



# HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH

THROUGH THE CROSS JOY HAS COME INTO ALL THE WORLD

Rev. Fr. Christopher Foley  
frc@holycrossoca.org

645 Greensboro Rd., High Point, NC  
336-688-9820

www.holycrossoca.org

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## ON POSITIVE THINKING - PART TWO

*"For perverse thoughts separate men from God" (Wis 1:3)*



One afternoon, I went to visit the Elder. At the fence of his cell stood a man about thirty years old, waiting for him to open the door. When I arrived, Father Paisios opened his window and asked who it is. I replied:

- It's me, Father, and one layman, I said (and I told him his name).

- Tell the layman to leave, he replied.

Then, the layman said beggingly:

- Father, I really wish to see you.

The Elder answered reproachfully:

- Go, because you upset me as you only trust your own way of thinking and do not listen to what I tell you. Why are you coming here wasting your time?

And he told him to go away. Then, he came and opened the door for me to come in.

- He is a real burden, Father Paisios told me. He does not listen to my words. He comes, ask questions and leaves; after a short while, he comes back and asks me the same things over and over again. This happens because he always listens to his own thoughts; therefore, he forgets what I tell him or does not understand a word.

There was another young man who relied completely on his own thoughts and was led astray. One day, he visited

Father Paisios, who told him:

- Do not listen to your thoughts, because you will end up losing your mind. Be careful, you have a very good machine, but its wheel faces the wrong direction. You have to turn it to the right direction, where the good thoughts are. Only you, yourself, can do this along with the help of God. Nobody else can do it for you, as you are free and self-dependent. You turn the wheel and your spiritual father will show you the direction.

One of the monks, who resided in the desert of Mount Athos, considered himself a saint and thought that there was nobody else in the world like him. Some monks, who knew him well, asked the Elder if they should take him to see a psychiatrist. Elder Paisios told them:

- This kind of people cannot be benefited by doctors; the monk will only make a fool of himself in front of laymen. The doctor will prescribe some pills, which might be of some help in case of a serious condition, but just for a short period of time. Someone else should put the medicine in his food and show him spiritual love and try to correct his thoughts. His problem is a spiritual one; it is rooted in his ego and his excessive love and trust in his own way of thinking. There is nothing worse than to listen to and trust one's own thoughts.

At this point, Elder Paisios stopped and took aside one of the monks. He told him the story of three people who nearly destroyed their lives by trusting their own way of thinking:

a) Once, a young man came here who was obsessed with the thought that he had the smallest head in the world. He believed his head had the size of an orange. I assured him his head had a normal size; as a matter of fact, I told him, it is a little bigger than mine. But the young man was not convinced. Then, I told him:

- Would you like me to bring a string and measure our

heads, so you can see yourself are the way I tell you and not the way your thoughts tell you?

He accepted my suggestion and I brought the string. After measuring our heads, I found that his head was bigger than mine by one inch. But still he was not convinced, so I gave him the string to try himself. Although he also found his head to be a little bigger than mine, he insisted that this was not true; his mind was stuck in his thought, which was telling him that his head is very small. Raising my voice, I scolded him for his disbelief and lack of trust in other people and then I asked him to leave.

b) Once, there was a man who claimed that he heard a bird constantly singing in one of his ears. He was telling everyone about it and as a matter of fact, he used to complain that he could not find peace of mind due to the loud singing of the bird. His relatives did not believe him, since they could not see any bird in his ear; he repeatedly tried to convince them, however, that he was hearing the singing of a bird in his ear. The relatives decided to consult a doctor who was a friend of them. The doctor suggested first to buy a bird in a cage and then call him to come and visit.

After they bought the bird, they called the doctor. When the doctor arrived, they gave him the bird and then told the patient that the doctor is here to examine what causes this singing in his ear. While tactfully holding the bird in his hands, the doctor asked him what is wrong with him. He replied that he was hearing the singing of a bird in his ear. The doctor asked him again to show him his ear.

- Let me see, said the doctor.

While touching his ear, he looked inside it and said:

- Well, of course, there it is, a very small bird stuck inside your ear making you suffer. Hold on for a second, I will remove it. The doctor pretended he was trying to remove it from his ear. Then, he told him:

- There it is. Can you hear anything now?

The man answered happily:

- No, the singing stopped now! Thank you for coming doctor, because this bird was driving me crazy and everybody was making fun of me, as they did not believe a word I was saying.



c) The following incident took place sixty years ago in a monastery on Mount Athos. One of the monks had the illusion that he had become a saint. He used to say:

- I do not need to receive Holy Communion as Christ Himself is inside me.

He wanted to become a martyr, and once he tried to kill himself. The monks decided to lock him up in a room and have one of them look after him. They were very careful not to ever give him any spoon or knife with which he would try "to become a martyr" –according to him, out of his love to Christ- and saw that the food taken to him was ready to

be eaten without having to use any sharp item.

One day, there was a celebration in the monastery and all the monks were offered sardines for lunch. They also gave him a closed tin of sardines which he managed to open up and with its sharp edge attempted to cut his throat. He started screaming from the unbearable pain, and the monk, who was taking care of him, ran immediately to his room. He found him bleeding to death and said to him:

- What are you trying to do?

- I want to become a martyr, so I will be crowned with the laurel of martyrdom. The monk took the tin from his hands and told him:

- You cannot become a martyr, because you cannot stand the pain. You thought you would die instantly by using the tin to cut your throat. According to God's will, your martyrdom is what I am about to do you just now.

After putting a bandage around his neck to stop the bleeding, he brought a leather belt and began beating him hard. He was screaming out of terrible pain and shouting him to stop. The monk, however, was telling him:

- You wish to become a martyr, isn't that so? Then, I will beat you to death!

Thus, he gradually became aware of his own wretchedness and was humiliated, and as a result, he was cured.

Elder Paisios narrated the above three incidents to the monk who had brought along his fellow monk, who thought he was a saint in order to indicate how destructive it is to trust our own thoughts. He further said:

- When laymen listen to and believe in their own thoughts, they lose their minds, whereas monks are filled with illusions. A monk should not take tranquilizers; his medication is humbleness and repentance. This monk lacks both of these virtues. When these will fill his soul again, all his problems will be solved. Sometimes, he went on, when children behave badly towards their parents or insult them, they immediately start to be receptive to the devil's energies and become confused. By cursing or slandering their parents, they give the devil the right to interfere in their lives and control their actions. The same thing happens to monks, when they accept negative thoughts about their elder or the rest of the monks; this way, they give the right to the devil to fight them. When someone trusts his negative thoughts, he tends to disregard other people's advice. He can only listen to someone whom he absolutely trusts- after his own thoughts. For this reason, when he needs help, he can only accept it from the person he trusts the most. Concerning medication, that is tranquilizers, they may be of some assistance to people in serious conditions, that is, those who are filled with illusions, or are on the verge of losing their minds.

If, for example, our fellow man's mental condition is seriously deteriorating, we should give him a certain dose

of medication to stabilize it. At the same time, we must show him love and try to correct his negative thinking and persuade him not to listen to his own thoughts. As his condition is improving, the dose of his medication should also be reduced. This should last for a while.

When the mind of our fellow man moves away from humility, it escapes into a fantasy world. When he takes medication, he stops thinking or imaging things and his fantasy world is limited. Then, he starts feeling sleepy, tired, hungry and generally speaking, he is physically humbled; while he thought he was an incorporeal angel, he now feels like a human being bearing flesh.

“There is no magical therapy that will automatically cure someone, whose mind has gone astray due to his constant preoccupation with his false thinking; there are, however, certain steps to follow in order to recover:

First, and most important, is to realise the state of his own wretchedness. After he realizes it, the second step is to repent, go to confession, and never listen again to the voice of his own thoughts; instead, he must follow the advice of his spiritual father. Thirdly, after he becomes aware of his miserable state of being, he should constantly ask God for His mercy through Jesus prayer, so Christ will help him and His divine grace will return inside him. One can only be cured and saved through humbleness, the only miraculous therapy I know of; only humility can save us.”

“Man is changeable; on one hand, he clings to his good thoughts and on the other, to his negative and devious ones. He does what he likes and whenever he likes, for he has a free and independent will. The same thing applies to divine grace and illusion. Since man is constantly changing, divine grace and illusion come and go respectively.

If one lives in the world of his pride, that is the world of his own thoughts, he is filled with illusions and he is in danger. He must not listen to his thoughts, which try to



push him left and right in order to destroy him; on one hand, they convince him that he is virtuous, nice, a real striver, talented, almost a saint, and on the other, that he is a failure and there is no hope for him to be saved. His thoughts will either create inside him the false belief that he is perfect and thus awaken his pride, or that he is a hopeless loser and fill him with despair. He must ignore both positive and negative thoughts, and always confess them to this spiritual father, and obey whatever he tells him. He should only trust him and not his own thoughts; furthermore, he must believe that he is nothing but a striving soul and constantly ask for God's mercy in his prayers in order for his mind to be cleansed. As long as he humbly thinks of himself, God's grace remains within him and protects him. When he moves away from his humble thoughts and start being preoccupied with what the patriarch or the bishop or the abbot or the monks do or say, then God's grace starts retreating. Therefore, the most important thing for us to look after is to preserve the sense of humbleness in our lives, and thus allow for divine grace to permanently remain within us."

"When our soul lives carelessly without watching over its thoughts, it will consequently fill up with dirty and sly thoughts. As a result, people start developing psychological problems which gradually pile up. Some people, while they are found in this situation and come face to face with the problem itself, they do not realise it, and thus are unable to humbly confess to their spiritual father their fall. Instead, they look for a "secular" solution and consult a psychiatrist, who will inevitably prescribe medication. Pills will not solve the problem, but will temporarily cover it. This is not an effective solution, as once they stop taking their medication, the problem will come to the surface again, and the person will be found in the same miserable condition. The only solution is to become aware of the problem and confess it to a spiritual father and then humbly follow his advice.

In our days, people have lost control over their lives, and they do not know what they are doing. The reason being, that they do not wish to be guided; they want to live undisturbed, following their own free will, which will eventually bring their total destruction. God gave man his freedom and independence to do as he likes, but He also gave him the knowledge, the ability to realise, that he is unable to achieve good acts by solely relying on himself, "... for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5), "If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?" (Lk 12:26). Therefore, when man

uses his freedom and independence without taking into consideration his human weakness, he becomes deceived; he experiences and interprets everything by using his own logic. Instead of God's grace, human logic rules his life, and his mind is in confusion. This is terrible."

"I always give the following advice to people, and I insist that they follow it:

1. To become aware of their problem, in other words, their alienation from God,
2. to repent for this, and
3. humbly go into confession.

Today, people, more than ever, become recipients of the devil's influence and intrusion in their lives, and only if they follow the above mentioned advice they will be safe."

One day, three monks and I visited the Elder. He was constantly telling us that we should have good thoughts in our minds. As a matter of fact, he took the book of the Old Testament and began reading the part which refers to the story of King Darius who threw Daniel in the den of lions (Dan 6:14-18). The Elder commented on the fact that the next day Darius went himself to the den to check if the lions had devoured Daniel, and asked: "... 'O, Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?' Then Daniel said to the king, 'Oh King, live for ever!'... Then the king was exceedingly glad,..." (Dan 6:20-21, 23). Then, he added:

- If Daniel thought negatively, he would have said to Darius: "Shame on you! Not only you threw me into the den of lions, but you have the nerve to ask me if I am fine."

However, he always had positive thoughts, and for this reason God "spoke" to the lions and prevented them from devouring them. The same applies to the three youths, who were unjustly thrown in the burning furnace. They were not set against God, questioning themselves: "Why did God allow us to be thrown into the burning furnace, since we always obeyed His laws?" Instead, they were blaming themselves and glorifying God, saying: "Blessed art though, O Lord, God of our fathers, and worthy of praise; and thy name is glorified for ever and ever. For thou art just in all that thou hast done to us, and all thy works are true and thy ways right and all thy judgments are true. Thou hast executed true judgments in all that thou hast brought upon us and upon Jerusalem, the holy city of

our fathers, for in truth and justice thou hast brought all this upon us because of our sins, for we have sinfully and lawlessly departed from thee, and have sinned in all things and have not obeyed thy commandments; we have not observed them or done them, as thou hast commanded us that it might go well with us.” (Dan. Prayer of Azarius and the Hymn of the Three Children). Did you notice, Elder Paisios remarked, the positive nature of the three youths’ thoughts, which was connected to their humbleness? A good and humble thought can tame the lions, cool the burning furnace and transform it into a heavenly place. We should face our problems with patience, positive thinking and humility, so we may allow for the grace of God to help us.”

*Priestmonk Christodoulos (1998) “Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain”*



### ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Moleben on our property:** We will continue serving a weekly short prayer service on our property in Kernersville. This is a service of supplication (Molieben) that Archbishop Dimitri of blessed memory blessed for the use of parishes in the diocese. Fr. Christopher will be serving it on Friday mornings at 10 AM except where noted in the calendar. Our property is located at 1320 Masten Drive in Kernersville.

**Sisterhood of the Holy Myrrhbearers:** The Sisterhood will meet at 2:00 PM on Saturday, August 25.

**Men’s Group:** There will be a Men’s Group meeting at 7PM on Friday, August 10.

**Order Gift Cards Through Holy Cross!** Scrip cards are available from hundreds of retailers and don’t cost any more than the face value of the gift card. It’s a “free” fundraiser to benefit the Holy Cross building fund! Contact Karen Brudnak-Slate.



### FINANCIAL SUMMARY

July	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$11,325.37	\$12,516.25
Expense	\$8,792.51	\$10,310.18
YTD	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$83,106.68	\$87,613.55
Expense	\$68,245.37	\$73,705.04

Thank you for your generous support!



# HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			<b>1</b> Dormition Fast	<b>2</b> Dormition Fast	<b>3</b> Dormition Fast NO Prayers at the Property	<b>4</b> Dormition Fast 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>5</b> Dormition Fast 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 6:30PM Great Vespers	<b>6 TRANSFIGURATION</b> 8AM Divine Liturgy Dormition Fast	<b>7</b> Dormition Fast	<b>8</b> Dormition Fast	<b>9</b> Dormition Fast	<b>10</b> Dormition Fast NO Prayers at the Property 7PM Men's Group	<b>11</b> Dormition Fast 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>12</b> Dormition Fast 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	<b>13</b> Dormition Fast	<b>14</b> Dormition Fast 7PM Vespers at Dormition GOC in Greensboro	<b>15 DORMITION of the Most Holy Theotokos</b> 8AM Divine Liturgy	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b> 10AM Prayers at the Property	<b>18</b> 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>19</b> 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> 6:00 Parish Council	<b>22</b> 6:30PM Small Compline & Catechism Class	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b> 10AM Prayers at the Property 5PM Open Door	<b>25</b> 2PM Sisterhood 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>26</b> 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b> 6:30PM Small Compline & Catechism Class	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b> 10AM Prayers at the Property	

