

The Seer

The Energy of the Holy Spirit in Saul

When Saul left the Prophet Samuel and was climbing up the hill, he met a band of Prophets. However, before encountering the Prophets, immediately after leaving Samuel “God gave him another heart” (1 Kg./1 Sam. 10:9). Saul’s heart was changed by the energy of God. At once everything that the Prophet Samuel had prophetically declared to him came about. After that Saul was prepared, and he met the band of Prophets. Just then “the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied in the midst of them” (1 Kg./1 Sam. 10:10). At that moment Saul received the Holy Spirit and was united with the other Prophets in the company, prophesying along with them. As soon as those watching all these happenings saw that Saul was in the midst of the Prophets, they were amazed, because they knew that he was the son of Kish and because, of course, they were completely unaware of what had happened between Samuel and Saul. They asked each other, ‘Isn’t this Kish’s son? How can he now be among the Prophets?’ Characteristically, their actual words were: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (1 Kg./1 Sam. 10:11). This phrase became proverbial among the people of Israel, and was used to express amazement at something.

This event reminds us of what happened to the Disciples on the day of Pentecost, when they received the Holy Spirit and conveyed their joy in a variety of ways, to the point that those who saw them said that they were drunk. The fact is that, when the Holy Spirit comes into someone’s heart, there is a spiritual rebirth, which is expressed even in his body. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai his face shone. The same happened to St Stephen the First Martyr, when in the Council he saw the

glory of God and attained to the vision of God. St Dionysios the Areopagite calls this state “sober intoxication”. St Isaac the Syrian says that the Apostles were drunk with this sober drunkenness and preached the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the world, the Martyrs were intoxicated with it and shed their blood for the glory of Christ, and the holy ascetics were inebriated with it and struggled to do God’s will in their lives. The Holy Spirit fills with grace and sanctifies all the powers of man’s soul: its rational, desiring and incensive aspects. For that reason, the one who is deified, who is activated by the Holy Spirit, offers himself completely to God and loves God with all the powers of his soul.

The greatest problem in our life is that we are not in the grip of this “sober intoxication”. We may be good people and good citizens, but we are not as God wants us to be, we are not like the Disciples on the day of Pentecost. We are not intoxicated with the grace and energy of the Holy Spirit, which is why we are continually falling into the same sins. If someone is drunk with the Holy Spirit, his nous is completely turned towards God, which has immediate social consequences.

It is also worth looking at the phrases that Holy Scripture uses to how Saul’s transformation, change and rebirth through sharing in the energy of the Holy Spirit. Prophesying this change that would happen to Saul, Samuel said, “Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you...and you shall be turned into another man” (1 Kg./1 Sam. 10:6). In other words, when the Holy Spirit comes, Saul will become a different human being. And Holy Scripture tells us that, as soon as Samuel and Saul had parted from one another, “God gave him another heart” (1 Kg./1 Sam. 10:9). This change of heart means that Saul was completely transformed.

I think, however, that we should analyse the change wrought in Saul by the descent and coming of the Holy Spirit in a wider context, because this happens to other people as well.

First of all it needs to be stressed that the Holy Spirit acts in man's heart, as is clear in the case of Saul but also in other cases. In the biblical and patristic tradition the heart is the centre of the human being, as it is there that the source of biological life interpenetrates in a mystical but real way with the source of the spiritual life. According to St Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, the heart is a natural centre, because it is the first part of the human organism to begin functioning and the last to stop; it is an unnatural centre, as the passions act there; and it is a supernatural centre because the uncreated energy of God primarily acts there.

St Diadochos of Photiki writes that through Holy Baptism the grace of God comes into the depths of the heart and never leaves there. Thus God's grace acts in the depths of the heart, whereas the demons act on its periphery, or in the pericardium, as the holy Fathers say. It should be noted that when we refer to the heart we mean not only the bodily organ of the heart but also what is called the 'spiritual heart', the deep heart that acts in the depths of the biological heart. When someone struggles to concentrate his nous within his heart, the nous on its return encounters the biological heart first. Initially his attention is concentrated on the biological heart and subsequently he finds the 'spiritual heart'. This spiritual heart is made up of the powers of the soul: its rational, desiring and incensive aspects.

Someone who repents senses the change in his heart. Thus the King and Prophet David prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 50[51]:12). The Apostle Paul says that the law of God is written in man's heart:

“You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:2-3). The same Apostle, using a prophecy of the Prophet Jeremiah, which was fulfilled at the time of Christ’s coming and the descent of the Holy Spirit, also writes: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Heb 8:10). Noetic prayer is prayed in the heart, and there man acquires confirmation of the existence and energy of God’s grace. Thus St Paul states emphatically, “For it is good that the heart be established [confirmed] by grace” (Heb. 13:9).

Through the energy of the Holy Spirit, Saul becomes a Prophet and sings God’s praises. He joined the band of Prophets “and he prophesied in the midst of them” (1 Kg/1 Sam. 10:10). Someone in this state becomes capable of knowing by experience what God is, but also of knowing the meaning and deep purpose of Christianity. Then he naturally becomes an unerring spiritual father who leads the people. We therefore say that only those who are deified and activated by the Holy Spirit are spiritual fathers, who can help people to experience the purifying, illuminating and deifying energy of God.

The advent of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the deified is also perceptible to others, because this state is expressed outwardly as well. There are factors that reveal the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart. I should like to list a few of these.

First of all, the individual is set free from sin. This is the sense in which we should speak about freedom. It leads him to the point of hating the sin that he committed in the past.

Next, he has continuous remembrance of God. Now his nous is turned towards God, as he is aware of Him as He Who truly Is, Who gives meaning and value to his life. Thus the words of the Psalm apply: “May my words be pleasing to Him, and I shall be glad in the Lord” (Ps. 103[104]:34). In this way he experiences noetic prayer, which is the illumination of the nous.

This is also linked with something else. The spiritual heart is discovered and the deified human being senses its presence; he finds the centre of his soul. All the powers of his soul – nous, reason and spirit, or its rational, desiring and incensive aspects – are concentrated at one point. And this is linked with noetic prayer.

The body is also transformed. This happens mainly at the stage of theoria but it is also experienced to a lesser degree at the stage of illumination of the nous. This is clearly seen throughout the patristic tradition. St Gregory Palamas teaches that the body also “partakes to some extent in the grace acting in the nous” and “receives some awareness of the ineffable mystery in the soul”. Elsewhere this saint of the Holy Mountain speaks about the action of prayer in the heart, the spiritual warmth and pleasure that come from this, and “the joyful tears of grace”. These expressions show that the body also shares in deification. The body too is deified, which is why we have the relics of the deified saints. There are many examples showing this in Holy Scriptures, and I should like to draw particular attention to one of these: while the First Martyr Stephen was beholding God, those present “saw his face as the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15).

Someone in such a state prophesies: he prays and teaches unerringly and infallibly, but also guides his spiritual children in the path of perfection. Then he can clearly distinguish between what is created and what is created, between the energies of

the devil and the energies of God. Of course, as well as all this he can interpret Holy Scripture, because he is in the same spiritual state as the Prophets and Apostles and sees things from the same spiritual perspective.

Having acquired these 'eyes of heart', he is found worthy by God of becoming very sensitive and of seeing the uncreated energy of God, the inner principles (logoi) of created things, in the whole of creation. Then he sees the directing and providential energy of God.

Those who have experience of these matters can understand what we are analysing here. However, those who are spiritually dead regard all these things as simply psychological states, and either disregard them or, even worse, deny them. In fact, there is a vast difference between psychological and spiritual experiences. Certainly, spiritual experiences also have psychological effects, but these are not the same thing. They are not absolutely identical, as some people suppose nowadays.

That this change is perceptible to some and not to others is clear in the case of Saul during his experience. The Prophets, those who belonged to the band of Prophets, neither commented on the change in Saul nor denied it. Other people did both, saying to one other, "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets" (1 Kg./1 Sam. 10:11). The same often happens today. Worldly people who have never felt the action of divine grace are unable to understand spiritual transformations and spiritual changes. Usually they attribute them to unhealthy states. I believe this is because we have different criteria now as regards sanctity. We have lost the real criteria and think that a saint is just a good human being with a good character and so on. This change in mentality is one of the greatest problems in our time. We have lost the method used

by our Tradition for attaining sanctity, and we have even lost the true criteria.

St Symeon the New Theologian says that denying spiritual gifts, which means denying the results of God's energy in man's heart, constitutes the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Anyone who rejects the noetic prayer that the Holy Spirit gives, who despises the tears produced by the union of nous and heart, and who rejects all the spiritual gifts is actually rejecting the Holy Spirit Who bestows them.