

"God is Greater Than Our Hearts"

Here is another installment from the question and answer session with Bishop Atanasije at the Sretinsky Theological Seminary in Moscow:

Q: How does one fight against dwindling zeal for God after several years of monasticism?

A: An experienced nun once told me: "Batiushka, remember your first days, and always go back there." Or as the Fathers said: you still haven't laid the foundation of your salvation. One must go back this way in one's life. Above all, prayer that is sincere, without complexes, and self-judging. The Russians have an inclination to torture themselves, to press themselves – Dostoevsky clearly demonstrated that. That's bad.

One must sometimes forgive oneself – one of the Russians said – one must sometimes forgive one's soul. Always remember the words of John the Theologian: "My children, if your heart condemns you, know that God is greater than your heart" (cf., I Jn 3: 20). Our criterion is not our heart, not our conscience, but God, and so pray to God "Lord, come into me!" sincerely and deeply, and God will help. And if He lingers, then one must be patient: "be patient, Cossack, you'll be an ataman one day!" [A Russian expression.] One must be patient. With patience I waited patiently for the Lord, the Prophet Elias said. In your patience possess ye your souls (Lk 21:19).

Patience is a dreadful power and strength. One must wait for the Lord, and not lose hope. Fr Justin [Popovic] said: hold unto God with gasping, with tears, with desire, sighing in heart. And as long as there is this, it means the Holy Spirit is in us. He will never leave us. Glory to God, to Him, to the Holy Spirit!

Never permit yourself despair or to equate hopelessness with faith or hope. No sin, no situation can be equal to Divine mercy and Divine love. Serbs say, when one anguishes or despairs: "Udri brigu na vesel'e!" -- drop all that and be cheerful. The Serbian people have such a saying.