

XIII

A Letter of Father Archimandrite Moses of Optina to his Cousin the Nun Maximilla¹

Father Archimandrite Moses wrote [the following] letter to his cousin the nun Maximilla of the Convent of the Ascension in Moscow.

Most honorable among nuns, dearest sister Maximilla Ivanovna,

Be strong in the Lord!

I was glad to receive your welcome letter in good order. I thank you most kindly for everything. Do keep writing to me, and do not make this difficult for yourself. Write to me simply, whatever you feel, and just write as you speak. You do not need to go into detail about your devotion and love for me, because I have known that for a long time. Write to me mostly about yourself and the kind of spiritual infirmities

¹ This letter was added to the Appendix by the Saint Herman Brotherhood, in their 1976 reprint of the 1882 edition, from I. M. Kontzevich's work, *Optina Hermitage and Its Time*.—TRANS.

and trials you have, so that for my part I will be able to show you sympathy for the sake of your spiritual welfare, instead of mere useless affection.

Of course you and I, who are feeble, have no need to converse about great feats of asceticism and exalted virtues—just about weaknesses and the trials of life. I was pleased with this last letter of yours—that is what they should always be like. You write to me straightforwardly and trustingly concerning your infirmity. I am pleased with this acknowledgment of yours, because even the Apostle Paul acknowledged before the entire world that if he was strong, it was by the grace of Christ, but that of himself he was weak. He says, “Most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities” (II Corinthians 12:9), and “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? For in my flesh dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:24, 18).

Listen to me, dear sister. Do not trouble your soul over the fact that you are weak and that you do not correct yourself. Of course, it may be that you have not corrected yourself in a big way, but I trust that you have in small things which you do not even see, and they can add up. They seem to be small and insignificant, and yet they can be not only significant for your salvation, but even sufficient. Let me list at least some for you with which you are familiar and which you indeed possess on occasion:

If at some time you show someone a kindness, you will be shown mercy.

If you co-suffer with someone who is suffering (insignificant as this may seem), you are numbered with the martyrs.

If you forgive someone who offends you, not only will all

your sins be forgiven because of this, but you will also become a *daughter* of the Heavenly Father.

If you pray from your heart for your salvation, even just a little, you will be saved.

If you reproach, accuse and condemn yourself before God for the sins perceived by your conscience, you will be *justified* just for this.

If you confess your sins before God, even for this you will receive *forgiveness and a reward*.

If you grieve over your sins, or feel compunction, or shed tears, or sigh—even your sigh will not be hidden from Him, for Saint Symeon says, “not even one tear, nor a fraction of a teardrop, escapes His notice.”¹ And Saint John Chrysostom says, “If you just lament over your sins, He will accept even this as cause for your salvation.”

See how much you have corrected without even knowing it! And it is well for you that it is this way, so that you will rather glory in your infirmities and not complacently gaze upon what you have corrected. Let the righteous Bestower of rewards appraise the latter. As for us, let us behold only our sins, repenting of them daily and taking care that they may be forgiven.

¹ From the Prayers before Holy Communion.—TRANS.