



WEEK THIRTEEN

SPF: Say Prayers Frequently

As descendants of Adam and Eve, we have inherited the reality of a fallen world. One of the basic truths we accept as Orthodox Christians is that we are sinners. This is important to acknowledge. The epistle of 1 John: 1:8-9 states, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So, we don't despair! We frequently confess our sins to be forgiven and cleansed—to lead lives of continuous repentance. And *repentance* implies the firm decision to move from darkness to light.

Every time the Lord's Prayer is offered, we ask God to "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." That is, we humbly come to God to be forgiven of our sins and we, in turn, display a divine characteristic when forgiving persons that have sinned against us. Therefore, asking for forgiveness while forgiving others is a fundamental trait of Christians. There is a natural link between confessing and forgiving. When we confess our sins, we acknowledge our tendency to sin and understand the need for God's philanthropic mercy.

Psalm 50 (51) is the great prayer of repentance for Orthodox Christians. It is attributed to King David, who composed it after falling into sin. His cry for God's mercy is also ours. For this week, add Psalm 50 (51) to your family's prayer time.

Dive In: Go to Confession

The sacraments of the Church are offered to Orthodox Christians as transformative, life-giving manifestations of God's abundant grace. Unfortunately, many of us avoid the sacrament of Confession out of unfounded fears of shame or punishment. When we seek forgiveness through the sacrament of Holy Confession, we convey a sincere desire to be reconciled with God and the rest of His creation. The hope of confession is to bring about repentance—a conscious change from sinful behavior.

If going to Holy Confession is not a regular practice for you and your family members, take some time to prayerfully consider its implementation. As adults—and parents—we are the primary models of the faith to children. It is, not only, beneficial for children to see their parents seek forgiveness; it is entirely critical for their healthy formation. With a priest's guidance, determine when it is appropriate for younger can receive the sacrament. As a leader of your family, take the steps for your family's spiritual development.

RESOURCES:

Fr. Alexander Goussetis, Director of the Center for Family Care, gives an interview to OCN on introducing children to Confession:

<http://myocn.net/children-and-confession/>

A "Be the Bee" installment from Y2AM on the importance of Confession:

<https://www.goarch.org/-/confessi-1>

An article from goarch.org on preparing for Confession:
<https://www.goarch.org/-/preparation-for-holy-confession>

Take pictures, and don't forget to share with us!

#soakuptheSON

Vitamin D: "The Rich Traveller"

Into a remote and beautiful mountain village came an unusual stranger for his summer vacation. He was a very rich man. He was travelling alone, and, being quite tired, he wanted find to find a place to stay and rest. He had the intention of rewarding the people who could give him a quiet and pleasant stay. Since he had countless riches, he wanted to give his cordial hosts a present that they had never even dreamed of.

He saw what seemed to be a beautiful house situated on a wonderful spot and decided to ask for shelter there. He knocked on the door, but when it was opened and he was invited to come in, he instinctively shrank away. An unbearably foul-smelling air reached him from inside. What was the matter? The home of these people and their pigsty were under the same roof. Without even mentioning the reason for his visit, the traveller excused himself and went back out into the yard.

He went along the clear river, which was running through the village. Close by was another beautiful, newly built house, which attracted his attention, and he decided to knock at its door. However, the owner of this home was a very cruel man. When he saw a stranger approaching the gates, he set his dogs on him and did not even let him come into his yard.

The traveller sought shelter in a third house as well. The people there invited him kindly, and he went inside. But after he saw that everything in this home was lying around in disorder, covered in dust and soot, and buried in waste and cobwebs, he decided that he would not be able to find the longed-for peace.

By that time, he was so tired that he decided to stay in the next, fourth house no matter what its condition. But there, besides the untidiness and the dirt, he noticed something else. There were signs of bedbugs on the walls, and he could not stand the parasites. Also, fleas crawled all over him, so he hurried to get out of there, too.

In this way he went about the whole village, but he could not find a clean home where he could rest peacefully. He wondered how these people, who lived in such a beautiful mountain country, could abandon their houses so. A small river ran through the village. Creeks spouted out from many places in the steep and curvy streets. In the square and in other places in the village there were spouts and fountains from which abundant water gushed out. It was clear to the traveller that the filth in the village houses was not due to the lack of water, but exclusively to the negligence of the owners.

At the end of the village, exhausted, he dropped by a small house in which, as it turned out, lived a good housewife. There he was met with great cordiality and with friendly, smiling faces. The moment he entered one of the rooms, he noticed that everything there was simple, but clean and well ordered. The windows were shining with cleanliness. There were no cobwebs in the corners. The boards of the floor were recently cleaned. The air in the room was fresh. It was evident that the fragrance of the near fields and forests was often allowed to come into the house through the open windows.

The traveller sighed with relief and stayed in this home. At last he had found a quiet, pleasant place to rest. It was there that he left his magnificent gift.

Dear readers, have you asked yourselves: if our Saviour were to come, He Who is bringing the greatest gift—His heavenly grace with which He makes our souls happy and saves them—and if He were to seek shelter for Himself in our souls, where could He find a place fit for rest? St. Macarius of Egypt says: "Just as God has created the heavens and the earth for man to inhabit, so He has created the body and the soul of man to be His abode, that is why the Apostle says, His *house we are*" (Heb. 3:6)...

But who could say of his spiritual home that it is in full order and that he can welcome the heavenly King?

We are all more or less unworthy of the Redeemer coming from heaven. But here, He is knocking on our doors (cf. Rev. 3:20). He Himself longs to come into us, because we are created for Him and without Him we are infinitely unhappy. He is coming to bring His heavenly gift to everyone.

Is there a way for us to become worthy of Him again? With great joy we must say: There is! This way is Confession!... Through Confession, the windows of the soul are opened for the fragrance and the freshness of God's grace to come through them. Through Confession, all confused thoughts and ideas, all chaotic feelings and desires of the heart are once again put in order. At last, through Confession the soul is adorned, so that it becomes fit to accept the most marvelous guest—Jesus Christ.

-condensed from *The Forgotten Medicine: The Mystery of Repentance*, by Archimandrite Seraphim Aleksiev

