

Rule of Faith Begins

It is given to our Orthodox Church through the Holy Spirit to fathom the mysteries of God. And she is strong in the holiness of her thought and her patience. - *St. Silouan the Athonite*

by The Editors

Welcome to *Rule of Faith*. Let us tell you about ourselves and our mission.

We are a diverse group of scholars — clergy, monastics, and laity — who nurture an abiding love for the Church and her Holy Tradition. We are eastern and western, “cradle” and convert, and represent various Orthodox jurisdictions. We are united in affirming the theanthropic life that the Church makes available to each of us through the Holy Spirit, by means of, and within, her Tradition. This life is nothing less than Christ’s own life, offered through the sacraments and nurtured by prayer, fasting, the liturgical services, the Scriptures, the writings of the holy fathers, and the lives of the saints.

In this we also affirm the paradoxical Christian experience to which the Tradition bears fulgent witness: “life in death, light in darkness, joy in pain, resurrection through the cross.”¹ This paradox, or mystery, is our birthright as Orthodox Christians — a birthright that makes Christ’s life our own, a foretaste already in this world of the kingdom of heaven.

But like Jacob the patriarch, each of us must seize our birthright. It requires our effort. Above all, we are called daily to embrace the cross. In so doing, we accept a tension within ourselves — a tension between what we are now and what we are called to be. For “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” ([Matthew 11:12](#)).

This ascetic effort, daily renewed, is the point of contact between each of our respective lives and the Church's Holy Tradition. This is because our Tradition is not merely the vehicle for passing down the dogmatic truths of our faith. Nor is it, God forbid, a club with which to bludgeon unbelievers, the non-Orthodox, or our brothers and sisters in the Church. Above all, it is the life of the Church in her fullness — yearned for, yielded to, and fructified in each of our lives, moment to moment, from baptism to death. The Orthodox Tradition is, in other words, the Christian life *simpliciter*.

Consider, for example, one Ivan Petrovich Antonov, a Russian peasant who lived in the second half of the nineteenth century. The little we know of this father of seven comes to us through his son, who spoke sparingly of him. But we are told, and can infer, that he was in many ways a typical man of his time and station — uneducated, physically rugged, and accustomed to hard work. We are also told that he was a spiritual giant. For Ivan Petrovich was a man of the Church, steeped in her rhythms of fasting and feasting, and shaped in soul by her prayers and services. He was for his children the living embodiment of the Church's Tradition.

One evening, the son from whom we have these accounts, Simeon, a young man of perhaps nineteen (and, as the reader might have guessed, the future St. Silouan the Athonite) fell into sin with a young woman. “[W]hat so often happens, befell one summer evening,” writes St. Silouan's amanuensis, St. Sophrony of Essex:

Next morning, as they were working together, his father said to him quietly, “Where were you last night, son? My heart was troubled for you.”

The mild words sank into Simeon's soul.

Ivan Petrovich's rebuke of his son is gentle, his words “mild.” So too is St. Sophrony's framing of the story: “what so often happens, befell.” The atmosphere is of forgiveness already given before it is even sought, or perhaps before it is even understood to be needed.

This moment in the relationship of a father with his grown son — redolent of the Lord seeking Adam in the garden and speaking with the woman at the well — is a glimpse of our Holy Tradition alive in one man, in one relationship. For Ivan Petrovich was not simply Simeon’s father, he was also, as formed by the Orthodox tradition, his *spiritual* father. St. Sophrony notes pointedly that St. Silouan “never forgot his sin.” And St. Silouan himself said of his father, “I have never reached my father’s stature.”²

It is this experience of Orthodox Christianity that *Rule of Faith* exists to honor. We believe that the time is right for an Orthodox web journal with one foot, as it were, in the academy, and the other in the life of the Church. For if it is especially needful today dispassionately to understand and articulate our Tradition, it is crucial also to remember that the true home of the Tradition is in the hearts of the faithful in every parish and monastery church. Therefore, our goal is scholarly engagement with both the theoretical and the practical dimensions of our faith, always with an eye to the salvation of souls, not excluding our own.

We ask your prayers for our efforts.

Notes

1. Alexander Golitzin, *The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain*. (St Tikhon’s Seminary Press: New Canaan, 1990) p. 37.
2. Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *St. Silouan the Athonite*. (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press: Crestwood, 1999) pp. 12, 16.