



MY LIFE IN CHRIST

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*Extracts from the Diary of
Saint John of Kronstadt*

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY

E. E. Goulacff

THE HOLY NATIVITY READING GUIDE

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My Life in Christ

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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

This edition presents the complete, unabridged text of *My Life in Christ* in the 1897 English translation of E. E. Goulaeff, the first to bring the whole of Saint John's diary into English. The translation is followed faithfully, with all of its original footnotes preserved. The reflections have been individually numbered as an aid to study and reference, and the volume closes with an index of scripture references and a subject index. The text is in the public domain.

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PART I

“This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.”—St. John xvii. 3.



THOU, O God, hast opened wide to me Thy truth and Thy verity. By instructing me in the sciences, Thou hast opened to me all the riches of faith, of nature, and of human understanding; I have learned Thy word—the Word of God—“piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.”¹ I have studied the laws regulating the mind of man, its love of wisdom, the formation and the beauty of speech; I have penetrated in part into the mysteries of Nature, into her laws, into the abyss of the creation of worlds and their revolution; I know the population of the terrestrial globe; I have acquainted myself with its different peoples, with the celebrated persons, and their works, who have passed in turn through this world; I have in part studied the great science of self-knowledge and of how to draw nigh to Thee; in a word, I have become cognisant of many, many things—“for more things are shewed unto thee than men understand,”² and hereafter I shall yet learn much. I have many books of very varied contents; I have read and re-read them, but still I am not yet satisfied. My spirit still thirsts for further knowledge and my heart is unsatisfied; it hungers, and from all the knowledge thus acquired by the intellect, it cannot gain full happiness. When will it be satisfied? It will be satisfied, when “I will behold Thy face in

righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.”³ Until then I shall hunger. “Whosoever drinketh of this water (of worldly wisdom) shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life,”⁴ said the Lord.

2 How is it that the saints see us and our needs and hear our prayers? Let us make the following comparison: Suppose that you were transplanted to the sun and were united to it. The sun lights the whole earth with its rays, it lights every particle of the earth. In these rays you also see the earth, but you are so small in proportion to the sun, that you would form, so to say, but one ray, and there are an infinite number of such rays. By its identity with the sun this ray takes an intimate part in lighting the whole world through the sun. So also the saintly soul, having become united to God, as to its spiritual sun, sees, through the medium of its spiritual sun, which lights the whole universe, all men and the needs of those that pray.

3 Have you learned to see God and represent Him to yourself—as the omnipresent Wisdom, as the living, acting Word, as the vivifying Holy Spirit? The Holy Scripture is the domain of Wisdom, Word and Spirit, of God in the Trinity: in it He clearly manifests Himself: “The Words that I speak

¹ Hebrews iv. 12.

² Sirach iii. 23.

³ Psalm xvii. 15.

⁴ St. John iv. 13 and 14.

unto you, they are spirit, and they are life,”⁵ said the Lord. The writings of the Holy Fathers are again the expression of the Mind, Word and Spirit of the Holy Trinity, in which the spirit of the higher class (spiritually speaking) of mankind has largely participated; the writings of ordinary worldly men are the expression of the fallen spirit of men, with all their sinful attachments, habits and passions. In the Holy Scriptures we see God face to face, and ourselves as we are. Man, know thy self through them, and walk always as in the presence of God.

4 As you are aware, man, in his words, does not die; he is immortal in them, and they will speak after his death. I shall die, but shall speak even after my death. How many immortal words are in use amongst the living, which were left by those who have died long ago, and which sometimes still live in the mouths of a whole people! How powerful is the word even of an ordinary man! Still more so is the Word of God: it will live throughout all ages, and will always be living and acting.

5 As God is the creative, living and life-giving Wisdom, therefore those greatly sin who, by the thoughts of their spirit, turn aside from the Wisdom of the Trinity and occupy themselves with material, perishable things, thus materialising their spirit itself. Especially do those sin who, during Divine Service in church or during their prayers at home, entirely turn aside in their thoughts from God and allow their minds to wander in different places outside the church. By doing so they greatly offend God, upon Whom on such occasions our minds should be fixed.

6 To what end do fasting and penitence lead? For what purpose is this trouble taken? They lead to the cleansing of the soul from sins, to peace of heart, to union with God; they fill us with devotion and sonship, and give us boldness before God. There are, indeed, very important reasons for fasting and for confession

⁵ St. John vi. 63.

from the whole heart. There shall be an inestimable reward given for conscientious labour. Have many of us the feeling of son-like love to God? Dare many of us, without condemnation and with boldness call upon the Father in Heaven and say: “Our Father!”... Is there not, on the contrary, no such sonlike voice to be heard in our hearts, which are deadened by the vanities of this world and attachments to its objects and pleasures? Is not our Heavenly Father far from our hearts? Is it not rather an avenging God that we should represent to ourselves, we who have withdrawn ourselves from Him into a far-away land? Yes, by our sins all of us are worthy of His righteous anger and punishment, and it is wonderful how long-suffering and forbearing He is to us—that He does not strike us like the barren fig trees. Let us hasten to propitiate Him by repentance and tears. Let us enter into ourselves; let us consider our unclean hearts in all strictness, and when we see what a multitude of impurities are keeping them from the reach of Divine grace, we shall ourselves acknowledge that we are spiritually dead.

7 The loving Lord is here: how can I let even a shadow of evil enter into my heart? Let all evil completely die within me; let my heart be anointed with the sweet fragrance of goodness as with a balsam. Let God’s love conquer thee, thou evil Satan, instigating us, who are evil by nature, to evil. Evil is most hurtful both to the mind and to the body. It burns, it crushes, and it tortures. No one bound by evil shall dare to approach the throne of the God of love.

8 When praying, we must absolutely subject our heart to our will, and turn it towards God. It must be neither cold, crafty, untruthful, nor double-minded, otherwise what will be the use of our prayers, of our preparation for the Sacrament? It is good for us to hear God’s voice of anger: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”⁶

⁶ St. Matthew xv. 8.

9 So do not let us stand in church in a state of spiritual prostration, but let the spirit of each one of us on such occasions burn in its working towards God. Even men do not much value the services which we render to them coldly, out of habit. And God requires our hearts. “My son, give Me thine heart.”⁷ Because the heart is the principal part of the man—his life. More than this, the heart is the man himself. Thus he who does not pray or does not serve God with his heart, does not pray at all, because in that case his body only prays, and the body without the mind is nothing more than earth. Remember, that when standing in prayer, you stand before God Himself, who has the wisdom of all. Therefore, your prayer ought to be, so to say, all spirit, all understanding.

10 The saints of God live even after their death. Thus, I often hear in church the Mother of God singing her wonderful, heart-penetrating song which she said in the house of her cousin Elizabeth, after the Annunciation of the Archangel. At times, I hear the song of Moses; the song of Zacharias—the father of the Forerunner; that of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel; that of the three children; and that of Miriam. And how many holy singers of the New Testament delight until now the ear of the whole Church of God! And the Divine service itself—the sacraments, the rites? Whose spirit is there, moving and touching our hearts? That of God and of His saints. Here is a proof for you of the immortality of men’s souls. How is it that all these men have died, and yet are governing our lives after their death—they are dead and they still speak, instruct and touch us?

11 As the breath is necessary for the body, and as without breathing men cannot live, so likewise the soul cannot truly live without the breath of God’s Spirit. As air is necessary for the body, so is the Holy Ghost for the soul. Air has some likeness to the Holy Ghost. As “the wind

bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”⁸

12 When you are threatened with temptation to sin, then represent to yourself vividly that sin is exceedingly displeasing to God, Who hates iniquity. “Thou hatest all workers of iniquity.”⁹

13 And in order to understand this better, imagine a father, righteous and severe, who loves his family, and is trying by every means to make his children well-principled and upright, in order to reward them afterwards for their good behaviour by the great riches he has laboriously laid up for them, and, who nevertheless sees, to his grief, that the children, disregarding their father’s love, do not love him, do not pay attention to the inheritance so lovingly prepared for them by their father, but live disorderly, and rush impetuously to destruction. Mark, that “sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death,”¹⁰ because it kills the soul, because it makes us the slaves of the Devil—the destroyer of men; and the more we work for sin, the more difficult will be our return, and the more sure will be our ruin. Dread, therefore, every sin with the whole heart.

14 When your heart inclines to evil, and the evil one begins to undermine your heart, so that it is completely removed from the rock of faith, then say to yourself inwardly: “I know of my spiritual poverty, my own nothingness without faith. I am so weak, that it is only by Christ’s name that I live and obtain peace, that I rejoice and my heart expands, whilst without Him I am spiritually dead, I am troubled, and my heart is oppressed; without the Lord’s Cross I should have been long since the victim of the most cruel distress and despair. Only Christ keeps me alive: and the Cross is my peace and my consolation.”

15 We are all able to think, because an unlimited Wisdom (Thought) exists, just as

⁸ St. John iii. 8.

⁹ Psalm v. 5.

¹⁰ James i. 15, and others.

⁷ Proverbs xxiii. 26.

we are able to breathe because unlimited air-spaces exist. This is the reason why bright ideas upon any subject are called inspirations. Our thoughts are constantly flowing conditionally with the existence of the unlimited Spirit of Wisdom (Thought). This is why the Apostle says: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God."¹¹

16 This is also why the Saviour Himself says:—"Take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak."¹² Thus you see that the thought and even the word itself (the inspiration) come to us from without. This, of course, in a state of grace and in cases of need. But even in our ordinary state all our bright thoughts come from our Guardian Angel and from God's Spirit: whilst, on the contrary, impure, dark thoughts proceed from our corrupt nature and from the Devil, ever lying in wait for us. How then, should the Christian behave? "God Himself worketh in us."¹³ In general, throughout the world we see the Kingdom of thought in the structure of the whole visible world, as also in particular in the earth, in the rotation and the life of the terrestrial globe; in the distribution of the elements—light, air, water, earth, fire (concealed), whilst other elements are diffused in all animals—in birds, fishes, reptiles, beasts, and men—in their wise and ingenious construction, in their faculties, nature and habits; in plants, in their construction, nourishment, etc.; in a word, we see everywhere the kingdom of thought, even down to the lifeless stone and sand.

17 Priests of God! learn how to turn the bed of sorrow of the Christian sufferer into one of joy by the consolation of faith; learn how to make him, instead of—in his opinion—the most unfortunate, the happiest of men; assure him that having been "a little chastised he shall be greatly rewarded

afterwards,"¹⁴ and you will be the friends of mankind, angels of consolation, instruments or ministers of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

18 If the fervour of faith in the heart is not sometimes stirred up, then in time, through negligence, faith may become entirely extinguished in us; and Christianity with its Sacraments may entirely die for us. The enemy takes pains to attain this end, and tries to extinguish faith in our hearts and to bury in oblivion all the truths of Christianity. That is why we see men who, being Christians, are only such in name, while by their actions they are quite heathen.

19 Do not think that our faith is not vivifying to us—pastors—that we serve God hypocritically. No; we before all, and more than all, avail ourselves of God's mercies, and we know by experience what the Lord Himself is to us, His Sacraments, His most pure Mother, and His Saints. For instance, in partaking of the life-giving mysteries of the Blood and Body of the Saviour, we often, often experience in ourselves their vivifying effect, the heavenly gifts of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; we know that the gracious gaze of a king does not rejoice the heart of the least of his subjects as the merciful gaze of our heavenly Master, as His mysteries rejoice our hearts. And we should have been most unthankful to the Lord, and our hearts would indeed have been hardened, had we not tried to make known the glory of God's Life-giving Mysteries unto His beloved, had we not extolled His wonders, accomplished in our hearts during each celebration of the Divine Liturgy. We also experience the effect of the invincible, incomprehensible, divine power of the Lord's glorious and life-giving Cross, and by its power we drive away from our hearts evil passions, despondency, pusillanimity, fear, and other snares of the Devil. The Cross is our friend and benefactor. I say this

¹¹ 2 Corinthians iii. 5.

¹² St. Matthew x. 19.

¹³ Philippians ii. 13.

¹⁴ Wisdom iii. 5.

sincerely, with full belief in the truth and power of these words.

20 You wish to comprehend the incomprehensible; but can you understand how the inward sorrows with which your heart is overwhelmed overtake you, and can you find, except in the Lord, the means to drive them away? Learn at first, with your heart, how to free yourself from sorrows, how to ensure peace in your heart, and then, if necessary, philosophise on the incomprehensible, for “if ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?”¹⁵

21 Think oftener: Whose wisdom appears in the construction of your body? Who has ordered the laws of your thoughts, so that until now these laws are followed by all men? Who has engraved in the hearts of all men the law of conscience, so that until now it rewards the good and punishes the evil in all men? The Almighty, All-wise, and most gracious God! Thy hand is constantly upon me, a sinner, and there is no moment when Thy mercy leaves me. Grant me, then, always to kiss, with living faith, Thy gracious hand. Why should I go far to seek for the traces of Thy mercies, of Thy wisdom, and Thy omnipotence? O! how clearly these traces are visible to me! I, I myself am a miracle of God’s goodness, wisdom and omnipotence. I myself—on a small scale—am a whole world; my soul is the representative of the invisible world; my body—of the invisible one.

22 Brethren! what is the purpose of our earthly life? It is, that, after our trial by earthly affliction and misfortunes, and after our gradual advancement in virtue, by means of the divine gifts, given to us in the sacraments, we may rest, after our death, in the Lord, the peace of our souls. That is why we sing of the dead: “Grant rest, O Lord, to the soul of Thy departed servant.” We wish him to rest in peace, as the limit of all wishes, and pray to God for this. Is it not, then, unwise to grieve much

¹⁵ St. Luke xiii. 26.

for the departed? “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,”¹⁶ says the Lord. Thus our departed ones, who have fallen asleep in a Christian death, come to this voice of God and obtain rest. What is there, then, to grieve for?

23 Those who are trying to lead a spiritual life have to carry on a most skilful and difficult warfare, through their thoughts, every moment of their life—that is, a spiritual warfare; it is necessary that our whole soul should be every moment a clear eye, able to watch and notice the thoughts entering our heart from the evil one and repel them; the hearts of such men should be always burning with faith, humility and love; otherwise the subtlety of the Devil finds an easy access to them, followed by a diminution of faith, or entire unbelief, and then by every possible evil, which it will be difficult to wash away even by tears. Do not, therefore, allow your heart to be cold, especially during prayer, and avoid in every way cold indifference. Very often it happens that prayer is on the lips, but in the heart cunning, incredulity or unbelief, so that by the lips the man seems near to God, whilst in his heart he is far from Him. And, during our prayers, the evil one makes use of every means to chill our hearts and fill them with deceit in a most imperceptible manner to us. Pray and fortify yourself, fortify your heart.

24 If you wish to ask of God in prayer any blessing for yourself, then before praying prepare yourself for undoubting and firm faith, and take in good time means against doubt and unbelief. For it will go ill with you if during the prayer itself your heart wavers in its faith and does not stand firm in it; then do not even expect to obtain of the Lord what you have prayed for doubtfully, for in so doing you have offended the Lord, and God does not bestow His gifts upon a reviler. “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believ-

¹⁶ St. Matthew xi. 28.

ing, ye shall receive,"¹⁷ said the Lord. This means, that if you doubt and do not believe, you shall not receive. "If ye have faith and doubt not," said He also, "ye shall have power to move mountains."¹⁸ Therefore, if you doubt and do not believe, you shall not have power to do so. "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed," says the Apostle James; "for let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."¹⁹ The heart that doubts that God can grant what it asks for is punished for this doubt: it is painfully oppressed and contracted by doubt. Do not anger Almighty God even by a shade of doubt—especially you, who have already experienced many and many times, the omnipotence of God. Doubt is a blasphemy against God, an insolent lie of the heart or of the lying spirit that nestles in the heart, against the spirit of truth. Fear it as you would fear a venomous serpent, or no—what I would rather say, is, despise it, do not take the slightest heed of it. Remember that God, during your prayer, is waiting for your affirmative answer to the question which He is inwardly asking you: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" To which question you must from the depth of your heart reply, "Yea, Lord."²⁰ Let the following considerations also help you in your doubt or unbelief: I ask of God, firstly, that which already exists, and nothing merely imaginary not a fanciful good, and everything that exists receives its being from God: because "without Him was not anything made that was made,"²¹ and therefore, nothing that happens can happen without Him, and everything has either received its being from Him, or happens by His will or His permission, by means of powers and faculties given by

¹⁷ St. Matthew xxi. 22.

¹⁸ St. Matthew xxi. 3.

¹⁹ James i. 6-8.

²⁰ St. Matthew ix. 28.

²¹ St. John i. 3.

Him to His creatures—and in everything that exists or is still happening, God is an all-powerful Master. Besides this, "He calleth those things which be not as though they were."²² Therefore, had I even asked for that which does not exist, He could give it to me by creating it. Secondly, I ask of God what is possible, because what is impossible for us is possible for God; and there cannot be any difficulty even in this respect, because God can do for me even that which is impossible in my own opinion. It is our misfortune that our faith is hindered by the short-sightedness of our reason—that spider, that catches the truth in the web of its judgments, its arguments and analogies. Faith embraces and sees suddenly, whilst reason arrives at the truth by circuitous ways; faith is the means of communication between one spirit and another, whilst reason is the means of communication between the spiritually sensual and the spiritually sensual and even simply material: the first is the spirit and the latter the flesh.

25 All the blessings of the soul, that is, all that constitutes the true life, the peace and the joy of the soul, come from God! This I have proved by experience. My heart tells me so. Thou, O Holy Ghost, art a treasury of blessings!

26 Having Christ in your heart, fear that you may lose Him, and with Him the peace of your heart; it is hard to begin again; efforts to attach oneself afresh to Him after falling away will be very grievous, and will cost bitter tears to many. Cling to Christ with all your might, gain Him, and do not lose boldness in approaching Him.

27 You gaze upon the icon of the Saviour and see that He looks at you from it with brightest eyes; this look is the image of how He actually looks upon you with His eyes, that are brighter than the sun, and sees all your thoughts, hears all your heart-felt distress and sighs. The image is an image, and represents in lines and signs that which cannot be delineated, cannot be

²² Romans iv. 17.