

## **Interpretation of the Prayer: Lord, have Mercy!**

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Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me! And more concisely: Lord, have mercy! These prayers have been bequeathed to Christians from the time of the Apostles and it was decreed that they should constantly use these invocations, as also they do. However, while doing so very few now know the meaning of: Lord, have mercy! Therefore they invoke fruitlessly. They cry: Lord, have mercy! but do not receive mercy from the Lord because they themselves do not know what they are seeking.

And so we must know: What kind of mercy from the Lord Jesus is this? What Kind? Every kind: all that is needed by us in our present fallen state is in His right hand. For He, from the time when He was incarnated and became man, and endured such sufferings, and by the shedding of His most holy blood redeemed man from the hands of the devil - from that time HE has become in some special way the Lord and Sovereign of human nature. Thus everything of ours is now in his hands.

The Lord was even before his incarnation, from the beginning, Lord of all, seen and unseen, as their Creator and Maker. According to their being so it is and will be, but not according to the free activity of reasonable creatures. Devils and, after them, men, did not want of their own accord, to have Him as their Lord and Sovereign, and they detached themselves from Him who was the Ruler of all. For the All-gracious God, having created men and Angels independent and endowed them with reason, does not want to destroy this independence of their and rule over them by force, against their will. Therefore those of them who wish to be under the power and rule of God, over them He rules and those he defends, but those who do not wish it, those He leaves to do their own will as independent. That is why Adam too when, seduced by the apostate devil, himself became an apostate from God and did not wish to obey His commandments, He left him to his free-will, not wishing to rule over him domineeringly. But the envious devil, having seduced him in the beginning, did not cease to seduce him further, until he had made him by his irrationality like senseless cattle and until he began to live like unreasoning animals.

Then the most merciful God took pity on him and bowed the heavens and came down to earth and became man for man's sake, and having redeemed him by His most pure blood, He provided a saving way of life for him, showed him in the holy Gospel how to please God, regenerated and recreated him by divine baptism, instituted heavenly nourishment for him in the most pure mysteries and, to speak briefly, with the sublimest wisdom found means how He could be inseparably with man and man with Him so that the devil should have no more place in man. But even after this He nevertheless forces no one but leaves all free to accept the salvation that is offered to them or to perish. And so it goes: Some are saved; but others are negligent about salvation, some of whom do not believe the Gospel at all, while others believe but do not live according to the Gospel.

Those who are now Christians, after so many gifts of grace, after so many divine benefits, have again been seduced by the devil and by the action of the world and the flesh have been separated from God and have fallen under the yoke of slavery to sin and the devil, doing his will, but have not yet become quite insensible so as not to feel the evil that they have suffered, and understand their mistake and acknowledge the slavery into which they have fallen, but they do not see in themselves the power to be delivered from it - those have recourse to God and cry: Lord, have mercy, that the most merciful Lord may pity them and have mercy on them and accept them as the prodigal son and again grant them His divine grace and deliver them from slavery to sin, banish the devils from them and restore their freedom that in this way they may be able to live the rest of their life in a manner pleasing to God and keep the Divine commandments.

And so those Christians who with such an aim cry, Lord, have mercy! are certainly granted the Divine mercy and receive grace to be delivered from slavery to sin and be saved. But those who have not at all the above thoughts and do not recognize the misery of their position and their slavery to the will of the flesh and worldly habits, and have not even time to think about their slavery, but without any such aim, simply from habit cry, Lord have mercy! - how can these receive the Divine mercy: and especially such amazing and infinite mercy? It is better for such people not to receive it than to receive it and lose it again, for then there would be a double sin.

I shall now explain to you by examples also. Imagine to yourself a man poor and destitute who wishes to receive alms from some rich person. What does he say when he comes to the rich person? Something like: "Have mercy on me! Pity my poverty and set my life in order." Or someone has a debt and has nothing to pay it with. Wishing to be delivered from this burden he comes to the decision to ask his creditor to forgive him his debt. He approaches him and what does he say? Also simply: "Have mercy on me! Pity my poverty and forgive me the debt that I owe you." Similarly, when anyone is at fault in some matter before another and wishes to receive his forgiveness, what does he do? He comes to the person against whom he has sinned and says: "Have mercy of me! Forgive me for what I did against you." All such people know what they are asking for and why they are asking, and they receive their petitions according to circumstances, and what they receive they turn to good account for themselves. Now take on the other hand a sinner who is spiritually poor and in debt before God and has frequently offended Him. If he cries as if to God: Have mercy on Me! but meanwhile does not understand what he is saying and why he is speaking, and does not even know what that mercy consists of which he wishes to receive from God and the use of it to him, but simply from habit cries: Lord, have mercy! then how can God give him mercy when he cannot even recognize what he has received and therefore will not turn his attention to it and will make ill use of it or will augment still more that by which he became a sinner?

The mercy of God is nothing else but the grace of the Holy Spirit which we sinners must ask from God, unceasingly crying to Him: Have mercy on me! Show Thy mercy, my Lord, to me a sinner, in the pitiful state in which I am, and accept me again into Thy grace. Give me the Spirit of power that He may strengthen me in resisting the temptations of the devil and my sinful bad habits. Give me the Spirit of Counsel that I may become prudent and come to feeling and amend my life. Give me the Spirit of fear, that I may fear to offend Thee, and may fulfill Thy commandments. Give me the Spirit of peace, that I may guard the peace of my soul, and gather all my reasonings and be quiet and untroubled by thoughts. Give me the Spirit of purity, that He may keep me pure from all defilement. Give me the Spirit of meekness, that I may be gentle-minded in my relations with my Christian brethren and restrained from anger. Give me the Spirit of humility, that I may not think highly of myself and that I may not be proud. Whoever knows and feels how necessary is all that has been said and, asking it of the most merciful God, cries: Lord, have mercy! will surely receive what he asks and be granted the mercy of God and His grace. But whoever knows nothing of what we have said and merely from habit cries: Lord, have mercy! for him it is not possible to receive any mercy from God. For he had already previously received many mercies from God but he was unaware of it and did not thank God who gave him them. He received the Divine mercy when he was created and became a man. He received mercy when he was recreated in baptism and became an Orthodox Christian. He receive mercy when he was delivered from so many perils of soul and body which he experience in life. He received the Divine mercy every time he was granted to partake of the most pure Mysteries. He receive the mercy of God every time he sinned before God and grieved Him by His sins, and was not destroyed and not punished as was due. He received the Divine mercy when so many different benefits were bestowed on him by God, but either he was not aware of it or he forgot. How can such a Christian receive further mercy from God when he does not know and does not feel that he has

received so many mercies from Him? And now even if he cries: Lord, have mercy, he does not know what he is saying and pronounces these words without any thought or aim, but simply from habit.