

Venerable Silouan of Athos, Monk and Ascetic

(†1938)

Commemoration Day: September 24

St. Silouan was born Simeon Antonov to a large peasant family in the village of Sovsk, Tambov region, in 1866. Simeon's parents were illiterate and poor but very kindhearted and *hospitable*. They never *denied* a visiting stranger or needy neighbour food and *shelter*. Simeon and his siblings grew up in a loving home and learned lessons of *charity* and trust in God.

As a boy, Simeon was once walking with his father along the fields and saw a man stealing their wheat. Simeon told his father about it. "Don't worry, son," was his father's reply. "Let him. The man is hungry and we have plenty. The good Lord will *provide*." All his life, Simeon *held* his father *in high regard*.

Simeon's older brothers hired themselves out to do construction work, and Simeon started helping them when he became strong enough. He grew into a tall, very *robust* and handsome young man. Soon, the temptations of the world overcame him: he began drinking and partying with friends. A man once challenged him to a fight, and Simeon struck him in the chest so hard that he fell and couldn't get up for a long time.

With the grace of God, Simeon soon recognized that the path he had taken was destroying his soul. One night, he dreamed of being swallowed up by an awful serpent. He woke up in horror and started praying. All his life as a monk, Venerable Silouan would ask God for forgiveness of the sins of his youth.

After serving in the military, at age twenty-seven, Simeon left his native land and came to Mount Athos. He became a monk at the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon and received the name Silouan, in honour of St. Silvanus, an ancient martyr.

Fr. Silouan's first *obedience* was to work in the mill. Gradually he was given more responsibility, and became one of the stewards of the monastery, supervising 1,000 monks and 200 laymen who worked there. At the end of the day, he returned to his cell to pray. Fasting severely and sleeping only a couple of hours each night, he practiced the *ceaseless*



Jesus prayer. He wept not just for his own sins, but also for the world's. Compassionate towards man's *failings* and *wrongdoings*, Fr. Silouan placed the highest importance on the forgiveness of enemies.

St. Silouan never *sought* a hermit's life. After many years of spiritual trial, while living among people, he achieved great *humility* and inner stillness, keeping his mind free from worldly thoughts and passions. Many pilgrims visiting the monastery asked him for his wise guidance.

Fr. Silouan lived in the monastery forty-six years. Shortly before the ascetic's death, someone asked him if he was ready to meet his Maker. He answered, "I haven't conquered my pride yet." After a brief illness in September of 1938, the saint fell asleep in the Lord.

A man of great wisdom, St. Silouan could barely read and write. He left many notes that needed to be transcribed and edited. Another monk of Mount Athos, Fr. Sophrony, took this job upon himself. The collection of St. Silouan's writings was first published in Paris in 1952.

Vocabulary

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| venerable | ['ve nə rə bəl] | преподобный |
| hospitable | [hɑ: 'spɪ tə bəl] | гостеприимный |
| deny | [dɪ 'naɪ] | отказывать |
| shelter | ['ʃel tə] | кров |
| charity | ['tʃe rə ti] | милосердие, благотворительность |
| provide | [prə 'vaɪd] | обеспечивать, предусматривать |
| hold in high regard | | высоко уважать, почитать |
| robust | [rou 'bʌst] | крепкий, здоровый, сильный |
| obedience | [ou 'bi: di əns] | послушание |
| failing | ['feɪ lɪŋ] | недостаток |
| wrongdoing | ['rɔ:ŋ du: ɪŋ] | проступок |
| seek-sought-sought | [si:k sɔ:t sɔ:t] | искать |
| humility | [hju: 'mɪ lə ti] | смирение |

From the Writings of Fr. Silouan

Those who dislike and reject their fellow man are impoverished in their being. They do not know the true God, Who is all-embracing love.

Understand two thoughts, and fear them. One is, "I am a saint," and the other, "I won't be saved." Both thoughts are from the enemy, and there is no truth in them. But think: I am a great sinner, but the Lord is merciful. He loves people, and He will forgive my sins.

A monk is a man who prays for the entire world... I tell you that when we have no more men of prayer, the world will come to an end and great adversity will arise – as, indeed, is happening already.