



■ From the Life of Elder Barsanouphios of Optina

The Blessedness of a Soul That Has Acquired Purity of Heart

“**O**nce,” recalled Father Barsanouphios, “when I was still a novice, I walked out of my silent cell on a warm July night. There was no moon, but a countless multitude of stars shone in the dark sky. I loved to walk through the secluded alley of the Skete garden at this late hour so that, let alone with God, I might tear myself away from everything mundane. I walked up to the big pond and suddenly saw our Schema-monk, Father Gennadius, who had already spent sixty-two years in the Skete. In recent years he had not crossed through the Skete gates at all and had forgotten about the world.



“**H**e stood motionless and gazed at the water. I called to him to as not to frighten him by my sudden appearance. I approached him: ‘What are you doing here, Father?’

“**I** am looking at the water,’ he replied.

“**W**hat do you see there?’

“**D**o you not see anything in it?’ Father Gennadius asked in turn.

“**N**othing.’

“**B**ut I,’ said the Schema-monk, ‘am contemplating the wisdom of God. You know, I am semiliterate; I only learned to read the Psalter, but the Lord makes known His will to me, the lowly one. And I am amazed that learned people often do not know the simplest things regarding faith. Do you see this whole starry sky reflected in the water? That is how the Lord settles in the pure

heart. What blessedness, then, a soul must feel which has acquired purity.... *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* Here, no matter how I try, I cannot acquire purity of soul, even though I know how important this is. And do you understand what purity of heart is?’ Father Gennadius asked.



“**I** do not know by experience, since I do not have it,’ I replied. ‘But I think that purity of heart consists in complete passionlessness: he who possesses neither envy nor anger nor any other passion has a pure heart.’

“**N**o, that is not enough,’ objected the Schema-monk, ‘it is not enough only to rinse the vessel out—you still have to fill it with water; after uprooting the passions you have to replace them with the opposing virtues. Without this the heart is not purified.’

“**A**nd do you hope to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, Father Gennadius?’

“**I** have hope that I will be there,’ he replied.

“**B**ut since you yourself say that you do not have purity of soul, and only the *pure in heart shall see God*?’

“**A**nd what about God’s mercy? It makes up for all that is lacking. It is boundless, and I have the firm hope that the Lord will not reject even me,’ the Schema-monk said; and in his words could be heard deep faith in God’s mercy.”

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Oh, how many brethren with such profound faith live among us, hidden from our eyes, who never give a hint of being Elders endowed with spiritual gifts. And yet, they lead such profoundly spiritual lives. Conversing with them, one discovers the beauty of their cultivated souls.

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(*) Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanouphios of Optina* (Platina: Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000), pp. 211-213.