

Elder Thaddeus of Serbia



Archimandrite Thaddeus (Strabulovich)

Fr Thaddeus was born in Serbia in 1914. Aged 15, he was told by doctors that he had only five years to live. The young man entered the monastery of Milkovo, where he became a monk, the disciple of Russian monks who had taken refuge there. They had come to Serbia as a result of the Bolshevik coup d'état in Russia and the neo-calendarist persecution of Orthodoxy at Valaam Monastery, then in Finland. Among the Russian monks at Milkovo was the well-known Fr Ambrose, a disciple of St Ambrose of Optina. It was from him that Fr Thaddeus soon learned the Jesus Prayer.

After the repose of his revered elder, the saintly Fr Ambrose, Fr Thaddeus moved to the monastery of Gorniak, where he was tonsured by its Russian Abbot Fr Seraphim. Two years later Fr Thaddeus was ordained priest. After this he was given various obediences and until the outbreak of the Second World War served at the Patriarchate in Pec. From here he returned to Belgrade where he was arrested by the Gestapo, who had already arrested Patriarch Gabriel and the future St Nicholas (Velimirovich). They considered Fr Thaddeus to be one of the leaders of the Serbian resistance to the Nazi occupation. However, these charges were dropped, Fr Thaddeus was released and he set off for the monastery of Vintovitsa.

Fr Thaddeus was to remain in Vintovitsa for most of the rest of his life. He became known as an elder and every day received all who came to him for advice, support and consolation. However, he was persecuted by those jealous of him and spent the final years of his life with spiritual children. He departed this life on 13 March 2003 and was buried in the monastery of Vintovitsa. He is venerated by his many spiritual children, especially Serbs, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Bosnians, including former Muslims whom he converted to Christ.

Below is a translation of 100 sayings of this latest Serbian elder:

1. Spiritual life is noetic life, which is higher than all the desires and feelings of this world.
2. The main thing in spiritual life is to keep your heart at peace.
3. The Lord looks into the depth of the heart, its desires and aspirations.

4. We must remove earthly plans and desires from the heart, only then together with the Lord can we sincerely love our neighbour.
5. Communion with God is the normal spiritual state.
6. The first step to communion with God is to give ourselves up to God completely.
7. With God's help we can do everything, everything, when we turn to the Lord with our hearts.
8. A soul which has given itself up to God's will does not fear anything and is not troubled by anything. About everything that happens, it says: it is God's will.
9. Peace and joy are the greatest riches in this world and in the world to come.
10. Love is the strongest weapon that exists; there is no power or weapon which can fight love: it overcomes them all.
11. Love, joy and peace are Divine gifts, Divine characteristics. In themselves love, peace and joy work miracles, but joined together they can fulfil all the commandments.
12. The mind, the will and the heart are at one among the enlightened, but among the unenlightened they are most often divided and many human misfortunes result from this.
13. The pure heart will see God but the impure will feel shame to eternity.
14. The Lord looks into our hearts and when we turn to Him from the heart, He immediately consoles us.
15. As well as keeping peace in your heart, practise standing before the Lord. This means constantly keeping in mind the fact that the Lord is looking at us.
16. There is no such thing as an unforgivable sin except for an unrepented for sin.
17. The sign that a sin has been forgiven is if the sin is repeated and there is still peace in the soul.
18. The thoughts that we give ourselves up to define our life.
19. We must learn to control our thoughts so that we can order them.
20. We must give ourselves up to good thoughts and desires for our benefit and then we, our families and others will experience harmony, for, wherever we may be, we will give out quiet and peaceful thoughts, which are full of good.
21. Even the slightest thought that is not founded on love destroys peace.
22. He who accepts an evil suggestion accepts the enemy into his body. The spirits are invisible, we give them bodies so they become visible.
23. Our thoughts not only cause wars and earthquakes, but also the pollution of the environment. This is surpassed by spiritual pollution, which is much more dangerous.
24. Work hard to have good thoughts and goodwill towards friends and enemies and you will see what good fruit you and everyone around you will receive.
25. Cease to think evil of your superiors or colleagues at work, change your evil thoughts to good ones and you will see how the behaviour of your one time 'enemies' will change.
26. When you get up in the morning, do not leave the house without praying and in the evening thank God for the wonderful day.
27. Just as even a tiny speck of dust which has got into your eye can stop you seeing, so also a small care about some irrelevant matter can stop you praying.
28. If we pray inattentively, then we are not praying in spirit and in truth.
29. Everyone must use the Jesus Prayer. 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner'.
30. To pray is to draw energy from the Source of life.
31. Attention is required for prayer. It must precede prayer so that we know what we are seeking, what we are praying for.
32. Humility is the perfection of Christian life.
33. Humility is a Divine characteristic. Where there is humility, whether in the family or in society, it always spreads Divine peace and joy.
34. He who sets an example to others through his way of life is humble. Example is the best proof of the truth.

35. He who is humble is utterly content with what God has given him and he is happy at heart. Such people feel sorry for those who do not want or do not know how to amend their lives.
36. The humble do not get angry, they do not wish others ill and do not do evil, even to those who cause them evil.
37. The humble look on everyone as higher than themselves.
38. Chastity is attained through fasting, prayer and especially obedience.
39. Fasting is required to humble the body, for when the body is humble, the soul is humble.
40. Those who are humble and meek in soul are pleasing to God. They do not get angry when they are insulted, they are full of goodness and peace.
41. Here on earth we frequently experience many misfortunes and hardships, but all of these are because we have not humbled ourselves.
42. If someone is very demanding, then he is tormented by this.
43. He who thinks that he knows everything is disobedient and no-one can guide the disobedient.
44. The disobedient do not rejoice in the Kingdom of God, because they always want to do their own will, not God's will.
45. When we are completely humble, then everything around us is humble.
46. Only the meek and humble enter the Kingdom of Heaven.
47. We cannot be saved without struggling against the devil. We must endure many sorrows in our heart before the soul can free itself.
48. Anger is vanquished by renouncing our desires and our own will.
49. If we can stop making ourselves into judges over others and thinking that we are worthy, then there will be no anger.
50. If someone says or does something that is not to our liking and, failing to examine whether he is right or not, we feel offended, then we are in the grip of pride.
51. Jealousy destroys our inner peace and quiet of soul.
52. Sometimes the Lord reveals to us in our thoughts the answers to various questions and mysteries, but sometimes He is silent, so that we might turn to others for advice and so become humble.
53. We can find something edifying in everybody's life. Even the worst thief has something good in him.
54. Life here on earth is unceasing physical and spiritual warfare.
55. Man is only a tool in the hands of the Lord.
56. It is better to sing than to read. Sing. People say that he who sings does not think ill.
57. Divine life cannot bear selfishness.
58. As long as we pay attention to the negative sides of various people we meet, we will not find peace and repentance. As long as we keep in ourselves the thought of offence, caused to us by enemies, friends, family and neighbours, we will not find peace and quiet and we will live in a hellish state.
59. When you find a soul akin to your own, stay with it, for it is a great joy to make friends with those who think alike.
60. Today all civilisation is directed towards distracting the attention of people, especially of the young, from themselves, from the self, from looking inside, into the heart.
61. Unbelievers are busied with philosophy, reflection and achievements, but all of this is short-term consolation and melancholy and solitude soon attack once more.
62. Evil is the abuse of good on the part of rational beings who have fallen into base philosophising and create chaos in themselves and around them with their thoughts and desires.
63. The world is ever more sunk into sin and evil and confuses love and passion, yet love and passion have nothing in common. Love is God and passion is what comes from evil spirits.
64. We scorn our politicians who are in power, yet they are our children. We were the ones who were wrong before them, for we set them living examples which they could only equal.

65. There are no atheists! They do not exist. Even the enemy believes and trembles, only he does not do good.
66. 50 years of Communism have casued us far more evil than 500 years of the Turkish yoke. Communism removed people from God.
67. We suffer because our thoughts and desires are evil. We are ourselves the cause of our sufferings, for there is no repentance among our people. There is repentance neither among believers, nor among unbelievers.
68. Magic is performed where there is no prayer or strong hope in God.
69. Only love and goodness save both people and the whole world. Nothing is ever obtained through violence. Force merely provokes rejection and hatred.
70. All the knowledge which has been revealed to men through science is a gift of God to people and proclaims the presence of God in this world.
71. There is no knowledge revealed by human science which has been given by God to our detriment, everything has been given exclusively for our benefit.
72. Grace is Divine strength which is active everywhere, but especially in the souls of those who seek the source of life, who seek God.
73. We cannot keep inner peace if our conscience reproaches us for something. First of all we must make peace with our conscience.
74. It is better if we condemn ourselves than if the Lord condemns us. If we condemn ourselves, then He knows that we have repented and no longer wish to sin.
75. Repentance means changing our lives, abandoning the old man with all his evil habits and turning to God and the truth, so that we can be peaceful, still, good and meek.
76. If your parents are atheists and you are a believer, do not reproach or taunt them with your faith but pray for them and be good to them.
77. We must learn to divest ourselves of our burdens so that we can turn to God immediately and confide our cares and our neighbours' cares in Him.
78. We must help people to know their faith.
79. We must not preach from our heads but from our hearts. Only what is said from the heart can reach another heart.
80. It is much better to learn from life than from words.
81. It is dangerous to be strict with others.
82. Those who are strict with others can only reach a certain level in spiritual life. They remain at the stage of physical asceticism.
83. As is our relationship to our neighbour, so is our relationship to God.
84. Our neighbour is he who seeks our help.
85. We must have the same relationship with everyone. We must not separate people into those we like and those we dislike.
86. As long as we pay attention to the negative sides of those we meet, we will not find peace or quiet.
87. Everything done for the sake of God and not for the sake of glory is good.
88. He who works badly cannot expect good pay.
89. Only he who is with God and is informed about his salvation is rich.
90. The fear of God is not the instinctive animal fear of this world. That is a hellish quality. We live in a constant state of fear: what will happen tomorrow, in the future? The fear of God is similar to that when you love someone from your heart and you are careful not to offend him or annoy him with your whole being, not only through your thoughts and actions, but through your thoughts too.
91. There is not a single being who is perfect. We can only be perfect with God; without Him it is impossible.
92. Care for the soul is more precious than the gifts of this world.

93. A family which is pleasing to God must be filled with love, nobility, meekness, humility, piety and prayerfulness.
94. If a parent hits a child in anger, nothing will be achieved by it.
95. If there is a family where nearly everyone is content but one is not and begins to think that he has been treated unjustly and the others have behaved badly towards him, then everyone will start to be discontent, but they will not know why.
96. No-one who enters into a marriage without a blessing or who has been forced into marriage will find peace and their love will be useless to them.
97. When a child is born he cries because he does not know what sins await him. But when someone dies, he is happy because he enters into eternal life. Then everyone around him cries because they have to stay here.
98. There is no need to be sad for the dead, it is better to pray to the Lord, asking Him to grant them the dwelling places promised by the Gospel. Sadness destroys everything. It destroys the peace which they have received from the Lord.
99. To be sad for your departed relatives is not Christian. This is the lot of those who do not know God. We should rather pray to the Lord to forgive them their sins and do good deeds in their memory.
100. Here on earth there is nothing that can give us inner peace. For neither riches, nor glory, nor honour, nor position, nor family, nor neighbours can give us unshakeable inner peace. There is only one giver of life, peace and joy – God.

