

## Knitting before the face of God

*a story about a pilgrimage in prayer*

*by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh*



*Metropolitan Anthony was sent to celebrate the Liturgy at a Care Home soon after he was ordained to the priesthood. Afterwards an elderly woman came up to him and asked him about prayer....*

"All these years I have been asking people who are reputed to know about prayer, and they have never given me a sensible reply, so I thought that as you probably know nothing, you may by chance blunder out the right thing." That was a very encouraging situation! And so I said "What is your problem?"

The old lady said "These fourteen years I have been praying the Jesus Prayer almost continually, and never have I perceived God's presence at all." So I blundered out what I thought. I said "If you speak all the time, you don't give God a chance to place a word in." She said "What shall I do?"

I said "Go to your room after breakfast, put it right, place your armchair in a strategic position that will leave behind your back all the dark corners which are always in an old lady's room into which things are pushed so as not to be seen. Light your little lamp before the ikon that you have and first take stock of your room.

Just sit, look around, and try to see where you live, because I am sure that if you have prayed all these fourteen years it is a long time since you have seen your room. And then take your knitting and for fifteen minutes knit before the face of God, but I forbid you to say one word of prayer. You just knit and try to enjoy the peace of your room."

She didn't think it was very pious advice but she took it. After a while she came to see me and said "You know, it works." I said "What works, what happens?" because I was very curious to know how my advice worked.

And she said "I did just what you advised me to do. I got up, washed, put my room right, had breakfast, came back, made sure that nothing was there that would worry me, and then I settled into my armchair and thought 'Oh how nice, I have fifteen minutes during which I can do nothing without being guilty!' and I looked round and for the first time I thought

Goodness what a nice room I live in - a window opening onto the garden, a nice shaped room, enough space for me, the things I have collected for years."

Then she said "I felt so quiet because the room was so peaceful. There was a clock ticking but it didn't disturb the silence, its ticking just underlined the fact that everything was so still and after a while I remembered that I must knit before the face of God, and so I began to knit. And I became more and more aware of the silence. The needles hit the arm-rest of my chair, the clock was ticking peacefully, there was nothing to bother about, I had no need of straining myself, and then I perceived that this silence was not simply an absence of noise, but that the silence had substance. It was not absence of something but presence of something. the silence had a density, a richness, and it began to pervade me. The silence around began to come and meet the silence in me.

All of a sudden I perceived that the silence was presence. At the heart of the silence there was Him who is all stillness, all peace, all poise."

After that she lived for about ten more years and she said she could always find the silence when she was quiet and silent herself. This does not mean that she stopped praying, it means that she could sustain this contemplative silence for a while, then her mind began to quiver and she turned to vocal prayer until the mind was still and settled again, then she dropped out of words to silence as before. Very often this could happen to us - if instead of being so intent on doing things, we could simply say 'I am in God's presence, what a joy, let us be still.'

*School for Prayer: Managing Time*  
by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh  
Publ.1970 Darton, Longman & Todd



*Gillian Burton,  
who supplied the title  
photograph, has been  
knitting prayerfully for many  
years. Amongst other things,  
she has knitted prayer shawls  
as gifts for Orthodox and  
Episcopal monastics.  
This is a detail from a  
monastic prayer shawl.*

**The Vine newsletter** is available at our website [www.orthodoxchurchdunblane.org](http://www.orthodoxchurchdunblane.org) where you can also view past issues. If you would like to receive an email with information about each new issue please contact the editor  
If you can read online it helps to keep our costs down.

**Calling all Pilgrims & Photographers!** Would you be willing to write about your visits to other Orthodox churches, communities or monasteries? Do you have any photographs of our community, or other communities in Britain or abroad for publication? Do let us know.

Email [newsletter@orthodoxchurchdunblane.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@orthodoxchurchdunblane.org.uk)