Welcome to the *Theosis* Weekend!

This workbook includes a number of items intended to be used both during the course of the weekend and afterwards. Please bring it with you to all the talks. It contains:

1 - Talks Section

Here space is provided for you to take notes at each teaching talk, to help you both in the reflection period which follows and back home as you review the course of the weekend.

Space is also provided to record the questions and points raised during the discussions which follow each talk.

Finally there are several readings and reflection questions to assist you in praying about the content of each presentation during the quiet time which follows or in the days following the weekend.

2. - Music Section

Several chants from our liturgical tradition are given here for use during the gathering time before the talks and to conclude each presentation.

This weekend is a time for enjoying the fellowship of a community of fellow Eastern Christians in the context of our Church’s spiritual Tradition. May it also be a time of grace for you to know the eternal God in the Body of His Son.
Synergy

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing; it is God’s gift. Neither is it a reward for anything you have accomplished, so let no one pride himself on it. We are truly his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to lead the life of good works which God prepared for us in advance.” (Eph 2:8-10)

There are three interacting elements at the heart of the Christian life: grace, faith and works. The source and basis of our life in Christ is God’s graciousness, the sheer gift of His love for mankind, which He gives to us unearned. Faith is our saying “yes”, our enabling God to grace us, our accepting of God’s gift allowing Him to be generous to us. Our good works do not earn us God’s love or more of it: they are our response in gratitude for what He does for us. Having been adopted into God’s family, we are responsible for managing what we have been given.

Synergy is the interplay of these three elements: God’s initiative for loving us, our acceptance in faith, and our responsible management through works. God does not force His love on us: He offers it. We must accept His love openly to receive it and then care for it responsibly to keep it. No one of these elements without the others defines the Christian life. All three together produce the fullness of God’s life in us.

Theosis

The Greek Fathers term for describing the Christian life is drawn from 2 Pet 1:3-4: “His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.” This seems too daring an expression for many people, but the Scriptures are daring on this theme. Elsewhere our union with God, is described in imagery such as the vine and the branches (Jn 15:4) or as comparable to the union of the Father and the Son (Jn 17:22-23). This union admits to the Unattainable God with the intimate confidence of children calling to their baba (Rom 8:14-17). It is with the same boldness that the Fathers affirmed that “God became man so that man can be made divine.”
1 - GOD CALLS US TO A NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, grant you a spirit of wisdom and insight to know Him clearly. May He enlighten your innermost vision that you may know the great hope to which He has called you, the wealth of His glorious heritage to be distributed among the members of the Church, and the immeasurable scope of His power in us who believe."

Eph 1:17-19

Notes on This Talk
O God, you are my God whom I seek;
for You my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth: parched,
ilfeless and without water.
Thus have I gazed toward You in the sanctuary
to see Your power and Your glory.
For Your kindness is a greater good than life;
my lips shall glorify You.
Thus will I bless you while I live;
lifting up my hands I will call upon Your name.
As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied,
and with exultant lips my mouth shall praise You.
I will remember you upon my couch,
and through the night watches I will meditate on You:
That You are my help,
and in the shadow of Your wings I shout for joy.
My soul clings fast to You;
Your right hand upholds me.

Psalm 63: 1-9

Reflection Questions

1. I am invited to have ‘more of God’ in my life. How do I feel about that? Is it a burden or a promise of renewal? How are my feelings affected by my past experiences of God or the Church?

2. To have her thirst for life quenched by Christ, the Samaritan Woman had to face part of her life which was not oriented to Him (her marriages). What do I have to deal with in the areas of:

   * resentments over past hurts
   * secret sins or faults we fear to expose
   * fear of being a fanatic, too ‘religious’.

   + + +

"Enter eagerly into the treasure-house that lies within you, and so you will see the treasure house of heaven: for the two are the same, and there is but one single entry to them both. The Ladder that leads to the Kingdom is hidden within you, and is found in your own soul. Dive into yourself and in your soul. You will discover the rungs by which to ascend."

St. Isaac the Syrian
"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creatures. In Him everything in heaven and on earth was created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, principalities or powers; all were created through Him and for Him. He is before all else that is. In Him everything continues in being. It is He who is the Head of the Body, the Church: He who is the beginning, the first-born of the dead, so that primacy may be His in everything. It pleases God to make absolute fulness reside in Him and, by means of Him, to reconcile everything in His person - both on earth and in the heavens - making peace through the blood of His cross. ...

"In Christ the fulness of deity resides in bodily form. Yours is a share of this fulness, in Him who is the head of every principality and power."

Col 1:15-20; 2:9-10

Notes on This Talk
O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Your name over all the earth;
    You have exalted Your majesty above the heavens.
When I behold the heavens, the works of Your fingers - the moon and stars
    which You set in place -
What is man that You should be mindful of him,
    or the son of man that You should care for him?
You have made him little less than the angels,
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him rule over the works of your hands,  
putting all things under his feet:  
All sheep and oxen - yes, and the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea  
and whatever swims the path of the seas.  
O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Your name  
over all the earth.

Psalm 8

Reflection Questions

1. We were created after the image of God. What specifically does that include: how are we ‘imaging’ God?

2. What are some God-like qualities with which you have been gifted?

3. The fall distorted the image of God in us. As a result, we often live in delusion about reality from God’s perspective. Can you recall a time when you lived in delusion about a specific aspect of your life and then were brought out of it?

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"What is this mystery all about me? I had a share in the image; I did not keep it. And now He partakes of my flesh that He may both save the image and make the flesh immortal. He unites with us in a second way more marvelous than the first; then He imparted to us a better nature, but now He shares Himself in a worse one. This is more godlike an action than the first: this is loftier in the eyes of anyone with understanding."

St. Gregory the Theologian, Oration 33:12

"God created us that we should become ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pt 1:4) and of His immortality, and that we should be like Him (1 Jn 3:2) through deification by grace. To this end everything is created and exists and things that are as yet not, are brought into existence and born."

St. Maximos the Confessor
3 - YOU HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED

"When the designated time had come, God sent forth His Son born of a woman, born under the law, to deliver from the law those who were subjected to it, so that we might receive our status as adopted sons. The proof that you are sons is the fact that God has sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of His Son which cries out 'Abba!' ('Father!') You are no longer a slave but a son! And the fact that you are a son makes you an heir, by God's design."

Gal 4:4-7

Notes on This Talk
The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?
The Lord is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid?
Though an army encamp against me, my heart will not fear;
Though war be waged upon me, even then will I trust.
One thing I ask of the Lord; this I seek:
To dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
That I may gaze on the loveliness of the Lord and contemplate His temple.

Psalm 27:1-4
Reflection Questions

1. The holy mysteries in our Church are communal rites: do I see these mysteries more as rituals or as personal encounters with the Lord?

2. Each mystery has a physical side (water, chrism, etc.). Do these physical signs and gestures hide or reveal for me the personal side of these mysteries?

3. Write a definition of one or more of the mysteries of initiation as a personal encounter with the Lord: what does He do, how does He do it?

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"Having been baptized into Christ and having put on Christ, you have become like the Son of God. Because God foreordained us for adoptive sonship, He has made us like the glorious body of Christ. Rightly, then, do men call you 'christs', since you share in Christ. ... Yes, you have become christs by receiving the mark of the Holy Spirit.

"When Christ bathed Himself in the River Jordan, ... the Holy Spirit really rested on Him. ... He was chrismated with a spiritual oil of gladness: the Holy Spirit who is called the oil of spiritual gladness. You too have been chrismated, and that makes you sharers and associates of Christ.

"Yet do not imagine that this was an ordinary ointment. For, just as the Bread of the Eucharist, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, is no longer ordinary bread but the body of Christ, so this holy ointment, after the invocation, is no longer what we might call an ordinary, everyday balm, but it is a gift of Christ, and the presence of the divine and Holy Spirit makes it efficacious."

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Third Mystagogical Catechesis 21:2-3
4 - GROWING IN THE LIKENESS

"That divine power of His has freely bestowed on us everything necessary for a life of genuine piety, through knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and power. By virtue of them He has bestowed on us the great and precious things He promised, so that through these you who have fled a world corrupted by lust might become sharers of the divine nature. This is reason enough for you to make every effort to undergird your virtue with faith, your discernment with virtue, and your self-control with discernment; this self-control, in turn, should lead to perseverance, and perseverance to piety, and piety to care for your brother, and care for your brother to love."

2 Pt 1:3-7

Notes on This Talk
Notes on the Discussion
The Lord is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.  
In verdant pastures  
He gives me repose;  
Beside restful waters He leads me;  
He refreshes my soul.  
He guides me in right paths  
for His name’s sake.  
Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil;  
for You are at my side  
With Your rod and Your staff  
that give me courage.  
You spread the table before me  
in the sight of my foes;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Only goodness and kindness follow me  
all the days of my life;  
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
for years to come.  

*Psalm 23*

**Reflection Questions**

1. Can you identify with any of the experiences mentioned in the talk?

2. Is there anything concrete you feel you can or should do to progress in the spiritual life?

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"Let us offer ourselves, the possession most precious to God and most fitting; let us give back to the Image what is made according to the Image. Let us recognize our dignity; let us honor our Archetype; let us know the power of the mystery and for what Christ died. let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become gods for His sake, since he became man for ours."

St. Gregory the Theologian, *Oration 1:4,5*
5 - HEAVEN ON EARTH

"Since we have a great High Priest who is over the house of God, let us draw near in utter sincerity and absolute confidence, our hearts sprinkled clean from the evil which lay on our conscience, and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to our profession which gives us hope, for He who made the promise deserves our trust.

"We must consider how to rouse each other to love and good deeds. We should not absent ourselves from the assembly, as some do, but encourage one another; and this all the more because you see that the Day draws near."

Heb 10:21-25

Notes on This Talk
Notes on the Discussion
"Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; 
    let us acclaim the Rock of our salvation. 
Let us greet Him with thanksgiving; 
    let us joyfully sing psalms to Him. 
For the Lord is a great God, 
    and a great king above all gods. 
Come let us bow down in worship; 
    let us kneel before the Lord who made us. 
For He is our God, 
    and we are the people He shepherds, 
the flock He guides. 

Psalm 95:1-7

Reflection Questions

1. In your experience of the Divine Liturgy, are you ‘actor’, ‘audience’ or ‘prompter’?

2. How can you most fully exercise your priesthood in the Divine Liturgy?

3. What concretely can you do to more fully enter into what the Lord is doing in the catechetical synaxis and the Eucharistic Liturgy?

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"During the oblation, the whole Church - in heaven and upon earth, the Church of the first-born inscribed in the heavens and the Church militant fighting against the enemies of salvation upon earth - is represented typically as assembled around the Lamb, who took upon Himself the sins of the world. What a great spectacle, enrapturing and moving the soul! It is possible that I too am the joint heir with the saints, if I remain faithful to the Lamb until death. And are not all my brethren too members of the future kingdom? ... 'We are the children of God ... heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.'

St. John of Cronstadt
LIVING YOUR PRIESTHOOD

"You are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God. You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the capstone. Through Him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit."

Eph 2:19b-22

Notes on This Talk
Notes on the Discussion
The Church has become a brilliantly lit heaven, filling all the faithful with light. Standing within it we cry: ‘O Lord, strengthen this house!’

Menaion, September 13

Reflection Questions

1. Is the idea of sharing in Christ’s priesthood new for you? How does this teaching connect with the doctrine of theosis?

2. Have you any personal experience of a home - yours, your parents’, or another’s - living as a ‘domestic church’?

3. What particular gifts are you conscious of in yourself or in others in your group that can be used to build up the wider Church?

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"The Church is one and the same with the Lord - His Body, of His flesh and of His bones. The Church is the living vine, nourished by Him and growing in Him. Never think of the Church apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, from the Father and the Holy Spirit."

St. John of Cronstadt
HYMNS AND PSALMS

INVOCATION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

This chant is taken from the service of Pentecost. It is used at the beginning of almost every service in the Byzantine tradition, indicating the Church's desire that the Spirit fill what we are about to do with His presence.

\[\text{Music notation}\]

O heavenly King, Consoler, Spirit of truth, present in all places and filling all things, the Treasury of blessings and the Giver of life:

come, O Good One, and dwell in us, cleanse us from all stain and save our souls.
HYMN OF THE THIRD HOUR

This chant is adapted from a troparion often recited during the service of the Third Hour. It is repeated here after verses taken from Psalm 50.

0 Master, who at the third hour sent
down your Holy Spirit upon Your disciples, take Him not away from us but
renew Him in us, we pray.

V 1 A clean heart create in me, O God;
renew a steadfast spirit in my heart.
V 2 Cast me not afar from Your face;
take not Your blessed Spirit out of me.
V 3 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
and let Your guiding Spirit dwell in me.
V 4 I will teach Your way to the sinners
and the wicked shall return to You.
V 5 O Lord, You shall open my lips
and my mouth will declare Your praise.
V 6 For You are not pleased with sacrifices;
should I offer a holocaust, You would not accept it.
V 7 Sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit;
a crushed and humbled heart God will not spurn.
THE POLYELEOS (Psalm 135)

This psalm is usually sung at orthros on feasts of Christ. It is a joyous praise of the divine plan of God for our theosis.

0 give thanks to the Lord for He is good, alleluia; For His mercy endures forever, alleluia.

0 give thanks to the God of gods, alleluia.

0 give thanks to the Lord of lords, alleluia.

To Him who alone has wrought great wonders, alleluia.

To Him who made the heavens with understanding, alleluia.
To Him who established the earth upon the waters,

To Him who alone has made great lights,

The sun for dominion of the day,

The moon and the stars for dominion of the night,

To Him who smote Egypt with their first-born,

And led forth Israel out of the midst of them,
To Him who divided the Red Sea in to parts, 
With a strong hand and a lofty arm, 
And led Israel through the midst of it, 
And over threw Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, 
To Him who led His people through the wilderness, 
For in our humiliation the Lord remembered us,
And redeemed us from our enemies,

He that gives food to all flesh,

O give thanks to the God of heaven,

O give thanks to the Lord for He is good,

Alleluia; For His mercy endures forever, alleluia.
ALL OF YOU BAPTIZED

This chant is sung as the newly baptized are brought around the font and into the church during the christening rite. It is also sung at the Divine Liturgy on the feasts of Christ, which were the original days for solemn baptisms.

1. All of you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Alleluia. (3 times) Glory ... Now...

And again, All of you who have been baptized into Christ...
Psalm 32 praises the Lord's power and His divine providence. It is used in the Divine Liturgy as the prokimenon before the epistle reading on Sundays in the first tone.

Cantor: May Your kindness, O Lord, be upon us, for we have hoped in You.

All:

May Your kindness, O Lord, be upon us, for we have hoped in You.

Cantor: Exult, you just, in the Lord; praise from the upright is fitting. Give thanks to the Lord on the harp; with the ten stringed lyre chant His praises. For upright is the word of the Lord, and all His works are trustworthy. He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the Lord the earth is full. Our soul waits for the Lord, who is our help and our shield; for in Him our hearts rejoice: in His holy name we trust. May Your kindness, O Lord, be upon us;

for we have hoped in You.
Psalm 117 is a prayer of confidence, of sureness that the Lord will accept us if we turn to Him. In the Holy Liturgy it is the prokimenon before the epistle reading for Sundays in the second tone.

Cantor:

My strength and my courage is in the Lord,

and He has been my Savior.

All:

My strength and my courage is in the Lord...

Cantor:

In my distress I called upon the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free. The Lord is with me - I fear not; what can man do against me? I was hard pressed and was falling, but the Lord helped me. I shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord. Though the Lord has indeed chastised me, yet He has not delivered me to death. I will give thanks to You for You have answered me and have been my Savior. The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone: by the Lord has this been done, it is wonderful in our eyes. You are my God: I give thanks to You; O my God, I extol You. Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His kindness endures forever.

My strength and my courage is in the Lord,

and He has been my Savior.
Psalm 46 celebrates the kingship of the Lord who chooses us to share in His reign. In the Liturgy it is the prokimenon before the epistle reading for Sundays in the third tone.

Cantor: Sing praise to our God, sing praise! Sing praise to our King, sing praise!

All: Sing praise to our God, sing praise! Sing praise to our King, sing praise!

Cantor: All you peoples, clap your hands! Shout to God with cries of gladness!
For the Lord the Most high, the Awesome One, is the great King over all the earth.
He chooses for us our inheritance: the glory of Jacob whom He loves.
Sing praise to our God, sing praise!

Cantor: Sing praise to our King, sing praise!
Psalm 103 sings the praises of the Lord's love for us. Besides being used as the prokimenon before the epistle reading on Sundays in the fourth tone, it also serves as the first psalm at vespers.

Cantor: How great are Your works, O Lord: in wisdom You have wrought them all.

All: How great are Your works, O Lord: in wisdom You have wrought them all.

Cantor: Bless the Lord, O my soul! You are very great indeed, O Lord my God.
You are clothed in majesty and glory: robed in light as with a cloak.
You fixed the earth upon its foundation, not to be moved forever.
You water the mountains from Your palace; the earth is replete with the fruit of Your works.
You raise grass for the cattle and vegetation for men's use.
You make the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows the hour of its setting.
Man goes forth to his work and to his labor till the evening.
May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord be glad in His works.
Psalm 11 combines a lament over the condition of society with the confident assurance that the Lord is with us in the midst of it. It is used as the prokimenon before the epistle reading in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays in the sixth tone.

Cantor: You, O Lord, will keep us and preserve us always from this generation.

All:

You, O Lord, will keep us and preserve us always from this generation.

Cantor: Save me, O Lord, for there is no longer any holy man; for truthfulness has vanished from among the children of men.

Everyone speaks falsehood to his neighbor; with smooth lips they speak, and double heart.

‘Now will I arise,’ says the Lord; ‘I will grant safety to him who longs for it’.

The promises of the Lord are sure, like tried silver: freed from dross, sevenfold refined.

You, O Lord will keep us;

and preserve us always from this generation.
PROKIMENON, SIXTH TONE

Psalm 27 is a prayer of petition and thanksgiving. It is used in the Divine Liturgy as the prokimenon before the epistle reading on Sundays in the sixth tone.

Cantor: O Lord, save your people and bless Your inheritance.

All:

O Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance.

Cantor: To You, O Lord, I call; O my Rock, be not deaf to me!

Hear the sound of my pleading when I cry to You, lifting up my hands to Your holy shrine.

The Lord is my strength and my shield. In Him my heart trusts and I find help;

Then my heart exults and with my song I give Him thanks.

The Lord is the strength of His people, the saving refuge of His anointed.

Save Your people and bless Your inheritance: feed them and carry them forever.

O Lord, save Your people;

and bless Your inheritance.
Psalm 28 proclaims the majesty of the Mighty God of Israel. It is used as the prokimenon before the epistle reading at the Divine Liturgy on Sundays in the seventh tone.

Cantor: The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.

All: The Lord will give strength to His people;

the Lord will bless His people in peace.

Cantor: Give to the Lord, you sons of God, give to the Lord glory and praise. Give to the Lord the glory due His name; adore the Lord in holy attire. The voice of the Lord is mighty; the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord strikes fiery flames; the voice of the Lord shakes the desert. The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests, and in His temple all say ‘Glory!’ The Lord is enthroned above the flood; the Lord is enthroned as king forever. The Lord will give strength to his people.

the Lord will bless His people in peace.
Psalm 76 is a song of thanksgiving celebrating a victory in the Lord’s name. We celebrate in view of Christ’s victory over sin and death in His resurrection. It is sung as the prokimenon before the epistle reading in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays in the eighth tone.

**Cantor:** Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.

Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.

**Cantor:** God is renowned in Judah; in Israel great is His name. In Salem is His abode; His dwelling is in Zion. From heaven You made Your intervention heard; the earth feared and was silent. When God arose for judgement, to save all the afflicted of the earth.

Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them;

let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.
VESPER PROKIMENON FOR TUESDAYS

The constant love of our God for is the theme of Psalm 22. It is used as the prokimenon at vespers on Tuesday evenings throughout the year.

Cantor: Your mercy, O Lord, follows me all the days of my life.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures He gives me repose. Beside restful waters He leads me; He refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for His name's sake. Even though I walk in a dark valley I fear no evil, for You are at my side with Your rod and Your staff that give me courage. You spread a table before me in the sight of my foes; You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Your mercy, O Lord, follows me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.
Psalm 120 joyfully proclaims the Lord as our unfailing Guardian and Protector. It is used as the prokimenon at vespers on Thursdays throughout the year.

Cantor: My help is from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

All:

6. My help is from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Cantor: I lift up my eyes toward the mountains; whence shall help come to me? My help is from the Lord who made heaven and earth. May He not suffer your foot to slip; may He slumber not who guards you. Indeed He neither slumbers nor sleeps, the Guardian of Israel. The Lord is your guardian, the Lord is your shade; He is beside you at your right hand. The sun shall not harm you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will guard you from all evil; He will guard your life. The Lord will guard your coming and going, both now and forever.
The Stages of Spiritual Life

St Maximos the Confessor synthesized the Fathers’ teaching about how we progress on the spiritual journey. *The first stage* is concerned with dealing with our human weaknesses, failings, sins and cravings (“passions”). All that is selfish in us needs to be crucified and buried through asceticism and service to others. To begin the Christian life we must learn true hospitality, placing all that we are and all that we have at the disposal of others, thus putting egotism to death. At the same time, lest our egos delight in all the good we are doing, we are called to secret asceticism through prayer and fasting.

In *the second stage*, through ceaseless inner prayer, we come to see things as they really are: reflections of their Creator. Creation is no longer something to be used or exploited for our own convenience but signposts pointing to the One who brought them into being. At this stage old customs like kissing a piece of bread dropped on the ground make complete sense. *In the third stage* we begin to grasp in our hearts what we previously can only describe through rote repetition of others’ words: the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. It is only this deeply personal knowledge to which the Eastern Fathers give the name “theology.” For the Easterner, it is the experience of God by being in communion with Him, rather than the contemplation of metaphysical truths, which produces true theology; and it is this theology which is the goal of Christian living.

“Experience” is an “in” word in many circles, but the Fathers’sense of the experience of God with the assumed religious experiences of some people today. When they speak of experiencing God, the Fathers are not talking about visions of Jesus, Mary or the saints (they distrusted all such manifestations) or about religious feelings in general. They knew that these feelings generally arise from our pride at being “religious” (Jesus appeared to *me*) or from the arousing of our emotions. The Fathers saw such things as spiritual delusion and deception, brought about from our inner disorders or by adverse spiritual powers. When such events occur in our lives, they advise us to stick to the path of the Tradition and refuse to be drawn down any other paths.

One of the delusions experienced on the spiritual journey is that of feeling that we have progressed. The thought that “I used to be at stage one, now I’m into stage two” is an invitation to disaster. Our emotions may make us feel that we are
growing, but we may just as easily begin to feel that we are going nowhere so what’s the use of all this striving. A more proven approach is that of the ascetics who regularly consider themselves as without any spiritual depth. “I have not even begun to repent,” was the cry of one ascetic on his deathbed. We know him as one of the great desert Fathers, but he knew himself only as a weak and unprofitable servant.