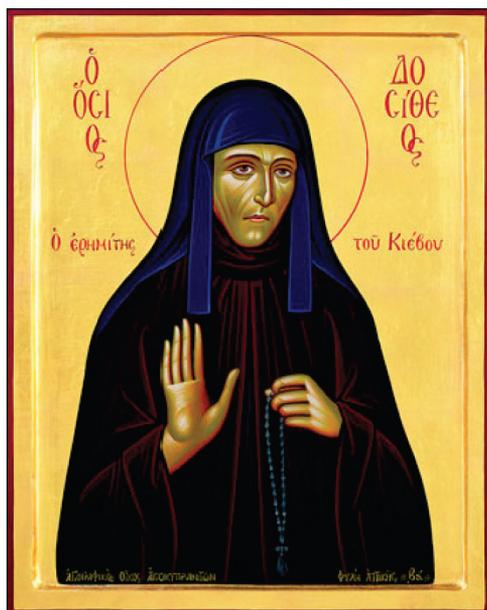


+ Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili

St. Dositheos **The Hermit of Kiev** **1721-1776**



Holy Icon of St. Dositheos

Apolytikion of **St. Dositheos,** **the Hermit of Kiev**

Tone Four

From thy youth, O modest
One, consecrated to God,
Thou didst prove to be as a
Gift from Heaven to the
Church of Christ,
O Dositheos.
Having changed thine
Appearance, and with it
Thy spirit,
Thou didst struggle manfully
Unto the end in a cave.
Wherefore do we honor thee,
Thou boast of Kiev!

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Note

See **Notes** for more detailed facts concerning the words marked by an asterisk (*).

St. Dositheos

The Hermit of Kiev

(1721 - 1776)

Life and Conduct

1. “The Holy Spirit Will Abide In You...”



Our story takes place in eighteenth century Russia. In the 1770s, a young man went to Kiev as a pilgrim. His name was Prochoros Moshnin, and he came from a family of merchants in Kursk. He wanted to dedicate his life to God—to become a monk.

During his pilgrimage to the holy places of Kiev (*), he sought an answer to his prayers from God. Someone advised him to visit the well-known hermit Dositheos, who lived as a recluse in Kitaev near Kiev, in order to seek his spiritual advice: he had a special gift from God.

The young Prochoros visited the recluse. He opened up his heart. The “answer” that he had been seeking from Heaven was finally given to him through the hermit Dositheos:

“Go, child of God, to the Monastery of Sarov and stay there. That place will be to you for salvation. With God’s help, there you will finish your human wanderings on earth. Only, struggle to acquire the unceasing remembrance of God. Continuously call upon His Name, saying: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner!’ Let all of your attention and ascetic labor be turned towards this activity. While you are walking, when you are resting or are standing in Church, have this unceasing prayer on your lips and in your heart. You will find rest in it and will acquire spiritual and bodily purity. Then the Holy Spirit will abide in you. And you will lead your life in all piety and purity. In Sarov, the Superior, Pachomios, leads a God-pleasing life. He follows in the footsteps of our own Anthony () and Theodosios. (*)”*

“The Holy Spirit will abide in you....”

These words convey an essential Christian teaching that we have received from our Lord, Who promised to send the “*Spirit of Truth*,” the “*Living Water*,” to His disciples. This teaching has been transmitted to us by the Holy Apostles, the God-Bearing Fathers, and all of the Saints and Spirit-Bearing Ascetics, who were bearers of the Orthodox Tradition.

That zealot of virtue, Prochoros, placed these God-enlightened words deep into his heart, armed himself with patience, and decided to put them into practice. Many years later, when he himself had become a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit—known henceforth as St. Seraphim of Sarov (*)—he revealed this fundamental teaching in his wonderful conversation with N. A. Motovilov:

“The purpose of the Christian life is the ‘acquisition’ of the Holy Spirit.”

2. The Young Daria



But let us go back to Central Russia, east of Moscow.

In the province of Riazan (*) lived the noble Tiapkin family. It was descended from a Lithuanian cavalier who had been enlisted in the army of St. Dmitry Donskoy (*), the Grand Duke of Moscow, in the fourteenth century, in order to fight against the Tartar invaders.

Throughout the following centuries, the descendants of this noble family also included a large number of important political leaders, provincial governors, diplomats, and councilors.

In 1721, a girl was added to the Tiapkin family. At Holy Baptism, she was given the name of the Holy Martyr Daria, who is commemorated together with St. Chrysanthos on March 19.

Not long before Daria’s birth, her grandmother had dedicated herself to the monastic life. Fulfilling her promise, she became a nun at the Monastery of the Ascension in the Moscow Kremlin, receiving the name Porphyria.

The Grand Duchess Evdokia, wife of the aforementioned St. Dmitry Donskoy, had founded this monastery. This foundress be-

came a nun, and her incorrupt Relics were kept in the monastery's *Katholikon*. She is St. Euphrosyne, who is commemorated on July 7.

When the infant Daria was two years old, her parents went with her to visit the Nun Porphyria. Already at first glance, the grandmother wholeheartedly loved the girl and said to her parents:

"No, I will not let her leave here. I will entrust her to the blessed Princess Euphrosyne. Through her holy prayers and motherly care, she will guide her on the correct path of life."

Of course, it was not at all easy for her parents to leave the infant at the monastery. The Eldress Porphyria, however, insisted. Finally, with God's help, the parents gave their reluctant consent.

3. The Child-Eldress



The luxury and frivolity of her paternal home were now replaced with the simplicity and quiet sobriety of the cell and monastery. These had henceforth become the small Daria's home.

Daria immediately adapted to her new surroundings. She demonstrated a marvelous wisdom uncommon even to adults. She was truly a "child-eldress."

A serious and intelligent child, she dedicated all of her efforts to helping and giving comfort to her venerable and beloved grandmother. At one glance or signal from Eldress Porphyria, she understood immediately what was wanted. She was continuously watchful lest she sadden or displease her.

Quickly, she learned obedience and good conduct. When her grandmother was ill, she spent all day at her bedside, shedding bitter tears. The two were inseparable.

Sometimes the young girl would wake up in the middle of the night and would not see her grandmother in the bed next to hers. Then, weeping, she would search for her. In the dark cell, by the faint light of the vigil lamp, she would see the aged nun praying and making prostrations. The Eldress soothed the girl so that she would not be afraid and urged her to go back to sleep. Daria, however, followed those admirable prayers, and prayed not to fall asleep. She wanted to hear them forever!

With fear of God and great care, the Nun Prophyria taught her granddaughter self-condemnation and humility, temperance, and love for mankind. That blessed seed was welcomed into the good earth of Daria's innocent soul, and it brought forth abundant spiritual fruit.

Her innocent heart grew fervent and alighted with zeal and love for God. At the first ringing of the bells, she would bring her grandmother her *mantia* and prayer rope, urging her to hurry so that they would not be late for the Divine Liturgy. In Church she was quiet. She followed the movements of the monks... prayed before the holy Icons... made prostrations....

After the Liturgy, she eagerly helped the Eldress Porphyria, who would give aid to the beggars standing outside the door of the Church. When her grandmother would perceive that Daria was trying to avoid some unkempt beggar in rags, she would invite the poor person to her cell. She would then make the young girl serve at the table. In this way, Daria learned to love the poor and to share her food with them.

At the monastery, the "child-eldress" learned to read and memorize prayers. She also learned to read from spiritual books for the benefit of her grandmother, who would listen with tears of repentance in her eyes.

Every afternoon, before their usual prayer rule in their cell, the blessed Daria would confess to the Nun Porphyria her sins and misconduct of the day that had passed....

4. A Time of Trials



Seven years passed in this holy atmosphere.

Daria, that small angel, at nine years old would now have to go through the first great sorrow of her life. She would be tried as gold in the furnace. The outcome would show that she was truly spiritual gold, a precious vessel of God, predestined for a greatly virtuous life, incomparably more lofty than the mediocrity of the world.

In 1730, her parents came to the Monastery of the Ascension and announced their decision: Daria would have to return home in order to be educated as befitted her noble origins.

The six-year ordeal of the “child-eldress” was already beginning....

The new environment of the Tiakin family’s luxurious dacha was painfully different from the blessed environment of the monastery! Everything seemed strange to the nine-year-old angel.

She had been accustomed to austerity, humility, and temperance. Here, to the contrary, a spirit of indulgence, contradiction, laxity, and abundance reigned. She had been accustomed to rising early in the morning. Here, everyone stayed in bed until late. The quiet and calm of the monastery had been replaced by loud laughter, shouting, leisure, and unimaginable frivolity. They went to Church only on Sundays and Great Feasts. There was no time for prayer. And as for spiritual reading, there was not so much mention as made of it.

It was not possible for the enlightened Daria to adapt to this worldly environment. And her parents did not conceal their dissatisfaction with their daughter’s attitude.

She was quiet, humble, friendly, and never offended anyone. She fasted, did not eat on Wednesdays and Fridays, and assiduously avoided meat and dairy products. She had replaced her soft and comfortable bed with a narrow board. She was equally polite and welcoming to all people, rich and poor. She brought beggars and homeless people into the house and led them to her room, where she would give them food and whatever else she could gather together.

Her family’s mockery of her pure, monastic habits, and their displeasure and complaints were openly expressed:

“You must dress yourself more nicely, my dear Daria. We have important guests tonight. Do you want everyone to say that a wealthy girl of noble lineage goes around like a beggar?”

The God-enlightened “child-eldress” answered with presence of mind:

“No one is wealthier than our Lord Jesus Christ, the Heavenly King. But He went around like a beggar and ‘had nowhere to lay his head.’ What am I before Him? I wish to adorn myself with Divine virtues, not with ostentatious clothing.”

Daria persistently avoided childish games and worldly amusements. She preferred to seclude herself and to spend her time in prayer and spiritual study. When she would find out that they would

have visitors, she would disappear into her room or the garden. Her parents and visitors wasted their time in merry-making and drinking until late at night. Finally, when the visitors had departed, her vexed family would demand an explanation from her.

The answer she would give was remarkably simple and firm:

"I was speaking with God. Holy Scripture says: 'Depart from evil and do good....'"

And her parents, waving their hands in frustration, would answer:

"Watch it! Are you not ashamed of yourself? Just listen to that 'do good'! Do you not understand that this whole attitude of yours embarrasses the entire family?!"

The years went by in this atmosphere. The virtuous Daria reached fifteen years of age.

One final trial during that period would be decisive for the future of this earthly angel.

Her vain family did not cease concocting "therapies" for the "headstrong" girl. In the end, they decided that the best "therapy" would be marriage. Despite her ascetic way of life, Daria was a lovely girl. And the delights of married life would surely divert her from her "foolish" ways....

Though they never said anything on the subject in front of her, the small "world-nun" understood that this decisively important moment was soon approaching. She had, however, absolutely no dilemma whatsoever to confront. Her innocent and pure heart was aflame with love for her Heavenly Bridegroom, Christ. It was inconceivable to her to choose an earthly bridegroom and to betray her Beloved One!

5. For the Love of Christ



May of 1736 brought a beautiful, warm, and early spring to Russia.

At one point, Daria's sisters suggested to her that they spend the day in the forest:

"You are always avoiding us," they rebuked her, "and are never with us. But perhaps this time...?"

To their surprise, Daria immediately agreed. They all set off together. Passing through fragrant meadows, they reached the forest. She led the way.

After a short while, the distance between them grew. Her sisters were absorbed in the natural beauty of the path. Daria did not let the opportunity slip by. She said a fervent prayer, made the sign of the Cross, and began quickly to distance herself.

She did not stop her course when she heard the distant voices and the tears of her sisters who were looking for her. She ignored them. Her destination was Moscow....

After a tiring journey of approximately 180 kilometers, she reached Moscow. She approached the Monastery of the Ascension. From the back of the Church, she saw the aged Eldress Porphyria, the Abbess, and the other sisters. She longed to fall at their feet and to open her heart to her beloved and venerable grandmother. It was, however, certain that her parents would find her if she remained there. She quickly left the monastery of her first asceticism without saying a word to anyone.

Her decision was firm. She was prepared to sacrifice everything for the love of Christ. She ought not return to her parents home; she belonged elsewhere. Decisively and courageously, she followed her calling.

In the marketplace, she cut her hair, dressed herself in peasant boys' clothing, and set off for the Lavra of St. Sergey (*). She had to walk forty more kilometers. When she reached there, she was no longer a delicate, pale girl of noble lineage. She was suntanned and had the manners of a poor serf.

The renowned monastery was not unknown to her. She had visited it many times in the past with Eldress Porphyria on pilgrimages. This time, however, she had not come as a pilgrim....

She presented herself to the Abbot as a serf by the name of Dositheos, asking to be admitted into the Brotherhood as a novice. But she did not have the necessary papers that would prove that she was neither a runaway nor a fugitive.

The senior Fathers deliberated the matter. Finally, they decided to allow "Dositheos" unofficially to live at the Lavra. She would not be admitted into the order of novices, however, if she did not bring

the documents of proof.

Dositheos made great progress. “He” soon became an exemplary disciple, easily and quickly learning every kind of work, and was always willing to help others.

Though a young girl, she was distinguished for her brave and manly spirit and manners. In this way, it was impossible for anyone to suspect that the young serf, Dositheos, was the innocent and noble maiden, Daria.

The brave-hearted little girl was also human, however. In the midst of men, she had to battle against her nature. But the fear of God gave her spiritual wisdom, and she shielded herself with humility and self-reproach.

Three years went by. Her mother and sisters came to the Lavra at one point to pray. They were completely unaware of the noble girl’s fate. The venerable Eldress Porphyria had exhorted them to pray that God reveal where the child was. Finally, it appeared that their prayers had been heard....

The prospective Novice Dositheos was then helping in the Church. He began lighting the vigil lamps, unaware that his family was present. One of his sisters urged her mother in a whisper:

“Look carefully at the novice who is lighting the vigil lamps!”

“Why? It’s a monk....”

“No, Mother! Look more closely! Look at his eyes and jaw! It’s Daria!”

At that moment, Dositheos happened to turn around towards them. The mother instinctively recognized her lost child!

The family straightaway asked a Hieromonk whom they knew to send the novice that was serving in the Church to meet them in the guest cell. When Dositheos was informed, he took a quick glance at the people who were seeking him and immediately recognized his family.

“With your blessing, Father,” he answered the Hieromonk, *“inform them that I am coming at once.”*

Immediately leaving the Church, he ran to his cell, tied up some necessary things in a bundle, and, without delay, bid farewell to the Lavra of St. Sergey.

The blessed and valiant Daria, at eighteen, was prepared to submit herself to new sacrifices for the love of Christ. The Heavenly Bridegroom had completely captivated her heart.

She set off on foot for faraway Kiev.

Her mother and sisters waited in vain....

6. *At the Kiev Lavra*



The journey to Kiev was not at all easy. Nearly 500 kilometers had to be traversed.

The young pilgrim was exposed to the weather, to wild beasts, and to robbers.

God's providence took care of everything, however. Food and shelter were offered to her by certain compassionate souls in various villages. Russia at that time had many pilgrims, and there were many kindhearted people who were eager to offer hospitality for our Lord's sake. In so doing, they hoped to earn the pilgrims' prayers, whom they saw as devoted slaves and servants of God.

The dangerous journey had a favorable end. By the Grace of God, the fearless Daria was finally vouchsafed to set eyes on the golden cupolas and the lofty white bell tower of the famous Kiev Caves Lavra (*) on the opposite bank of the Dneiper river (*).

She introduced herself to the assistant to the Lavra's Abbot, Archimandrite Hilarion (Negrebetsky).

"Holy Father, I am a serf. I was working on the land of a great Russian nobleman. My name is Dositheos. I have wanted to become a monk from a very young age. And now I wish to dedicate myself to the service of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Accept me under the protection of the Queen of Heaven. I will toil here until my last breath. I will do nothing blameworthy. I will not sully the sanctity of this holy place...."

The Abbot of the Lavra at that time was Metropolitan Raphael (Zabrofsky), whose incorrupt Relics were later discovered in a crypt at the Cathedral of Holy Wisdom in Kiev.

Archimandrite Hilarion notified the Metropolitan about the young serf Dositheos' request. The Metropolitan called for the pilgrim and they spoke together for a short while. But although he was

impressed by the young serf's intelligence and spiritual intuition, he answered in the negative.

“My friend, as you know, the imperial decree forbids the acceptance of soldiers or serfs into any monastic brotherhood without documents from the appropriate authorities. And not only that: the law requires that an inquiry be made to ascertain the reason for the release from the army or any other service. Likewise, it is anticipated that educated people can become monks only with the permission of His Imperial Majesty together with the decision of the Holy Synod in St.. Petersburg.”

This answer from the venerable Abbot ultimately helped Daria to realize that the suitable place to fulfill her pious desire was not in an organized monastic community.

The words of our Lord then came to her mind:

“Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

She departed from the Lavra and the other monasteries of Kiev.

Her cross was the hermitic life.

She would follow in the footsteps of the blessed St. Anthony of the Kiev Caves....

7. In the Kitaev Hermitage



In the southern environs of Kiev, there is a wooded hill known as Kitaev. It has a magnificent panoramic view of the Dnieper River, Kiev, and all of the surrounding area.

Already in the eleventh century, it was a place of asceticism for monks. It was later desolated by the Tartars. In the sixteenth century, it was the Lord's good will for a hermitage to be organized there, again as a dependency of the Lavra. All those who had the calling for the hermitic life lived there.

The hermitage's wooden *Katholikon* was built in 1716 and was dedicated to St. Sergey of Radonezh.

Within the confines of the hermitage, higher up, on the summit of the hill, there was a system of cave-hideouts under the earth, just as at the Lavra. Valiant athletes of the Lord had periodically lived

there.

Daria ultimately decided to imitate them. She chose one of these caves in order to live in secret. The inconspicuousness of the cave gave her the freedom she was seeking.

“In the caves and dens of the earth...”

Dositheos' life was inconceivably harsh in the damp cave. For the love of Christ, he had to endure bodily privations and great hardships.

He had, however, come to love the Lord with *“all his heart, and all his soul, and all his mind, and all his strength.”*

With this Divine love as a guide, he valiantly battled against the snares of the Enemy and carnal mindedness.

A monk from the neighboring Kitaev Hermitage would bring him bread and water. During the period of Great Lent, Dositheos did not accept even this small comfort.

He remained completely secluded. Only at night would he go out to gather some moss and roots to eat.

Even during winter, which is particularly heavy there, Dositheos never lit a fire in his cave. Divine Grace warmed him through his fervent prayers!

Years later, when someone asked him about that feat, he answered:

“O Lord, O Lord! By the light of Thy countenance shall we see the light. We are poor sinners. In the darkness of the night we hide ourselves from human eyes. We imagine that no one sees us. But does God...? Do the eyes of the Lord perhaps not see the good and the bad in any place whatsoever? If the utter doom of Hell is visible to Him, how much more so the heart of man? The eyes of God see everything. Our Guardian Angel and our conscience are witnesses to all of our thoughts and actions. Being conscious of this, it is the same to me if I have a fire or not in my dwelling. I see His Divine Countenance beside me. I sense that He hears my words.”

To others, he addressed the following advice, which were indicative of a deep personal experience:

“Do not concern yourself with food, shelter, and other unimportant things. Lead your life with fear and trembling. Guard

this fear like a bird of Paradise, lest it fly far away. If it escapes you, you will not be able to catch it again. Therefore, keep yourself in a cell. Gather up your thoughts. Bind your senses with vigilance and prayer. Pleasures are temporary, but virtue is immortal. You are intelligent, so make your choice.”

* * *

So the brave Dositheos prayed and struggled in secret under the radiant eyes of Christ, our Omniscient Savior. He, however, has said that *“nothing is covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known.”*

Thus, at the appropriate hour, it was the good pleasure of our Lord to reveal in a miraculous manner this hidden “precious pearl.”

8. An Unexpected Gift



Five years passed of harsh ascetic labors and struggles.

Dositheos the Hermit, though only 23 years old, was already strikingly mature in the spiritual life. The Wisdom of God had come to dwell in his heart. But he had not yet received the Monastic Schema....

At the end of August, in the year 1744, the Empress of Russia, Elizabeth Petrovna (*), expressed a pious desire to visit Kiev and its holy places.

The Empress was then 34 years old. The daughter of Peter I (*), she had ascended to the throne three years before. Though perpetually surrounded by a brilliant and splendid royal court and known for her congenial disposition and her extravagance, she was still a conscious Orthodox Christian. Her rule had infused new life into the Russian Church after the state interventions inspired by German Protestantism during the reign of her father and his successors.

The Empresses' visit to Kiev included sumptuous and stately ceremonies, but also sacred pilgrimages.

An ancestor of the princess, Andrei Bogolioubsky, had at one time lived at the Kitaev Hermitage. She therefore decided to visit it.

It was at that time that someone spoke to her of Dositheos the

Recluse who, five years before, had settled in one of the caves a little higher up, on the summit of the hill.

The Empress asked to visit him. A wooden pathway with steps was immediately set in place so that the noble guest could walk with dignity to the entrance of the cave.

When she arrived, she invited the hermit to come out.

Dositheos unsuspectingly opened the humble entrance to his ascetic cell and was taken aback: before him stood the Empress of all of Russia, a crowd of Hierarchs, noblemen, and government officials!

Instinctively, the hermit contritely dropped to the ground and hid his eyes from the distinguished imperial retinue.

Elizabeth asked him:

“Servant of God, have you been working out your salvation here for a long time?”

And he humbly replied:

“Your Majesty, from the time that my soul learned to be heedful! My inner life began at that moment. And up until this point, with God’s help, it has not left me.”

“And why did you choose such a sorrowful and austere way of life?”

“Our Lord said: ‘Your sorrow will give rise to gladness.’ Only the ‘strait gate’ and the ‘strait and narrow way’ lead man to eternal life, Your Majesty. This earth is our place of exile. We must become accustomed to trials. Only in this way will we be vouchsafed to inherit the blessed state which we have lost. Only that is eternal.”

“In other words, you mean that you have become more resolute since you made this choice of yours? You have not repented that you have left worldly pleasures behind? Are you never faced with the temptation of descending from your cross?”

“Your Majesty, it may be that my cross is heavy. Perhaps I collapse with sweat and blood from its weight. But I am determined to endure until the end, at whatever cost. I know that the path I have chosen is full of thorns. But I will continue crawling along until I am exhausted. I will never succumb and become a shamefaced deserter. I do not wish to be condemned together with

the thief on the left side. Do not soldiers who are left invalid or lose their lives in battle have a share in the honors which are given to those who have survived and are celebrating the victory? Without the shedding of blood, there can be no festivity or victory. Our own festivity does not take place here, but in the next life. Either a crowning or a condemnation awaits us there."

"Servant of God, your words have touched my heart. I see that, despite your youth, the Lord has given you wisdom and experience. I would be pleased to render you honors in the future, if you would agree to leave your hermitage and serve our country."

"Your Majesty! Neither gold nor silver enrich the soul. Only virtue enriches us. When the Lord summoned the Apostles, they straightaway left everything and followed Him. Just why did they immediately respond with such eagerness? Because they saw something more splendid. He is the law which governs our souls, Your Majesty. When we come to know something better, we abandon whatever is inferior. But all of the various kinds of delights separate man from the Kingdom of God. The soul which is enslaved to material goods has no place in eternal life. Only when we have communion with the One, True God do we acquire an immense fortune, even if we have no material goods...."

The Empress proceeded to ask Dositheos the Recluse many other questions. After a long conversation, she eventually learned that the hermit had not yet become a monk on account of the law concerning serfs.

Elizabeth, then, immediately gave a personal command to have him tonsured a monk. On the next day, his tonsure as a rasophore monk was performed in the presence of the Empress. At Dositheos' request, he was not given a new name.

Thus, in such an unexpected manner, did the Providence of God arrange for the valiant Dositheos' heartfelt desire to be fulfilled, and he received the precious gift of the Monastic Tonsure—indeed by means of Her Majesty!

When Elizabeth took leave of the newly-tonsured hermit, she gave him a purse full of gold coins. He, after bidding the Empress farewell, did not bring the gold into his cave. From his youth, he had chosen a life of exile and lack of possessions. And up until this point,

with God's help and for His sake, he had remained consistent. Accordingly, he left the purse inside an earthenware pot outside of the entrance to his cell.

In this manner, he imitated St. Agapitos the Healer of the Caves. The latter had done something similar with the gold offered to him by the Grand Duke Vladimir the Monk when he had miraculously healed him of a mortal illness.

After the departure of the Empress and her retinue, a pious serf from the neighboring village of Pirogovo brought a little food to the hermit. Dositheos thanked him and asked him:

"The Empress came here to visit me, and what do you think she gave me?"

"What did she give you, Batiushka?"

"Do you not see? Look for yourself, there, inside that earthen pot!"

"Batiushka! These are gold coins! See how much money it is! Here, take it!"

Dositheos turned down the offer with a smile and refused to take the money that belonged to him, saying:

"Do whatever God enlightens you. As for me, I do not need it."

Surprised, the serf hastened to the Kiev Caves Lavra and gave the money to the Council of Elders. They deliberated the matter and, with the hermit's consent, decided that the money be used for the construction of a new parish Church in the village of Pirogovo.

* * *

As for the Monk Dositheos, a new stage of struggles was now opening before him after this Divine intervention.

In the isolation of his ascetic cave, he would have to increase the talent given to him yet more....

9. The God-Illumined Guide of Souls



With time, Dositheos the Hermit, that hidden treasure of Grace, became all the more well known. The gifts of the Holy Spirit began to gush forth from his cave. He proved to be a God-il-

luminated guide of souls.

Many people hastened to the Recluse of Kitaev for comfort and spiritual guidance. And he, from a small opening and without being seen, spoke to everyone according to his or her social level.

The episode with the Empress, about which we have just written, was very characteristic.

We have already recounted the deeply-meaningful and prophetic guidance and exhortation to the future St. Seraphim of Sarov.

* * *

Yet another special occurrence has been handed down to us about a rich man from Kiev.

This man went to the hermitage and despondently begged:

“Help me, Batiushka! I am in great distress.... God has abandoned me.... He does hear me!”

“And you, why do you stop your ears when people who are in need speak to you? That is why the Lord does not hear you. ‘One closes his ears not to hear those who are ill, and then himself calls out, and there is no one to hear him.’ But do not be upset. This is not yet misfortune. But woe to you if the Lord will not hear you when you begin to pray for the forgiveness of your sins....”

“I pray, Batiushka! I pray every day! Morning and night I make many prostrations and I call upon the Name of the Lord.”

“In vain do you labor, my friend. You call upon His Name with your voice only, but not with your heart. If your heart says the prayer, then it will be ready to submit to the One whom you know and confess as your Lord. Go home and ponder this: Who is the Lord and who were you before Him? How much good has he done for you, and how much does he continue to do? Why are you living on earth and what are you bound to see in the future? When you ponder these things, then you will feel eagerness to carry out His will without wavering. Then you will not pray simply with your mouth: ‘O Lord, O Lord’ But you will cry from your heart: ‘O Lord, help me and give me the strength to walk according to Thy will.’ This repentance of yours will be pleasing to the Lord.”

One other very characteristic and stirring meeting took place twenty years later.

While Dositheos was continuing his life as a recluse in the cave, yet another pilgrim came to him to find spiritual repose....

It was his sister!

Even though he recognized her, Dositheos hid his face and his identity.

He listened to her attentively....

Her parents had reposed. She felt lonely. Ultimately, she had decided to visit Kiev. She wished to confide her family problems to the Hermit of Kitaev. One of her sisters had disappeared. No one knew what had happened to her.

Dositheos gave her the appropriate advice. He urged her not to feel sorrowful over her missing sister who had left for the purpose of serving the Lord:

“Do not involve yourself in your sister’s life. She left following the Grace of God. You should feel joy. She does not give in to sinful thoughts as you do. Vain, material things do not interest her. She was reborn in the Holy Spirit and is now struggling for her salvation. We do not have an abiding city here. We seek the one that is to come....”

10. At the Caves Lavra



Around 1770, when he was already about fifty years old, Dositheos underwent an ordeal. He was obliged, out of obedience, to abandon his ascetic cell. What had happened?

On account of certain trespasses, a decree of the Empress Catherine II forced the hermits who were living outside of organized monastic communities to enter cœnobiums. *“It is not permitted for there to be hermits all over the place....”*

The Elders at the Caves Lavra did not want to transgress this direction. They summoned Dositheos the Recluse to come to live with them. The experienced ascetic obeyed. He preferred, however, to continue in his isolation. Thus, he chose a cave in the Lavra’s Far Caves, which were also within the Lavra’s confines.

For four years, he lived in his new ascetic cell, struggling valiantly.

The throng of faithful pilgrims continued to come to the opening of his new cave. This had begun to tire him. Perhaps he had a presentiment of his death; he desired to spend his last days in complete seclusion.

As a result, he petitioned the Lavra administration that he be given leave to return to Kitaev.

There is also a version of events that states that the administration instructed Dositheos to prepare himself to be Ordained a Deacon. He refused and began to behave as a fool for Christ. Going about the market places, he chided the people.

In any event, a year later, the administration granted his request. Dositheos returned to Kitaev in 1775, one year before his repose—not, however, to his original cave, but to a cell belonging to the Hermitage.

He lived once again as a recluse, peacefully and with an even more austere ascetic life. He was preparing for the great departure.

11. The Novice Theophan



It would be worth making a rather extensive account of the Novice Theophan. For a few years, he was Dositheos' disciple and cell attendant. Though limited, the facts that we know about his life suffice for us to derive edifying lessons.

When the Hermit of Kitaev was obliged to seclude himself in the Lavra's Far Caves, a novice by the name of Theophan was assigned to serve him.

Theophan came from a family of serfs in Ukraine. He had a younger brother and a sister. At twelve years old, he had been left an orphan.

At one point, when he was sixteen, while ploughing in the fields, something miraculous occurred which marked his future life: a heavenly light suddenly visited his heart, which filled with contrition and repentance! Without delay, he loosened the ox from the plough and, without bidding his siblings farewell, set off for Kiev. He had decided to enter the monastic life. He was overflowing with love for

Christ. At the Caves Lavra, he lived for seventeen years as a novice.

His childlike simplicity and meekness comprised the “good ground” on which fell the blessed “seed” of the guidance and advice, which the Elders’ wisdom sowed with love. In this way, Theophan built the house of his soul upon the sure rock of obedience to those who were and older and wiser. “*For it was founded on the rock....*”

The good-natured novice obtained great benefit, to be sure, from Dositheos the Hermit. When the unclean spirits warred against him and afflicted him with various thoughts, his refuge was the experienced recluse, who would give him courage and strength in his spiritual struggles.

* * *

A conversation on this subject has been handed down to us, full of wisdom and discretion.

“Have patience, my brother! Have patience until the end and you will be saved. Love the life of tribulations. Thirst for it as if for water. Tribulations lead to salvation. They are bitter, but purifying. We have to endure them because they are useful to us, exactly like clothes that are tight, but which it is not permitted for us to take off. Do not imagine that by complaints and impatience you will escape tribulations. On the contrary, that only makes matters worse. Only the humble acceptance of difficulties and a good disposition will relieve us of the burden. Do not forget that the Lord gives according to His mercy and not according to his justice. If God decided to be just with you, he would not send you only those tribulations, but much weightier ones. This thought of the Lord’s love for mankind will give you strength and wondrous patience. And while the others will marvel at your tribulations, you will leap for joy. And you will say: ‘My beloved ones, I have nothing to endure.’”

“Batiushka, my heart does not listen to me. It is young. The demonic thoughts can not leave it.”

“And how did they find an entrance way in the first place? From where? Just where are their roots?”

“In sin....”

“And why did sin begin to grow in there?”

“That happened by my own will.”

“Splendid! So go and cut off your will. Simply, just as one cuts the trunk of a tree to the roots in order to cut its leaves and branches, so should you cut off all of your desires. And do not allow demonic thoughts to reach your heart. Your intelligence will teach you the way. That is like the pruning-knife with which we cut the branches.”

“Batiushka, that is very difficult for me. My weakness makes my spirit uncertain.”

“Take heed! Do not give in! Do not coddle yourself. Remember that the spirit of grumbling is our most deceitful and dangerous enemy. That is what advises you: ‘Take a break. You have worn yourself out.’ How considerate it is! And as soon as you listen to it, it presents you with one rest after another. In that way it saps one’s efforts for deliverance. We forget the rule of the life of piety. Our zeal for God grows cold. And what follows? Darkness, sin, and falls. But no! As long as the Lord helps you in your struggle for salvation, do not give up!”

“Batiushka, just what can I do to fight it? What can I do for myself?”

“Do not pity your ‘self.’ Punish it so that it be diligent. Keep your body under discipline. It is like the foolish servant: when he is being worked, he is humble and submissive. But from the moment that you give him a break and he slackens, he will show you his claws and his eyes will burn with passion. A great affliction for us! No one tries to humble his body. Everyone gratifies and spoils it. But remember: ‘It is not possible for flesh and blood to inherit the Kingdom of God.’”

* * *

Not much time passed, and the Novice Theophan asked for a blessing to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. But Dositheos the Recluse answered in the negative:

“Your path does not lead either to Jerusalem or to the Holy Mountain. When the right time comes, you will have to make a different journey. But for now, if you like, make a start for Moldavia (). That journey will be beneficial to you.”*

“But how will I get there? And where will I go? I know no one there.”

“Do not let that worry you. Go down to Podol. You will find two Moldavian monks there. They will take you with them.”

Theophan obeyed. He did exactly as the clairvoyant Elder had told him. In Podol he did in fact meet the two monks. Indeed, one was Sophronios, one of the closest disciples of St. Paisy (Velichkovsky) (*).

The Moldavian Elders asked the novice to acquaint them with the Recluse of the Caves. In the end, they visited Dositheos and had an edifying conversation. And they agreed to take Theophan with them to their homeland.

After many difficulties, they reached Dragomirna in Moldavia. There, they were greeted by the renowned Staretz himself, St. Paisy, who addressed the novice from Kiev:

“My child, Theophan, your journey was not for nothing. A reward has been prepared for you.”

A visit followed to the exemplary monastic communities in Moldavia, which were under the spiritual direction of the great Staretz Paisy.

In the end, deeply impressed, Theophan asked the Saint's blessing to remain with them. But the Staretz replied:

“For now, go to Russia. Serve your Elder for a short while longer. He will depart very soon. Then, with his blessing, go find your salvation wherever he advises you.”

* * *

Theophan thus returned to Kiev. He continued serving St. Dositheos in the Lavra's Far Caves.

At one point, his clairvoyant Elder sent him to fetch a quantity of incense. And he began to distribute the incense to the pilgrims, saying prophetically:

“Take this and cense your houses very thoroughly. A great misfortune is soon coming. People will fall dead in the streets like insects. But do not despair! Do not become disheartened! Pray! Pray!”

Not much time had passed when an epidemic of the plague broke out in the country. Rapidly, it approached Kiev, and arrived

on 3 September 1770. There were many casualties. But whoever had censed his house with Dositheos the Recluse's incense remained immune!

12. A Peaceful and Blessed End



Dositheos the Recluse was once again in Kitaev. He was not very advanced in years. He was, however, weakened by many years of hard and persistent asceticism.

One day, he called his disciple, Theophan, and gave him his last counsels:

“My beloved child.... You have served me in many ways. I am now ready to depart to my Fathers. Once you have buried me, do not remain here. Go north. At the Monastery of Solofsky () you will find your salvation.”*

On the eve of his repose, the Saint suddenly left his cell and began to go around the Kitaev Hermitage, leaning on his cane.

The monks were astonished, seeing him.

Dositheos made a full prostration to each one of them and said with tears:

“Forgive me! In the Name of God, forgive me! I have offended you many times with my words, actions and thoughts.”

He then returned to his cell. During the course of the night, he chanted. He approached the gates of eternity in prayer.

In the morning, Theophan did not receive an answer when he asked him from outside about his needs. He ran and informed the monks. When they opened the cell, they found Dositheos kneeling in a position of prayer before the Icons. His vigil lamp was lit. In his left hand, which was frozen, he was holding a piece of paper. The blessed soul of their beloved ascetic had departed to God. He was 56 years old.

They took the paper and read:

“My body is ready for burial. I beseech you, my brothers, to bury it according to custom, but without tampering with it.”

His request was obeyed: no one dared touch the recluse's body, to clean it, or to change his clothes.

Many people gathered for the funeral service and the burial of the blessed Dositheos.

His much-suffering body was laid to rest at the Kitaev Hermitage, next to the *Katholikon*.

The following fact is also wonderful: In the days of the Saint, between 1763-1767, in place of the Hermitage's wooden Church, one of stone was built. It was dedicated to the Holy Trinity and it had a chapel dedicated to St. Sergey of Radonezh!

In this way, the brave Dositheos, who had started his monastic life at the age of fifteen as a novice at the Lavra of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergey, was vouchsafed to repose forty years later on the very day of the commemoration of St. Sergey (25 September) and to be buried next to the Church of the Holy Trinity, of which he had become a living and sacred temple!

His grave soon became a popular place of pilgrimage and a sacred place of prayer.

The following simple facts are written on the tombstone's plaque:

"In the year 1776, 25 September, Dositheos reposed."

The proclamation of Dositheos' sanctity took place by a Synodical Act in 1993.

* * *



Portrait of St. Dositheos

A short while later, Dositheos' sister once again came to Kiev on pilgrimage. When she learned that the ascetic who had strengthened and comforted her had already reposed, she asked to learn more about him. The particulars of his life that had become known and the features of his portrait led her to the definite conclusion that Dositheos the Hermit of Kiev was the very Daria who had disappeared from the noble Tiapkin family of the Riazan province!

* * *

After the death of his Elder, the Novice Theophan continued to be unsettled for a short while longer.

Going against the counsel of the clairvoyant ascetic, he remained in Kiev. There, he prepared a cave for himself in order to live as a hermit. But the administration did not allow him to live a life as a recluse either in the Lavra or Kitaev

He then understood that he ought not to have disobeyed the late Dositheos' guidance. He thus accomplished the distant journey to the Monastery of Solofsky. When he arrived there, he placed himself under obedience and passed through all of the stages of cœnobitic life. He began as a novice in the bakery and ended it as a hermit in a cave, where he reposed on 26 July, 1819. And he received a worthy place in the famous *Paterikon of Solofsky*....

Notes

Anthony, Saint. *The cave-dweller. Founder, with St. Theodosios, of the famous Monastery of the Kiev Caves of the Pechersky Lavra. Born in 982 in Lyubets, northwest of Kiev, and reposed in 1067. He was the embodiment of Russian hermetic life. As a young man, he went to the Holy Mountain where he became a monk and lived as a hermit. By order of his spiritual Father, he returned to Russia and installed himself in the place where the Lavra now stands. His cave had been dug on the steep bank of the Dnieper River by another hermit who had previously practiced asceticism there. He is commemorated on 10 July.* ←

Dmitry Donskoy, Saint. *Grand Prince of Russia. Born in Moscow in 1349 and reposed in 1389. On 7 September 1380, the Russian army under Dmitry conquered the Tartars and delivered the country from its formidable enemy. Russians surnamed Dmitry "Donskoy" after the Do River, nearby which the historic battle—which was the greatest in Russia until the time of Peter the Great—was waged. In token of gratitude for the fighters who heroically fell, the Russian Church has prescribed a special memorial prayer for the so-called "Saturday of Dmitry," which falls between 18 and 26 October.* ←

Dnieper. *River in Russia. At 2,146 kilometers in length, it is the third longest river in Europe after the Volga and the Danube. Empties into the Black Sea. Prince Vladimir (+1015, youngest grandson of Princess Olga) "by decree, called the inhabitants of his state (around Kiev) to receive Baptism in the Dnieper River. A portion of them were Baptized" in 988.* ←

Elizabeth Petrovna. *Empress of Russia. Born in 1709 and reposed on 29 December 1761. Daughter of Peter the Great and Catherine I. She was beautiful, social, of upright character, extremely intelligent, and zealous for Orthodoxy. On 25 November 1741, when thirty-one years old, she led a military coup and ascended to the throne. She became greatly beloved by the people for successfully undertaking the deliverance of Russia from German influence. She was quite active in her efforts towards the moral, educational, political, and economic recovery and progress of her country. She benefited the Church and attempted to improve the morals of the clergy and to broaden its education with the foundation of the Theological Academy of Moscow.* ←

Kiev. *"Holy city and mother of Russian cities." Located on the right bank of the Dnieper River, it is situated on three hills and is separated into four "cities": a) Podol (the lower town), on the plains and shores of the Dnieper, commercial and industrial city; b) the old town; c) Pechersk (the town of the Crypts-Caves), on the dominating hill, surrounded by walls that encloses the famous Pechersky Lavra; and d) the new town. It was the political and religious capital of what was known as Kievan Rus (989-1240) and headquarters of the Grand Prince. It served as the Metropolis of the Russian Church, which was organized there from the end of the tenth century. It was seized, ransacked, and set on fire by the Mongolian Golden Horde (1240).* ←

Moldavia. *Present-day northeastern part of Romania. Received its name from the Moldava River. Area: 38,058 km. sq. Capital: Iași. Beginning in the sixteenth century, it was under the dominion of the Turks, but with internal autonomy. In the eighteenth century, Phanariot rulers were appointed by Constantinople. It is well known for the development of monasticism within its boundaries and for its famous monasteries with their multitudes of ascetic cells and hesychastic typikon.* ←

Paissy (Velichkovsky), Staretz. *Born on 21 December 1722 in Poltava (southeast of Kiev) and reposed 15 November 1794 at the Monastery of Neamț in Moldavia. Practiced asceticism as a monk in monasteries in Kiev, Vlachia, and on the Holy Mountain. In 1758, he founded the Skete of Prophet Elias on Mount Athos. In 1763, he went to Moldavia, where he shone for thirty years. He is considered to be the founder of an entire ascetical and philosophical school, the work of which was the translation and publication of (primarily) ascetic and mystical texts of Patristic Tradition. He brought the spirit and typikon of the Holy Mountain to the monasteries that he founded, and this spirit was transmitted from there to many other monasteries, in particular to Optina, which blossomed in the nineteenth century. He reinstated Eldership, restored the hesychastic tradition, and brought back noetic prayer, which had been forgotten. He is commemorated on 15 November.* ←

Peter I (the Great). *First Emperor of Russia. Born on 30 May 1672 in Moscow and reposed 28 January 1725 in St. Petersburg. A very enterprising man, “he dragged the Russian people by force along the path of progress [by its complete westernization]; on every page of his reformatory ukases [orders from the Tsar that had the force of law], one encounters the knout and death penalty.” He founded St. Petersburg and moved the capital there. He abolished the Russian Patriarchate and replaced it with the Holy Synod.* ←

Pechersky Lavra. *Monastery of the Caves. Founded on one of the three hills of Kiev around the middle of the eleventh century by Sts. Anthony and Theodosios. It became the great spiritual center of Russia. “It constituted an entire walled city with many rows of cells and a labyrinth of catacombs in which are deposited many Saints of the Russian Church.”* ←

Riazan. *City in Russia, southeast of Moscow. Capital of the Eparchy of the same name. Area: approximately 34,000 km. sq.* ←

Seraphim of Sarov, Saint. *Known in the world as Prochoros Moshnin. Born in Kursk on 19 July 1759 and reposed in Sarov on 2 January 1833. He entered the monastic life at age eighteen, living first as a monk*

under obedience and later as a hermit. From 1815 on, he practiced Eldership by order of the Theotokos. He sustained the Russian people by his rich spiritual gifts, while teaching that the purpose of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. He had the deepest reverence for the Theotokos whom he called "the Joy of our joys," and he reposed in the Lord, kneeling before her Icon. Together with St. Theodosios of the Pechersky Lavra and St. Sergey of Radonezh, he constitutes the summit of Russian spirituality. His memory is celebrated on 2 January and 19 July. ←

Sergey of Radonezh, Saint. *The most beloved Saint of the Russian people. Born in 1314 in Rostov, northeast of Moscow, and reposed on 25 September 1392. He founded the Holy Trinity Monastery near Radonezh, forty km. from Moscow. He was for fourteenth century Russian monasticism what St. Theodosios was for monasticism of the eleventh century, bringing about the fullest expression of cœnobitic monasticism in Muscovian Russia. In his days, when Russian monasticism was undergoing a period of decline on account of the subjugation to the Tartars and the unpropitious ecclesiastical and political conditions, "he became the shining beacon of the Russian conscience, in political as well as ecclesiastical matters." Before his campaign against the Turks and his victorious battle at Koulikovo (1380), the Grand Prince Dmitry Donsky turned to St. Sergey for his blessing and advice. The Saint foresaw the victory and gave courage to Dmitry. Shortly before his repose, which he foreknew, he saw the Theotokos in a vision while he was praying, and she said to him: "Fear not, chosen one of God. Your prayers for your disciples and this monastery have been heard. Be anxious about nothing. From this day forth, this monastery will have everything in abundance, and not only during the course of your life, but also after your death." The translation of his Relics and the Proclamation of his sanctity took place on 5 July 1422. His memory is celebrated on 25 September. ←*

Solofsky. *(Also Solowjezkij). A cluster of Russian islands in the White Sea, located at the entrance to Lake Onega and under the government of Archangelsk. On the largest of its islands, Solowjezkij, lies the monastery of the same name, which is surrounded by walls. It was founded after 1436. The Patron Saints of the monastery are Saints Zosimas, Savvatos, and Germanos. ←*

Theodosios, Saint. *The cave-dweller. One of the founders of the Pechersky Lavra. Born in 1029 and reposed in 1074. Around 1055, he became a monk in the first, small Brotherhood of St. Anthony the Cave-dweller. About 1062, he was elected Abbot. During his abbotship, the number of monks grew, the monastery territory was extended, and the Brotherhood was definitively settled outside of the caves. He became the model of a monk who initiated the pattern of Russian monastic tradition. He linked asceticism with altruism, that is, humanitarian social work. In this way, he essentially inaugurated the institution of the Russian “Starchestvo” (Eldership). The commemoration of his repose is celebrated on 3 May, and the uncovering of his relics on 14 August.* 

+

To our All-Holy
Triune God, Who Loves Mankind,
Glory, Honor, Worship, and
Thanksgiving!