

The Jesus Prayer is the traditional practice of ceaseless prayer in the Orthodox Christian Tradition. The standard formula of the Jesus Prayer reads: «Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me» or, «Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, the sinner.» In practice, a variety of forms can be used. The shortest forms are simply «Lord, have mercy».

The Jesus prayer has a biblical foundation. It is based on the combination of two prayers in the Gospel: that of the blind man in Jericho, «Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!» (Luke 18:38), and that of the tax collector, «God, be merciful to me, the sinner!» (Luke 18:13).

The Jesus Prayer is meant to be cultivated ceaselessly, not just during our specified prayer times. We can focus on this prayer while we are doing our ordinary daily tasks of walking, driving, cleaning, cooking, managing children, or anytime, night or day. When this prayer is practiced over time, it can enter into the heart and become what is called «the prayer of the heart.» The immersion into the Holy Name of Jesus, which is a continuation of our baptismal immersion, brings our attention to Christ and Christ, in turn, dwells in us. The prayer warms the heart and becomes an experience of God's Presence.

The idea of «presence» is essential to the Jesus Prayer. However, it deals with a non-iconic or imageless presence of the Lord. St Gregory of Sinai gives this instruction to those who practice the Jesus Prayer: «Keep your intellect free from colors, images and forms.» Our awareness of the presence of Jesus must not be accompanied by any visual concept but must be confined to a simple conviction or feeling. Through the invocation of the name we are united

with Jesus in a direct, unmediated encounter, that is, without any intermediary concept or image. We feel his nearness with our «spiritual senses», much as we feel the warmth with our bodily senses on entering a heated room.

special power of the Jesus Prayer to accomplish the union of the mind and the heart.

In order to bring the mind into the heart, our heart must first be awakened. As Christians we have received the Holy Spirit at our Baptism and Chrismation. As the Holy Spirit dwells in the sanctuary of our heart and is unceasingly praying in us, we ourselves carry within us a constant prayer. But most of us are unconscious of his presence and the prayer which continuously goes on in us. Our heart lies asleep and needs to be awakened to this inner reality. The Jesus Prayer is a powerful means for awakening our heart, enabling us to become aware of the secret indwelling of the Spirit in a conscious way.

It is important to realize that the essential point of the prayer is not the act of repetition in itself, but the One to whom we speak. The prayer is not simply a rhythmic incantation or 'mantra' but an invocation addressed to another person and thus implies a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The Jesus Prayer exists within a certain context which is, first of all, one of faith and repentance. Removed from this context the prayer loses its meaning. The invocation presupposes our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Without this confession of faith there is no Jesus Prayer. Also, repentance implies that we are attempting to live a life «in Christ» and so, aspiring always to be Christ-like.

The aim of the Jesus Prayer, therefore, is not simply the laying aside of all thoughts, but an encounter with Someone. It is not so much prayer emptied of thoughts but prayer filled with the Beloved — our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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THE JESUS PRAYER

As long as the prayer remains in the mind, or in the head, it is incomplete. It is necessary to descend from the head to the heart, to «find the place of the heart.» To be more exact, we must descend with the mind to the heart: to «bring down the mind into the heart.» Our aim is «prayer of the mind in the heart.» It is the

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION IS A SPIRITUAL BAROMETER

From the first chapters of the Book of Genesis with the story of Creation and the Fall of mankind, we know that the source of all illness is sin, the disobedience of God.

Mainly, of course, our illnesses are not the consequence of our personal sins, but rather the consequences of unconscious sin, the sin that is all around us in the world and to which we are subject. Modern science, for example, tells us that many illnesses are the result of bacteria coming from the world and attacking a weakness in our organisms. Such a weakness may be inherited through what we now call genes. Or perhaps that weakness has developed in old age when our organisms have begun to fail as they wear out. Sometimes in such cases the use of medicine or even surgical operations can bring us relief.

On the other hand some weaknesses may be the result of overeating or an unhealthy diet, or the use of alcohol or other drugs, or a lack of physical activity. Or such a weakness may also be the result of a state of mind. For instance, it is well-known how one person gets well more quickly than another. This is the result of willpower, the feeling that we still have something

to do, that there is still something to live for, we still have a purpose in life. 'I can't be ill now, I have no time'. It is



well-known that our mental state controls our physical state and we all know of cases of hypochondria.

In Gospel from Matthew Chapter 9, the cause of the illness of the man who was sick is clearly not bacteria, old age or a poor mental state, but unforgiven sins. Our Lord says to the man: 'Thy sins be forgiven thee', and the man is healed.

It must be said that the cause of many illnesses, both physical and mental, in modern society is exactly

the same as in this case — unforgiven personal sins, since unforgiven sins are extremely common. And they are unforgiven because they are unconfessed, never said at confession and therefore never asked forgiveness for.

Indeed we can consider that the sacrament of confession is like a spiritual barometer which tells us of the state of any society. Among Protestants confession does not exist, although there are Protestants who do ask forgiveness of God and of one another. In Roman Catholic societies confession has all but fallen into disuse, even though it has been given various fashionable names such as 'the sacrament of reconciliation'. And we as Orthodox have nothing to boast of, since many Orthodox too never go to confession, or go once a year, and as a result hardly ever go to communion.

The sacrament of confession is a spiritual barometer because for confession to take place, we need humility, the humility to go before God in front of a witness and confess to God our sins. But if we do not go to confession, we must not expect the divine healing that is necessary in our lives. If we are true believers, then it is for us to go to Christ and be healed by Him through the sacraments that He has given us in His Body, His Church.

ENUMERATION OF SINS DURING BRIEF CONFESSION

We find the following enumeration of sins used for a brief confession in the book on Confession, a series of lectures on the Mystery of Repentance, By Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky):

Idle talk	saying unseemly things
Condemnation of others	inappropriate laughter
Scorn	self-love
Insubordination	love of glory
Pride	love of honour
Envy	gluttony
Anger	love of sensual pleasure
Slander	over-eating
Inattention	drunkenness
Listlessness	attachment to things
Negligence	love of money
Carelessness	vainglory
Resentment and	laziness
Remembering wrong	
Disobedience	acceptance of lustful and impure thoughts
Grumbling	missing church services
Self will	reproaching others
Dozing and sleeping in church	neglect of prayer
Lying	concealing sins at confession

