ether; we cannot catch or stop it. It passes through our fingers, slips away and does its dirty business. It seems impossible to catch. Often in such a case, saints do not advise entering into a relationship with it. They say, we should ignore it, but do not explain how. There is no other way rather than to go into your cell, close the door, and leave the thought outside. By cell, we mean our mind; we should direct it from the outside into the inside of us, into our heart, and keep it there, repeating the prayer, “Jesus, Jesus...” The thought hovers about, but cannot enter inside, as Christ is there, Whom it is afraid of.

How do those, who have not found their place in the heart, find salvation? They are saved by

weeping over their imperfection. But if the Lord shows you the means through experienced people, it will be a sin to ignore this. At a certain moment, you understand that the verbal prayer is not enough and that there is a more perfect form of it, a noetic prayer, which stops your mind and prevents it from flowing in imagination. But this stop should be in a definite place, in the realm of our heart, in a place where our “I” is. This is the place where Christ dwells too. The Kingdom of Heaven is within you. When we say the verbal prayer, we begin to drive it to the realm of our heart. Do not confuse this to descending into one’s heart. This is a very important moment. The entrance to the Kingdom is not in our power. This is boldness. The Lord opens this door from the inside to the outside when He decides this is appropriate. Our mind is simply staying by the doors and knocking gently, “Jesus, Jesus...” Humbly and patiently. But it stays right here and says these very words, “Jesus, Jesus...” Only the door separates us, and thoughts like wild animals feel this and only the boldest and angriest of them dare to approach. Thus, we are not completely safe here. We win now and lose then. Nevertheless, this is a means and we win, at least in part.

The Lord takes His time behind the door, so that our every failure makes us more perfect in our humility and clear vision of ourselves. Lord, I am nothing by myself, I badly need You, Who is the Savior. The Lord says, “But on this one, will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit.” And also, “There shall by no means enter the Kingdom anything that defiles.”

Even though a noetic prayer is not perfect yet, it is a means, which gives a real result for those who practice it. If you only cried over accepting thoughts before, now you can do something about this. You received the means and at the same time, accepted the responsibility. If you have a means, then you should use it and attain a result.

In order to practice the Jesus prayer, it is not enough to repeat it aloud all day long. It is good to have a stable rule, when you retreat to your cell and, saying it in silence, try to direct your mind into the realm of your heart to stop it there. As a rule, our mind makes an advancing, linear, movement outwards, from thought to thought, from image to image. We change the direction inwards, stop our mind in the area of the physiological heart, in its upper part and stay in

this place inconspicuously and imagelessly, repeating, “Jesus, Jesus...” We do not imagine Him, nor do we expect any feelings, but we simply say, “Jesus, Jesus...” And that’s it. This will not work immediately and quickly. Many people cannot even understand what “inconspicuously” and “imagelessly” mean. Everything comes gradually and naturally. Just be patient and humble.

...

Mostly the noetic prayer is our measure, which we attain by our technique and zeal. Beyond this is the concern of Grace. Standing by the heart is in our power; entrance into the Kingdom is possible only through Grace, it is in God’s hands. Do not try to fall boldly over yourselves, you will either strain yourself or become deceived taking an illusion for reality. I do not say perfection is impossible. It is not in our power. Only God is perfect and we cross the borders of the natural only when we unite with the supernatural through Grace. It is called deification, the union of the two natures, Divine and human ones. Venerable people repeated, in part, the phenomenon of the God-Man, Who united in Himself the two natures, which existed neither together, nor separately. This is the

essence of being venerable – the union with God. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. He dwells in me and works miracles, makes supernatural things.

...

We not only may, but have to use the noetic prayer, the purpose of which is the attainment of purity and chastity of our heart. Our soul is like a bride, who preserved chastity for the union with her Divine Bridegroom. They will be one. The Lord says about this, “You are gods.” Not by ourselves, but in union with Him. In reverse, separation with God, degrades us to the level of beasts.

...

Sometimes we come across the opinion that the practice of the Jesus prayer is related to temptations. This opinion is both subjective and objective. The point is that Christianity itself presupposes the bearing of a cross. “Whoever desires to be My disciple, take up his cross, and follow Me.” We declare war on our egotism, and this is very serious. I am not speaking about evil spirits now. It is enough to try to vanquish yourself. This is sweat and blood, and this is to death. Our egotism contradicts and resists

slightly at first, but then it comes to the state of anger and madness. This is not a game, this is war, a real war, where it hurts and it is dangerous, deadly dangerous. Those Christians who have come here to play, remind me of those thoughtless people, who spread a white cloth on the battlefield. They serve the table, choose the tableware, and put flowers, while missiles fly around them and dirt and blood with pieces of human bodies scatter in the air. One can say, I aggravate, yes, one may, but it seems like this to those who saw this only in movies or read in books.

You may surrender and live a relatively quiet and tranquil life. But if you choose freedom, you will pay a high cost for it. Might one be saved without extreme sacrifices following, so to say, the middle path, which is relatively moderate and calm? No doubt, one might be saved in this case. But only saved. There is a case described in Father Sophrony Sakharov's book about St. Silouan of Athos. It happened on Athos to one Russian hermit, before whom Christ appeared and said He would save everyone who called His name at least once in their life. To which the Father answered wondering, "If the way to salvation is so simple, then why do we strive here in asceticism,

impinging on ourselves and mortifying ourselves extremely.” The Lord said, “Those who called Me will simply find salvation, but you, who performed a great feat for My sake will be in a close proximity to My Glory.”

Christianity is full of voluntary limitation and overcoming of our “I want,” “I won’t,” etc. This is not easy even in an external feat. However, the struggle for internal purity is more savage. A big price supposes a big acquisition. Being simply saved and being on Christ’s breast is a big difference. This is the difference, which may turn into hell.

...

There is a widely spread opinion about the middle path, which presupposes caution and prevents people from delusion. The Church speaks a lot about the danger of delusion. However, this same Church, in its hymnography and hagiographical literature, always glorifies the overwhelming feats of the saints, which extend beyond the scope of everyday life. The Lord Himself, in the parable about the talents, judges very strictly the cautious servant, who dug God’s talent in the ground. God,

Whose name is Love becomes angry with him and judges him.

Caution is blessed by God. But caution is not a paralysis, neither is it a stop. It is a movement forward. What is the point of caution? It is in distrust of yourself. In this case, you will take counsel from someone. A person who takes counsel is in relative safety. If you practice the Jesus prayer and cannot find an experienced guide, you may take into account the outside point of view of a simply kind and faithful priest or even a spiritual friend. Your damage will be seen immediately from the outside. Usually, those people who suffer from delusion become argumentative, stubborn, and angry when they encounter other opinions.

If you are a monk and entered into the mystery of obedience to a good, spiritual guide, this is the golden, the most favorable, state for the Jesus prayer, the state of having no concerns. Surely, it is so, if you take the course of obedience correctly. Obedience saves you in two ways. First, it teaches you humility, in other words, to accept any situation peacefully. Peace is the first principle of prayer. Second, God loves the humble and gives them His Grace. Grace means a life of prayer. A

prayer without Grace is like a beautiful doll, which comes to life only through the Holy Spirit.

Of course, in the science of noetic prayer, it is better to take counsel from a person who knows this art through his or her own experience. If you have not found such a person yet, first, you should keep seeking, second, try, observing the conditions. Start from the beginning and not from the end, that is, initially there should be verbal prayer, a lot of it and for a long time; when it becomes habitual, say it in your mind, keeping it in the area of your heart, but do not enter it. This will be your measure. But this is already a lot, believe me. The rest is the realm of Grace, which is not in our power. Attention is already a big deal, and then you will have more and more of it.

...

Sorrows make us experienced, humble, and in addition, partially God-like. What do I mean? If God is love and one of the main qualities of love is sacrifice, then practicing sacrifice in asceticism, I am striving after God-likeness in quality. If, as Saint Paul the Apostle says, love does not seek its own, then in the mystery of obedience, I chop away my will for Christ's sake and enter into God-

likeness. The Lord answers to my sincerity and gives me His Grace with love, which works miracles with me.

...

There is one and a major goal in the Jesus prayer – Christ. All the rest is about something else. We do not ask for something earthly, though, we have the right to it, “Ask, and it will be given to you,” neither do we seek the state of placidity, enlightenment and comfort. We seek Christ, literally. If this is so, we should be ready to accept Him as He is. He took the pain of the whole world upon Him and He is outside of time, in other words, this did not happen two thousand years ago, but this is happening now and ever. The Lord encompasses the whole Adam, not only yourself, but also your opponent, all those people who are not close and even unpleasant to you. “They all may be one.” You cannot tell Him, “Only You may come in and leave them behind the door.” Are you ready to accept Christ, Who brings pain, discomfort, and, if we say it plainly, even death with Him?

Yes, He defeated it, but we did not stop dying. People come through its gates, but it cannot entrap a Christian there.

Humanism proclaims human life as the most precious thing. While Christianity cherishes Life in Christ, for which one may die physiologically.

Christianity is painful. Christianity is scary. Christianity is not comfortable.

Christianity is beautiful. It is beautiful because it overcomes all the sorrow of the world. However, to overcome it, one should experience it.

In order to sell one's estate, one should know the price of the pearl, how precious it is and incomparable to anything. Knowledge comes through experience. One cannot have an understanding of the Kingdom without entering it. Here we know God in part, but there we will know Him as He is. Nevertheless, this "in part" should become your objective experience. Not your reflection, but experience. We should practice this instead of sympathizing with someone else's stories about this. The first advice concerning the practice of the Jesus prayer is practicing it. The understanding of it only comes through experience, as it is impossible to explain

many moments rationally, one should live them. It is impossible to explain what love is, simply impossible. One can only experience love and there is no other way. The same goes for Grace.

This is inexplicable, but real. God is impossible to prove, He should be experienced. The Jesus prayer begins with a word, but then it comes into life. “Jesus, Jesus...” This is not simply a name. He is Himself in every name. This is inexplicable, but very real. A mystery is not understood, it is experienced. Even though its nature often remains a secret. I do not understand this, but I experience this. Amen.

Saint Gregory the Theologian said very beautifully and precisely about the Mystery of Faith. Faith is not our inquisitive conviction, but it is a conviction, which comes through objective experience that is not a subject to rational explanation.

...

Deification is a unique state when two natures unite in antinomy, the Divine nature, which is perfect and limitless and the human nature, which is limited. The perfect unites with imperfect and partially communicates the latter its supernatural

essence through this connection. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. A human becomes God with no initial capital. His or her mind becomes the mind of God and is enlightened. The heart partially becomes the heart of Christ, which is able to love its enemies. When the disciples suddenly realized all the depth of the Lord's teaching, one of them exclaimed wondering, "Who is able to bear this?" and got a short and very definite answer, which encompasses the essence of all spiritual life. These things are impossible with men. With God everything is possible. To become enlightened and clairvoyant, our mind should not practice philosophy as an earthly wisdom, but it should practice prayer, through which it is connected with Christ. Christ is the Truth.

Christ is the Wisdom. He is the essence of everything. The Being of the world. Everything is either Christ-centered or insane. It becomes insane as the result, both personal and social. One day the world will come to its end not because God will destroy it, but because humankind, without God, will become insane and will destroy itself. As the Holy Fathers say, during the last times, people will be so much damaged that

seeing a normal person they will say, “Look, this person is insane!” and chase him.

...

The human mind becomes very distracted and lives in dualism. At a certain moment, I come to realize that my mind and I are two different subjects. This is schizophrenia. In order to become convinced in it, try to organize your thoughts. It is sad... However, this is not the whole problem. Even if you manage to put your thoughts in order, you will nonetheless be able to think rationally. But the wisdom of God created us with room to grow. We should come into the realm of the Spirit, otherwise, we will be mere animals, who have pack loyalty, a sense of seeking a couple and having offspring, and who will even be able to die for one another. This is very noble, but they do not have a sense of God or intuition of the supernatural. We can develop our intellect and heart as an organ of the senses, but we will not sense God at all. The greatest musician or scientist may be an atheist, because something is closed in them. This something belongs to a different nature in comparison to intellect or senses. The blind man from the Gospel was a human to the full extent, except for his vision. When the Lord heals

him, He does this gradually. “What can you see?” “I see men like trees.” Then his vision becomes better and better. When people practice the Jesus prayer, they go through similar stages. Our mind, where we try to keep Christ as the Truth, gradually is enlightened and comes to see not only earthly coarse moments, but also their spiritual meaning. We come to see not only subjects and events, but also their essence given to them by God. The mind becomes clairvoyant, it dwells beyond time, because God dwells beyond time, and the person comes to see through God, now, and ever, and unto the ages of ages. In other words, to see both the past and the future. Moreover, the person lives in this Supernatural state naturally and simply, as his or her mind is simple and emotionless at this time.

...

A good spiritual father, a guide of the Jesus prayer, does not only give his disciples the theory of the noetic prayer, but also communicates to them his spirit. No theory will come to life without the spirit. When a disciple asked Saint Poemen the Great, “Father, what should I do? Give me your advice” the Father answered, “Do what I do.” That is, stay by my side and you will have the same

spirit as I do. We should understand one important thing. “Jesus, Jesus...” is not information, it is the Holy Spirit. Do not approach the Jesus prayer intellectually. Our mind is not intellect, it is deeper and subtler. Intellect is a too coarse tool. It is like a bull in a china shop that ruins everything in its pursuit of understanding. When we try to catch a subtle wave of the Holy Spirit and hold it tight, this resembles tuning a radio. At such a moment we hardly breathe, we hold our breath like a tightrope-walker who needs to switch off his mind in order to become concentrated only on the rope. His mind might distract him and he might lose his balance.

...

During the noetic prayer, one’s mind should be very simple. There should only be “Jesus” and nothing more. At this time, even repentance might interfere. It will bring recollections, images, feelings, or, in other words, complexity. Only Christ and nothing else. “Jesus, Jesus...” If this is pure and simple, Repentance will come through Him as an enlightenment and revelation about yourself. This will be incomparably deeper and more precise and sincere than your own repentance. This will be a repentance in the Spirit.

Your worthlessness will become revealed and acute compared to the sainthood of Christ. You will not have to simulate tears artificially. You will simply not be able to stop them. Moreover, and more importantly, there will be no theater and hypocrisy as Christ is a great pureness. We may think about our sins before the Jesus prayer for a while, but during the prayer, we leave nothing, except “Jesus.” Here we do not think about anything. We live Him and only Him, and everything else is through Him.

...

Often people ask how to pray for the others during the Jesus prayer. If you get the habit of an imageless and simple prayer, the person you pray for will pass through your Jesus prayer as a simple dot, without the accompanying features and descriptions, and all humankind will be perceived at such moments as the multitude of dots, but also briefly and precisely, as the Lord encompassed the whole Adam in Himself. The same way we all were in God’s mind before the creation, we existed as an idea, having not dissipated in separate dots yet.

...

The Holy Fathers Hesychasts, who practiced the Jesus prayer, through the Grace of God, entered the state of contemplation and saw God as light. This Light was uncreated, pure, and had no shape. God is Light and there is no darkness in Him. Christians often understand this phrase only in the context of morality. But the Lord here speaks literally about the Uncreated Light. And again we face the two opposite notions: the Divine darkness and the Divine Light. The Divine darkness is an allegory of incomprehensibility and apophaticism of God's nature, Who, out of His mercy, comes to meet people and is perceived as the Uncreated Light. However, this meeting is experienced by a person only in a state of synergy. In order to see God, Who acts towards you, you need to bring back your ability to see, which is gained through long, sincere and stable ascetic feats. To come into the Light, one needs to immerse into darkness.

We perceive this created world through the five natural senses. When we strive after the Uncreated Light, we cut off everything created and rational. The ability to see, hear and feel stops consciously during the Jesus prayer. A person

immerses into the darkness of his heart and almost dies rationally. At this point of the dying of our creation the Lord suddenly begins to act.

Approaching this point of death presupposes one important condition. Repentance. That is, through the Grace of God, on immersing into the darkness of our inner person, , being in the state of presence of the Holy Spirit, we begin to see clearly and objectively the depth of our damage and sinfulness. The deeper we immerse, the more acute our repentance and cry are. This cry comes close to desperation, deep pain and even death. At this moment, God comes. Not like darkness, but like the Uncreated Light. This is an indefeasible law of the unceasing prayer. A deep repentance. But I repeat one more time, this Repentance comes from the Holy Spirit, not from ourselves.

The second important detail. The Lord lets us approach the point of desperation for us to have the acute feeling of the necessity of Him, the Savior. “Stay on the edge of hell and do not fall into despair.” This is the only and indefeasible condition of the unceasing prayer. If you proceed with the Jesus prayer and are afraid of temptations, you had better not start it. “If you

want to be My disciple, take your cross.” The Lord says very definitely and explicitly. The cross on the chest of a Christian speaks about our consent to dying for Christ’s sake, to the perfect love, even to death. Having the Uncreated Light presupposes a deep immersion into the darkness, the darkness of repentance causing pain and death, after which comes the Divine Light, the Light of Life and joy.

If we speak about the main condition from our side, repentance is the main thing in the noetic Jesus prayer. The Repentance in the Holy Spirit, not in good emotions. What I mean is, repentance should accompany the prayer, and the prayer should accompany repentance. We should have nothing of our own, except for sincerity, but it also depends on the Spirit. “Jesus, there is no me. You are everything.” This is why we say very shortly and simply, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...” Nothing else. When a person has deeply experienced the vision of his or her worthlessness and spiritual ugliness, they will say sincerely and repentantly, “I do not want anything of mine. I want only God. God as the Light.”

It is permissible to talk about something high without the fear of damage only if you see your worthlessness. Christianity by itself is very high

and unreachable. Nevertheless, if this highness makes us exclaim sincerely, “Who is able to bear this?” then we receive the major answer, “With men this is impossible. With God everything is possible.” This is why everything in the Jesus prayer is simple: there should be nothing of ours, only “Jesus, Jesus...” A lot of this, for a long time, without ceasing, throughout our life. “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...”

...

In conclusion, I would like to summarize briefly. The Jesus prayer is not a prayer of request, thanksgiving, repentance, etc. The noetic prayer is a prayer of unification, the purpose of which is the union with God. He becomes a part of you. You become a part of Him. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. This is the main thing. This is the final goal. But everything starts with smaller things. We have walked far away from our Parent’s house, this is why our coming back will require a long and stable effort. Start with a verbal prayer. If it should ideally become unceasing, say it more and more, so it becomes your habit and a part of your intuition. It should be like this: someone wakes you up in the middle of the night and the first thing you say half asleep is,

“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” Do not be afraid of inattentive prayer on this stage. This is not a sin. Attention will come later, through compulsion to it. Here I tell you, the compulsion should be gentle, without boldness, excessive passion, and anger. All this will spasm you and you will become hard, brittle, and non-functional. You should say gently, humbly, and patiently, again and again, “Jesus, Jesus...” If you become distracted, do not be hysterical, but at once, say simply and gently, “Jesus, Jesus...” Do not let satan make you angry. When people become angry, they lose their balance. Be patient, say it again and again. There should be much verbal prayer. Believe me, this is your experience, the quantity will turn into quality, if you are sincere and patient.

The next moment, when verbal prayer will become your habit, practice it in your mind. What does it mean? During your attentive prayer, try to escape logical and visual thinking turning it into imageless and irrational. In other words, your mind should change its direction from the forward, into the width of space, from thought to thought, from image to image, to the inside of you, to the place where your heart is. Stop there, in the imagelessness, complete darkness, silence,

and say, “Jesus, Jesus.” This short phrase does not move forward there, but it moves around the circle, one changing another.

Your mind, which is used to information, will be bored at first, but then it will get used to it, moreover it will gain more and deeper in Christ. I have been serving Liturgy for almost thirty years already. It is always the same, but it never bores me. We read the Gospel our whole life long, we know it well, but it never bores us. Every time it sounds new because of the spiritual depth of its text. The same is with the short Jesus prayer. It will reveal itself to you as an endless treasure. It does not consist of the richness of information, but the richness of the Spirit. Drive your mind to the place where your heart is and stay there in silence.

I repeat once again, do not break into your heart either with your stubbornness or with skill. This is not in your power, but this is boldness. Only God opens the Door to the Kingdom. Stand humbly and patiently by the gates and gently tap, “Jesus, Jesus.” This is what you can do. Be content with this. Besides, ceasing your attention by saying the prayer inside of you is a good means against thoughts. You should get used to it, and

everything will work. This way, little by little, your heart will become chaste and pure from sin and the Bridegroom might come there. A chaste soul is a Bride of Christ, who preserves her chastity for the Bridegroom, for uniting with Him. A soul should be not only chaste, but modest. The Bridegroom Christ says, “But on this one, will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit.” This is why you should in no way be proud of your chastity. Chastity has no Grace without modesty. The through line of your doing should be the thought, “Everything I managed to do was with God’s help. Without Him I am nothing, a zero.”

Remember, prayer is work; this is why you need to practice patience. Nothing will work without it. One may be patient only if he endured something. Do not be afraid of temptations. They temper you and make you strong. Only patience is not enough. We need a strengthening and inspiring Grace. Draw it from the Sacraments of the Church, in the Eucharist and confession. Follow the way of obedience. God loves the obedient and gives them His Grace. Do good. This is a blessed work too.

One more simple piece of advice. In order to learn the prayer, you should simply begin to practice it.

The Lord will help you, unless you do everything for yourself. Do it for Him, do it self-forgetfully, without expecting and bargaining any spiritual states and gifts. The most precious gift is to say simply in your heart, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...” Christ is the sweetest Word!!!