

## Let's Move Forward (Fr. Andreas Agathokleous)

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It mentions in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers that some monks asked Abba Elijah, in Egypt, what he thought of Abba Agathon, who had a good reputation as a monk. The elder replied: 'Compared to other monks these days, he's good'.

Then they asked: 'Compared with older ones, what's he like?'

He answered: 'I told you, given the way monks are today, he's good. But compared with the old ones... I knew a man in Skete who could stop the sun in the sky, just as Joshua son of Nun did'.



This dialogue refers to the spiritual state of vigilance and development. There are people who've managed to stop some of the sins which were troubling them spiritually or who've become more solid in some virtues and spiritual exercises, such as, for example, church attendance, prayer, fasting and so on. In other words, compared to the way they lived before, they feel they're doing better. This is natural and to be expected when there's repentance and the resolution to live a new life based on the Gospels.

The problem lies in resting on one's laurels and becoming inattentive. Since there's an obvious change, it's easy to think that it's sufficient, and then there's a very present danger of life becoming routine, self-contained, listless and unchallenging.

We need to realize the fact that the spiritual life is one of progress. This is where 'the first shall be last and the last first' comes in. As does the fact that this forward momentum harbours further joys and experiences which are revealed as we progress, with the desire to become acquainted with and live through other facets of life.

Comparison with our sinful past may be necessary to protect us from potential disappointment at any repetition of former errors. But it's of no help, naturally, when it's used to justify our stagnation.

From experience of life, we know that it's only if we abandon something that brings us satisfaction and security that we can rise to something better. There are many such opportunities in the spiritual life for those willing to develop and move forward.

Certainly the times we live in aren't conducive to the bodily asceticism and mortification of the flesh that were possible in earlier generations. What's required isn't that we should strive in the same manner as those who went before us, but that we should desire to move beyond where we are, to experience God in our heart more intensely, to be more closely bound to Him and to other people.

Then life will have meaning and our heart will be filled with joy. Because we'll be making our way and 'going on from glory to glory' (II Cor. 3, 18).