

# St. John of Kronstadt His Life and Worldview - Part 2

by St. John of Kronstadt

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of love, generosity, and holiness, and the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding us towards this goal.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 23:7, Matthew 5:16, John 4:14, John 7:38, John 10:10, John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 2:8, James 1:17, 1 John 4:8

**Topics:** "Holy Trinity", "Christian Living"

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## Description

St. John of Kronstadt emphasizes the importance of recognizing God as the source of life, both physically and spiritually, and encourages Christians, especially priests, to imitate God's generosity and not be like the miser who withholds blessings. He stresses the need for pastors to engage in various forms of ministry and to be a light for all, reflecting God's love and compassion. Father John delves into the concept of the Holy Trinity, highlighting the attributes of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and how they manifest in the world and in believers' lives. He underscores the significance of God's wisdom, the power of words, the necessity of pure thoughts, and the transformative nature of grace in shaping individuals into true Christians.

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## Transcript

The Miser is an Enemy of the Lord

"THE LORD is the cause and everlasting support (strength) of my organic, physical life through the activity of my lungs, my stomach, heart, veins, muscles; and my spiritual-organic life through my mind, and thought, and through the enlightenment of my heart by His Light."

And here again in the midst of ideas dealing with the fullness of life, the bountifulness, and wisdom of God, Father John gives a corresponding moral lesson.

"The Lord has complete consideration for nature created by Him, and for its laws, which are the product of His infinite, most perfect wisdom; and therefore He usually realizes His will through the means of nature and her laws, as, for example, when He punishes people, or blesses them." If the Lord is so generous a creator, if there is no end to His goodness, if the earth by His will furnishes food and clothing in abundance for man, then "each Christian, especially a priest, should follow in example the goodness of the Lord, that

everyone should be invited to partake of the Lord's food at your table. The miser is an enemy of the Lord."

From here comes the call to the fullness of pastoral activity; from here comes the fullness of his personal pastoral work. As a pastor, he warns himself and his co-pastors of being one-sided in Christian effort. "It is not necessary to ask whether you should spread God's glory by writing, speaking, or by good deeds. That is obvious. We are obliged to do these things according to our strength and our ability. Talents must be used in action. If you should stop to think of this simple matter, then the devil will try to suggest an absurdity ... that you need only inner work." "A priest must also remain in the spiritual world, in the sphere of his flock, as the Sun in nature; he must be a light for all, the living, kind hearted soul of all." "My sweetest Savior! Thou didst come to serve mankind; not in the temple only didst Thou preach the Word of Heavenly Truth, but wandering through cities, towns, Thou didst not shun anyone; Thou didst go into the homes of all, especially those in whom Thou didst foresee full repentance with Thy divine glance. Thou didst not sit at home, but had love for all. Grant us that we may show that love toward Thy people, that we pastors may not exclude ourselves from Thy sheep, in our homes, as in castles, or prisons, coming out only for service in the church, or for urgent call in their homes because of duty, mechanically repeating the same prayers. May our lips be opened in the spirit of faith and love in free conversation with our parishioners. May our Christian love spread and be strengthened toward spiritual children through attentive, free, fatherly discourse with them."

Father John had recourse to the spirit of the ancient Fathers in looking for dissimilarity in the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. He sees God the Father as Mind or Thought, God the Son as the Word of the Father, and God the Holy Spirit as the Divine Deed. "God is a Spirit... In what way does a spirit manifest itself? By thought, word, and deed. For this reason, God as a simple being does not consist of a series or multiplicity of thoughts or multiplicity of words or creations, but He is all completely in one simple thought - God the Trinity, or in one simple word - Trinity..., but He is all, and all-existent, all-permeating, and all encompassing..."

In the unity of the Holy Trinity, an image is also given to us. As the Trinity, our God is one in being - "so should we be one. As God is simple, so should we be simple, so simple as though we all were one person, one mind, one will, one heart, one goodness, without the slightest admixture of malice; in a word, one pure love, as God is Love."

God the Father is All-Good

LET US CONCENTRATE our attention on how Father John expresses his Christian teaching about God the Father. How often God the Father is presented as distant from the world! In philosophical religious teachings about God the Word, or Logos, it is explained in another sense, that God the Father, as the Absolute, is not equal with the relative world, and therefore cannot have direct contact with it, and consequently, is in need of an intercessor between Himself and the world, and that such an intercessor is God the Word, God the Son (Son of God). Such an outlook, incidentally, was expressed in the philosophical system of Vladimir Soloviev. This view penetrates often also into our common religious ideas: God the Father, living in unapproachable Light, has reserved the right for this same reason to be remote from this earthly world and from us people. In a similar manner, the thought of the remoteness of God the Father from people is felt in the Roman Catholic teaching about atonement (redemption) where the redemption of mankind with the Blood of the Son of God, is explained by the necessity of appeasing and satisfying God the Father for His being insulted through the sin of man.

Father John teaches an entirely different idea:

God, Father of the Word, is also our benevolent and loving Father. When saying "The Lord's Prayer," we must believe and remember that the Father in heaven never forgets and will never forget us, for what earthly father forgets or does not care for his children? Remember that our Heavenly Father constantly surrounds us with love and care, and not in vain is He called our Father - this is not a name without meaning and force, but a name with great significance and power." "Should we not recognize Him as all the more benevolent, because He gave ... the greatest gift of His benevolence, wisdom, and omnipotence - by this is meant freedom.... not being shaken by the ingratitude of those who received the gift, in order that His goodness could shine brighter than the sun before everyone? And has He not shown by His deeds His boundless love and unlimited wisdom by bestowing upon us freedom, when, after our fall into sinfulness, and our withdrawal from Him, and spiritual ruin, He sent into the world His Son, the Only-Begotten One, in the likeness of perishable man, and gave Him to suffer and die for us?"

"Christian! Remember and constantly bear in mind and in your heart the great words of the Lord's Prayer: 'Our Father, Who art in the Heavens.' Remember Who our Father is. God is our Father, our Love: who are we? We are His children, and among ourselves, brothers; in what manner of love ought children to live among themselves, having such a Father? If you were children of Abraham you would have done the deeds of Abraham; what kinds of deeds must we do?" "Our life is that of love - yes, love. And where there is love, there is God, and where there is God, there is all-good... And so with joy feed and delight everyone, please all and depend in all things upon the heavenly Father, the Father of mercies, and God of all consolation. Bring to your neighbor in sacrifice that which is dear to you..." And so, we see Father John converts the fundamental dogmas into immediate moral admonitions; he shows that every truth of Faith contains in itself a moral purpose.

Father John, in his theology about the Father teaches, first of all, about divine thought. "From God's mind, from God's thought, proceeds every thought in the world. In general, everywhere in the world we see the kingdom of thought, as in all the structure of the visible world, so also, in particular, on earth, in the rotation and life of the earthly planet, in the distribution of the elements of the world: air, water, fire, whereas other phenomena are distributed in all animals, in birds, fish, snakes, beasts, and in man, in their wise and purposeful formation, and in their capabilities, morals, habits; in plants, in their adaptation, in nutrition, and so on; everywhere we see the kingdom of thought, even in the inanimate stone and sand."

All of Our God Pleasing

Consists of Thoughts

GOD'S THOUGHT has its reflection in man's thought. "We are able to think on account of this, because there exists the Infinite Thought. We are able to breathe because there is boundless space with air. That is why pure thoughts dealing with any subject are called inspired. Our thoughts constantly flow under the condition of an Infinite Spirit's existence. That is why the Savior says: - Take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you ... what ye shall speak. You see, thought and even word (inspiration) comes to us from an outside source; this takes place in a grace-filled state and in case of need."

What kind of lesson does Father John draw from his thinking on God's thought? The reminder that we must avoid all kinds of thought that is not true. It is bad or false thoughts that we should avoid, because false thoughts draw us away from God, and incline us to surrender to the devil's power. Sins of thought in a Christian are not to be considered a small matter, because, according to St. Macarius of Egypt, all of our

God pleasing consists of thoughts; for thoughts are the beginning: from them arise words and actions, words, because they give grace to listeners, or are corrupted words that serve as a temptation to others, corrupting their thoughts and hearts.

### The Wisdom of God

THE SECOND person of the Holy Trinity, God the Son, is the Hypostatic Word of the Father. This dogma gave Father John the inspiration often to express in his writings the power and action of every word, not only God's word but also man's.

"The Word is the Creator and our God; every word of His is truth and action. Such should our word also be, (for we are created in the image of God)." "The Word is the expression of truth, the very truth, the life, and the deed. The Word precedes every creature, everything, as the cause of existence, in the past, present, and future." "How much then must one cherish especially all that which comes forth from the Very Hypostatic Word, the Gospel words, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the prayers." "Christian! Cherish every word, be attentive to every word; be firm in word; be trusting toward every word of God, and the words of saintly persons, the words of life. Remember that the word is the beginning of life." "The word must be revered strongly because in one word there is the omnipresent One, the One that fulfills all, one and undivided Lord... in one name is He Himself, the Lord..." "Remember that in the very word is contained the possibility of action; only one must have strong faith in the power of the word, in its creative capacity. With the Lord the word and deed are inseparable. So ought it to be with us also, for we are images of the Word, in its creative capacity. With the Lord the word and deed are inseparable. So ought it to be with us also, for we are images of the Word..." "The word is power... And of people it is said: he has an extraordinary power of words. So you see, the word is power, spirit, life." "Every word, every kernel will bring you spiritual benefit. Who from among those who pray has not experienced this? Not in vain did the Savior compare the seed with the word, and the heart of man with the earth." "We must believe that as the shadow follows the body, so action follows the word; as with the Lord, word and action are inseparable; for He speaks and it is; He orders and it is done... The trouble is that we are of little faith, and separate words from deeds, as body from soul, as form from content, as shadow from body."

It is evident that in the majority of thoughts expressed, Father John speaks about prayer, about the power of prayerful words spoken with faith.

Not every word retains its power in action. Father John observes: "The word on the lips of some is spirit and life, and on the lips of others, dead alphabet (for example during prayer or sermon)." Finally, the word can be a negative force. "With the devil, who fell away from God, there remained only the shadow of a thought and word without truth, without the essence of a deed, a lie, a shadow; and as the true word being the image of God the Word, and proceeding from Him, is Life, so a false word from. The devil, being his image, is death; a lie is inevitable death, for, naturally, that brings death to the soul which itself had fallen from life into death."

The Second Person of the Holy Trinity is also called Hypostatic, i.e., Personal Wisdom of God. Why do we believe that the Wisdom of God has a personal attribute? Father John answers: "How could God be without wisdom, and not be personal, how could God not be the Creator, how could He be without His own living self-existent Wisdom? Look at all in this world, how wonderful it all is! Can you imagine how God, having created innumerable reasonable, personal, wise, living creatures, could not Himself generate from within Himself Personal Wisdom? Is this wise? Is this possible? Is this in conformity with the perfection of

God? In God there must be the Hypostatic Wisdom, or the Hypostatic Word of the Father, equal as the Life-Giving Spirit, Who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son."

The Holy Spirit is

the Breath of Life

THE HOLY SPIRIT is the third person of the Holy Trinity, indivisible, "Within you, there is breath, and material impersonal in nature, but in God as life itself, breath is a personal spirit, indivisible, simple, that gives Life to everything." "We may ask, why is the third Person called Spirit, and why is He a separate Person, when God, even without Him, is Spirit? I answer: The Holy Spirit is called Spirit in relation to creatures: the Lord breathed with His Hypostatic Spirit, and there appeared, by the power of His Life-Giving Spirit, an innumerable host of spirits: In the power of His Spirit lies their strength; He breathed with His Spirit into man's body: and now man became a living soul, and from this Breath, until now, people are born, and will be born until the end according to the commandment: increase and multiply. If the Lord created by His Spirit so many personal separate beings, then why is it impossible for the Holy Spirit Himself to be a Person, or a personal creative Being? If there are countless numbers of created personal spirits, then is God Himself to remain without Spirit, without His independent, Hypostatic Personality?"

"The Holy Spirit, like air, 'is present everywhere and fillest [penetrates] all things.'" "The Lord Jesus Christ Himself likens the Holy Spirit in His action to the substance of water (John 7:38-39), air, or wind (John 3:8)." "As the air in the room is identical with the outer air and comes from it, and necessarily presupposes the air spread out everywhere, so in like manner, our soul, the breath of the Spirit of God, presupposes the existence of the omnipresent, transcendent Spirit of God."

"It is the Spirit that quickeneth" (John 6:63). "The life in creatures belongs to God, from the time of their creation, and to God the Son, their creator, bringing them from non-existence to existence... The Holy Spirit creates us in the womb of our mother; our spiritual wealth belongs to the Holy Spirit."

Our soul lives by the Holy Spirit, through Him we pray, through Him we become purified, through Him we save ourselves. "As breath is necessary for the body, and without breathing man cannot live, so without the Breath of the Holy Spirit the soul cannot live the true life. What the air is for the body, the Holy Spirit is for the soul. Air is likened to the Spirit of God. The Spirit breathes wherever It wishes." "He who prays by the Holy Spirit." "Prayer is the breath of the soul, as air is the breath of the natural body. We breathe by the Holy Spirit. You cannot say a single word of prayer from your heart without the Holy Spirit."

"As in a conversation with people the sound-conveying medium between our words and the words of another is air, which is everywhere and fills all space, and through air the words reach the ear of another, and without air it would be impossible to speak and hear: so in a spiritual manner, in communication with spiritual beings the mediator is the Holy Spirit, omnipresent and transcendent."

"We are filled with One Spirit: Do you see how the Holy Spirit surrounds us like water and air on all sides?"

"For a long time I did not know with full clarity how necessary was the strengthening of our soul by the Holy Spirit. And now the Most Merciful One gave me the opportunity to find out how indispensable it is. Yes, it is necessary every minute, as is breathing, necessary at prayer, and throughout life. It is necessary that our heart rest on a rock. And that rock is the Holy Spirit."

"All upright people are filled by the One Divine Spirit, similarly as a sponge is saturated with water. The comforting Holy Spirit, filling the universe, penetrates through all the believing, humble, good, and simple souls of men; living in them, reviving them and strengthening them; He becomes all for them: light, power, peace, joy, success in deeds - especially in an upright life. The Holy Spirit is all goodness."

Thus we see what the dogma of the Holy Spirit in the thought of Father John and how closely it is connected with life. The teaching about the Holy Spirit is at the same time teaching about the life of the world, about the source and nourishment of all uprightness and holiness.

### The Holy Trinity

Such is the teaching of Father John about the Holy Trinity. In the Triune Unity of God is found all the fullness of life and the life of the world. The reflection of the attributes of God is represented by the universe, the material world and in man in particular. From here, we will make a general deduction from the words of Father John: "In order to become pure images of the Holy Trinity, we must try to attain holiness in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Thought corresponds to God the Father, the word to the Son, and deeds to the Holy Spirit, the all active Creator."

"Your Lord is Love: love Him and in Him all people, as His children in Christ. Your Lord is Fire: do not be cold at heart, but burn with fire and love. Your Lord is Light: do not walk in the darkness of your mind without reason and understanding or without faith. Your Lord is a God of mercy and kindness: you should also be a source of mercy and kindness to your neighbors. If you will be so, you will attain salvation with eternal glory."

Such should our life be, for we carry within ourselves the image of God.

But actually most of the time we live in doubt, with lack of faith; in unbelief, having eyes and seeing not, having ears and hearing not, having a hardened heart. "We notice within ourselves the struggle of faith and disbelief, of good and evil, the spirit of the Church against the spirit of the world. Do you know where this comes from?" asks Father John, and he answers: "From the struggle of two opposing forces: the power of God, and the power of the devil. And I also feel within myself this struggle of two opposing forces. When I begin to pray, at times an evil force painfully depresses me and casts my heart down, that it may not be able to look up to God," writes Father John, in one of his comparatively early writings. The radiation of the evil forces of the devil is similar to poison that enters the body. The kingdom of life and the kingdom of death go together. And involuntarily the question arises: Why does the Lord allow the devil to exist, and even to act on good souls?

Father John sees in this the providential plans of God. "If you do not experience in yourself the influence of the evil spirit, you will not know and you will not value as you should the goodness shown to you by the benevolence of the Holy Spirit; not having known the spirit that destroys, you also will not know the Life-Giving Spirit. Only because of the opposites of good and evil, of life and death, can we understand the one and the other... Glory to God, the Wise and All-Good that He permits the spirit of evil and death to tempt us and cause us suffering. Otherwise, how could we begin to value the consolation of grace, the consolation of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Life-Giver!"

For this reason we have been given the Holy Church, Her Mysteries, and all of Her ordinances, so that we might have the opportunity to remain under the constant influence of the all-conquering grace of God.

## Ocean of Spiritual Waters

WE SEE the grace of God openly working in life. If a man was proud, a lover of self, and unkind, but became humble and gracious, he became so by the power of grace. By the power of grace the unbeliever becomes a believer; the lover of money, no longer greedy, but honest and generous by the power of grace. The glutton becomes moderate in eating from the conscious knowledge of high moral purpose, by the grace of God; he who hated and was full of malice, a lover of his fellow man by the power of grace; he who was cold toward God and toward the Church is transformed, he becomes a fervent believer in God, by the act of grace. "From this it is evident that many live without grace, not knowing its importance and its need for themselves, and do not seek it... Many live in all kinds of abundance, and pleasure, but they have no grace in their hearts, this most valuable treasure for the Christian, without which the Christian cannot be a true Christian and inherit the kingdom of God."

"The sign of God's mercy and that of His Most Holy Mother of God toward us, after or during prayer, is peace within the heart, especially after the affect of some passion, which is the absence of peace of soul. By peace of soul and a certain holy inclination of the heart we can easily ascertain that our prayer is heard and the grace asked for is received."

Take advantage then, Christian, of God's treasure of grace! "When you pray to the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, the One God, do not seek Him outside yourself, but perceive Him within yourself as living in you, completely penetrating within you and knowing you. Know ye not that ye are temples of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

Remember "that your soul is like some imprint of godliness and all the riches of the soul consist of God, as within a treasure (the treasure of grace) from which we can draw every spiritual good, by the prayer of faith, and by patience, and by purifying ourselves from all iniquity."

"As there is an overabundance of sources of water on earth, and all drink from them, come and draw freely, for the Lord is an ocean of spiritual waters; come and draw all the spiritual good with the dipper of true, firm, and unashamed faith. Only extend this hearty dipper and you will inevitably draw abundantly the water of life, the forgiveness of sins, and peace of conscience. But fear doubt; it deprives you of the means of drawing forth every mercy of God."

The waters from this source you will also find in communion with the saints during prayer; they are in the graceful life of the Church. "The priesthood and in general, all the saints, are blessed water containers, from which the water of grace is transmitted to other believers. Living waters will flow from the depths of rivers."

In such a manner Father John teaches us the fundamental truths of the Christian faith and life founded on these truths. The value of his theological teaching for us consists in the close connection between his theological thought, his words, his life, and all his sanctified activity. The value is in this, that his personal life is justified, proved, and realized by his faith in action. "Experience!" - "Based on experience!" with this exclamation Father John often finishes his separate writings. "No matter how many times I prayed with faith, God always heard me and answered my prayers." What can be said stronger than these words?

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