



Life in the Church

by Father Alexander Elchaninov (1881-1934)

“I have a deep faith” is a platitude on the lips of all conceited, limited people who are weak in faith. The apostles, though they saw Christ with their own eyes and touched Him still prayed: “Increase our faith!” The Gospels state with precision the marks of profound faith: “And these signs shall follow those that believe: in my name they shall cast out demons....they shall lay hands upon the sick and they shall recover” (Mark 26:17-18). “Nothing shall be impossible to you” (Matthew 27:20). And all things, whatever you shall ask for in prayer, believing, you shall receive” (Matthew 21:22). Does this sound like us? We who are so cold, powerless and spiritually weak? Our faith is weak because we are indifferent to the things of God. Can we assert that we love God sufficiently, that our faith is active and fervent? That we love every man as our brother in Christ? That we have attained freedom from anger, meekness and humility? What does our Christianity, then, amount to? Is it not true that the indifference of believers is something far more dreadful than the fact that unbelievers exist?

We know little, and in most cases do not try to find out anything about our church services, about the life of the Church. We should fill this gap and become living members of the Church! Few people today even realize that the so-called “choir” speaks and sings in the name of the entire congregation and that in the early Church there were none of those specially trained professional singers who now perform this duty.” All sang, testifying to their own faith and with a sense of responsibility for the words they uttered. Sometimes we do not even know the words. And how many understand them? When we attend a service in the Church, we seem to sign a letter we have not read, to assume duties which we ignore.

How can we strengthen our life in the Church? We must first love the Truth more than ourselves. We are Orthodox and all the treasures of the Church are at our service—her prayers, her sacraments. Learn to know these treasures, study them and be nourished by them. The direction of a spiritual father—continual contact with him. Frequent resort to the sacraments, careful preparation before receiving them, participation in Church services, prayer at home, the daily reading of the Gospels and religious books, the observance of the Church’s calendar of fasts and feasts, friendship and frequent contact with people who believe and who belong to the Church.

Christianity is not merely a philosophical system, it is a life, a special way of life and this must be studied and lived continuously—literally, every day. To strive towards the knowledge of God is to touch His glory: it is life in God. And to know God is to become like Him. The Church is alive and will live forever! Let us not hang like dry, withered leaves on this ever-living tree!

- from his posthumously published book, *The Diary of a Russian Priest*