

Saint Sergiy Radonezhsky  
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We know and honour many spiritual devotees of Christian Russia, but Reverend Sergiy Radonezhsky is especially dear to people. He lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the spirits of the Russian people had been crushed by the Mongol-Tatars, who had conquered our state in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The exact date of Sergiy Radonezhsky's birth is unknown, but presumably he was born around 1322-1324, and he lived till 1392. Varfolomey (as he was called in the world) was a middle son of noble boyars of Rostov town. After their home was ruined due to the enemies' raids, the family shifted to the town of Radonezh, not far from Moscow. His parents, being deeply religious people, were bringing their children up according to the church rules. Saint Sergiy's life story tells that as a baby, thrice he uttered a cry/scream while still in his mother's womb, when she was in church during the singing of the prayer to the Holy Trinity. His parents and the parish priest understood that this unusual phenomenon meant the baby would glorify the Holy Trinity with his life. It was said that he did not even drink his mother's milk during the fast days.

In his boyhood, learning grammar was hard for him, and Varfolomey prayed hard, with tears in his eyes, asking for God's help. One day, an angel in the form of a monastic elder appeared to him. Epiphany the Wise tells this story in the Life story of Saint Sergiy:

"According to God's will he was to obtain Knowledge from God, not from people." The messenger also told Sergiy's parents: "Your son should establish a monastery of Holy Trinity." In his young age Sergiy had the aspiration to devote his life to God, and he asked for permission to go on a monk's path. He and his parents, after raising their sons, went to live in a monastery.

Varfolomey was dreaming of a secluded prayerful life. In 1340 he persuaded his elder brother Stephan to leave worldly life, and they settled in a desolate forest not far from Moscow, where only wild animals were the silent witnesses of their asceticism. There the brothers built a church and a monastic cell. This was a new stage in the life of the spiritual devotees: a brief nap, working hard all day in intense prayer and making their living. But this life was too difficult for the elder brother Stephan, and he left for the Bogoyavlensky monastery in Moscow.

Left alone, the 20-year-old Sergiy (who got this name after he took monastic vows) continued for almost three years with unceasing prayer and labour: obtaining clarity of spirit, overcoming temptations from his thoughts, his fear of evil spirits and wild animals, and all other obstacles. The word of his ascetic life spread, and in 1342, his



first disciples came to him. At first there were only 12, as it was a difficult life. But eventually, people from the surroundings, and then from all over Russia, started settling around the new cloister. This is how a new town was founded. It was named Sergiyev Posad - after its founder.

The church at the cloister was named after the Holy Trinity. Pilgrims went there for instructions, spiritual encouragement and healing – Sergiy welcomed everyone with love and joy. In the beginning, the community was very poor, but Sergiy prohibited monks from begging. He set an example of making one's own living and helping others. One time, when Sergiy did not have any bread, he took a job from a member of his community in exchange for rotten, dried crusts of bread. He took the crusts only after the job was done. The community grew, and what was originally a monastery is now a whole community known as Troitse-Sergiyeva Lavra.

Reverend Sergiy was an eternally awake teacher: discipline of thoughts, fearlessness, selflessness, and constant prayerful labour. He was known for great simplicity, meekness and clarity of spirit. In the summer and winter (even when it was minus 30) he wore the same clothes. Three wonderful qualities of human nature were combined in him: a prayerful contemplative aspiration to the realm of spirit; tireless labour; and hearty energetic love, not only for people but also for all living beings. He was said to cherish friendships with a bear and other animals, and shared his scarce food with them.

Spending most of the night in prayer, Saint Sergiy worked full days for the community: he cut trees, chopped firewood, carried logs, he could make bread and sew. He wanted to serve everyone as a real follower of Jesus. His pure prayers to the celestial world brought Reverend Sergiy special benevolence of Mother Mary, who favoured him with wonderful visits. It is said that once Saint Sergiy was reading a scripture about Mother Mary and a gust of wind blew out the icon lamp. But Sergiy's spirit was so full of light he could read without a lamp. His near ones knew that during his service at the church a luminiferous angel helped him.

Elena Roerich wrote that Saint Sergiy was a marvelous reflection of Jesus on the Earth. He performed miracles when it was necessary but prohibited others from talking about them. For example, when the monastery needed a source of water, Sergiy touched the ground with a crozier, and there appeared spring water, sparkling in the sunlight. He filled people's hearts with his example of great collaboration. He was firm and exacting, but never imposed constraints on others.

Saint Sergiy became the founder of a new type of monastery in Russia as well as a new lifestyle for monks. Before him, monks owned property and provided for themselves. This led to a social inequality, as many wanted not spiritual bliss but



comfort for their physical bodies. However, Sergiy aspired to a deeply spiritual, prayerful life and did not spare his body. Once in the dead of night Reverend Sergiy, caring for his spiritual children, was praying in his cell and he heard a voice calling him: "Sergiy!" He opened a window and saw a wonder: radiant light was streaming down from the sky and it was brighter than daylight. "You are praying for your children. God has heard your prayers." Reverend Sergiy saw a lot of birds in the monastery and around it, and he heard a mysterious voice say: "May herds of your disciples grow!" Archimandrite Tikhon was a witness to this event.

These signs from above and the support of the head of the church in Moscow strengthened Sergiy's intention to transform monastery life. Private property was strictly prohibited, and all who were able to were required to work. Enlightening subjects such as icon-painting and copying books were introduced. The strict rules of the monastery were similar to those of the first Christian communities: all were equal and no one had their own property; life was entirely communal. At the monastery they created an almshouse and a hostel for pilgrims. All excess food was given as charity to needy people.

During his lifetime, Sergiy established several monasteries in Moscow and the surrounding area. He would choose the places for the cloisters himself, walking many miles on foot. During the 14th-15th centuries his disciples and their followers created about 100 monasteries in Northern Russia. According to the legacy of Reverend Sergiy, monasteries were established in deserted and wild places, attracting local people who felt more joy staying near cloisters. It helped to settle new lands, where crafts, construction and agriculture developed and where later towns were founded. This way a new state, based on spiritual culture, was being created, and Sergiy became the father of Northern-Russian monkhood, a founder of Holy Russia and a forerunner of monastic elders.

Reverend Sergiy did not seek power. For a long time, he did not agree to become the father superior of the monastery that he had created. Due to his great humility, being a stranger to any violence, he chose to leave the monastery when he saw that the monks were not happy with the new rules of monastery life. He allowed the monks to make their decisions and came back to the monastery only after they persuaded him to return. This way he followed his basic rule: "Not violence, but freedom and love win." He never expected help from anyone. To him, all help came from within himself and from the Divine Bliss that led him. He refused to accept the rank of "metropolitan" – the head of the Russian church. However, his spiritual authority was so great that the authorities and common people asked for his support and advice. He was striving to reconcile and unite Russian lands around the state of Moscow for them to find independence in unity. He often reconciled princes, giving them spiritual advice, and stopped their wars.



This way Saint Sergiy was growing out of a hermit-contemplator into a social leader, playing a great role in the renaissance of an independent state. People called him an Angel on the Earth and a Heavenly Man. Despite having looked for solitude all his life, he never managed to stay alone: a wonderful fire burning inside him was attracting people to him. By the middle of his life, he had become a national teacher, defender and reassurer.

Reverend Sergiy prohibited using any techniques for communication with the powers of Light. He knew from his own experience that it is achieved by opening the heart, and no special exercises are needed for this. Conscious and sacred labour in the name of God leads to a loving, open heart, and God's altar gets installed in the heart – this is what Sergiy was teaching. It was he who found the power of that source--that is opening one's heart as a force and a measure of spirituality--and through this, joined the fire world, which was shown by his flaming service. He reached this by constantly sharpening his feelings with joyful and solemn service to his neighbors.

According to Sergiy's life story, written by Epiphany the Wise, once Sergiy's favourite disciple Isaaky refused to become a superior of a monastery and asked Sergiy for his blessings to take a vow of silence. When Saint Sergiy made the sign of the cross over him, Isaaky saw a flame coming out of Sergiy's hand. Another time, Saint Sergiy was conducting a mass while his disciple Simon Ekkleziarch was at the altar. While singing, "We are singing for You," a flame seemed to fall from the sky and surrounded Sergiy and the altar with light. Simon Ekkleziarch saw the heavenly flame descending on the Holy gifts (bread and wine). "I saw the bliss of the Holy spirit cooperating with you," he told Sergiy after the service. But Reverend Sergiy prohibited him from telling anyone about it.

Saint Sergiy deeply revered Mother Mary, and more than once she came to him in vision. Once the community was peacefully sleeping and Sergiy was praying hard for his brothers, and for the future of their cloister. All of a sudden, he told the disciple Mikhey: "The purest Mother is coming." Then dazzling light, brighter than the sunlight, illuminated Sergiy, and the Heavenly Queen together with apostles Peter and John appeared before them, shining with indescribable Light. Reverend Sergiy, unable to bear the awe and trepidation filling him, fell to the ground. The Purest Mother touched him with her hand and said: "Don't be afraid, your prayer was heard; don't grieve about your disciples and your cloister, as from now on it will prosper, during your lifetime and afterwards. I will not leave your monastery." Having said this, the Holy Mother disappeared. The last time Mother May appeared to Sergiy was not long before his passing away.



Half a year before he passed away, Reverend Sergiy had a revelation about his passing. He called his brothers and charged his disciple Nikon with monastery management and left for total silent seclusion in his cell. According to the monks, at the time of Sergiy's passing his face was lit with Light and an unusual fragrance filled his cell.

Saint Sergiy--a spiritual builder of the Russian people--lived almost 700 years ago, but his memory is still alive in our hearts, as during his lifetime and afterwards he saved Russian land from enemies more than once. The great mystics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Elena and Nikolay Roerichs--earthly disciples of Heavenly Teacher Sergiy Radonezhsky--conveyed to us his instruction: win, overcome internal and external obstacles on the way to God, and in unity revive Holy Russia.

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the artist Nikolay Roerich painted a picture showing Sergiy Radonezhsky holding a temple in his hand, as a symbol of Holy Russia. Below is the inscription "Reverend Sergiy is to save the Russian land thrice. The first time – during the reign of prince Dmitry, the second time – at the time of Minin, the third time..."

The first time. 1380. Tatar Khan Mamay decided to bury all memories of the Russian state. Moscow's prince Dmitry, together with generals and other princes, came to Sergiy's monastery to get blessings for a decisive battle. "Have you done everything to prevent the frightful battle? If so, then the enemy will be defeated, and you will get help and glory from God," Sergiy told the prince. This was a really fiery blessing for a crucial battle. During the battle at Kulikovo field, Reverend Sergiy with his brothers were praying at the church a few hundred kilometers from the battlefield. Sergiy's body was at the church but his spirit was at the place where his Motherland's destiny was being decided. He saw the course of the battle and named the names of fallen soldiers. At last, he announced the defeat of enemies.

The second time. At the beginning of the 17th century Polish and Lithuanian troops conquered Russia and enthroned a sham king. At this time of disturbances and despair Reverend Sergiy appeared in vision to a citizen named Kozma Minin, who was living in Nizhniy Novgorod, and told him to gather forces and set Moscow free. Minin was supported by prince Pozharsky and many Russian people. They gave their money, gathered an army and headed for Moscow. On November 4, 1612 the enemies were driven out of Moscow, and then from Russia. People were waking up spiritually, and the state became stronger. This way Sergiy saved Russia again.

The third time. After the difficult 20<sup>th</sup> century, our people again start to rise spiritually and morally. And we know: Russia is under God's protection and is led by Saint Reverend Sergiy Radonezhsky. "My crozier is above Russia. Russia is a country of the future. Creator will decorate it with spiritual blessings. Who except my Russia can



say: "Let me disappear for the world to grow?" "Help Russia, Sergiy is calling." His precept is heard in our hearts, and we respond to him with the prayer of Elena Roerich: "Father Sergiy, Wonderful, we are going with you, with you we shall win." Amen.