



## St. John (Maximovitch): Nothing is Fearful for the Person Whose Hope is in God

*Where can I go from Thy Spirit, and where can I escape from Thy presence? If I go up into heaven, Thou art there; if I go down into hades, Thou art present there. If I take up my wings toward the dawn, and make mine abode in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand guide me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.” (Psalm 138: 7-10)*

These divinely inspired words of the Psalmist David should be particularly in our thoughts during these days, when the entire world is literally quaking, and from every direction comes news of all kinds of distress, shocks and calamities.

Before you can concentrate on what is occurring in one country, you are distracted by even more threatening events which have unexpectedly erupted someplace else; and before you can get a grasp on them, yet other news distracts your attention to still some other location, forcing you to lose track of the previous ones, even though they have by no means reached their conclusion.

In vain do “the representatives of the nations consult in order to find a remedy for the common affliction. They encourage one another and others, saying, 'peace, peace,' when there is no peace.” (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11)

Calamities in the lands where they are unfolding do not come to an end, when suddenly new ones begin in places which had been considered safe and calm.

Those who flee from troubles in one place find themselves amid troubles elsewhere that are even worse. "As if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into his house and leaned with his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him." (Amos 5:19) Or, as another prophet says, "He who flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit; and he who climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble." (Isaiah 24: 18)

This is what we see happening in our days.

A person sets out for his peaceful occupation and suddenly falls the victim of military action which erupted in a place where no one had expected it.

The person who escapes danger from military action, finds himself amid the horrors of natural catastrophes, of an earthquake or typhoon.

Many meet their death where some had escaped it, while other people are prepared to risk their lives rather than waste away in places considered to be secure, because they anticipate other catastrophes which could soon come upon those areas.

It would seem that there is no place on the globe in recent times that remains a peaceful and calm haven from troubles in the world.

Everything has become complicated: politically, economically, socially. "Danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren," as the Apostle Paul wrote (2 Corinthians 11: 26). And to these dangers in our days we must add also, "danger in the air and danger from the sky," which are especially frightful.

But when all the dangers listed by the Apostle Paul were endured by this glorious Chief of the Apostles, he had a great consolation. He knew that he was suffering for Christ and that Christ would reward him for these sufferings. "For I know Whom I have believed, and I am sure that He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me" (2 Timothy 1: 12). He knew that the Lord would grant him the strength necessary to endure even greater tribulations, and for this reason he boldly says, "I can do all things in Jesus Christ Who strengthens me" (Philippians 4: 13).

These current catastrophes are so terrible for us, because they have come upon us because we are not firm in the Faith, and because we are not enduring them for the sake of Christ. For that reason, we have no hope of receiving crowns for them.

And what is even worse, and leaves us powerless in our efforts to counteract our misfortunes, is that we do not strengthen ourselves with the power of Christ. We put our hope, not in God, but in human powers and means. We forget the words of the Sacred Scriptures: "Put not your hope in princes, in the sons of men, in whom there is no salvation. Blessed is he whose hope is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God" Psalm 145: 3, 5). And again: "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain" (Psalm 126: 1).

We keep trying to find a firm foundation apart from God. And so, we suffer what was foretold by the prophet: "This sin will become for you like the sudden collapse of the wall of a strong city under siege," and which is then immediately vanquished (Isaiah 30: 13). Woe to those who are leaning against those walls! Just as a collapsing wall crushes those who are leaning on it, in the same way, with the destruction of false hopes, all those who placed their trust in them will perish. Their hope will be like a "staff of reed." "When they grasped you with the hand, you broke, and pierced their shoulders; and when they leaned upon you, you broke, and injured their loins" (Ezekiel 29: 7).

It is entirely different with those who seek the help of God. "God is our refuge and strength, our helper in the troubles that grievously befall us. So we will not fear though the earth should rock and mountains be hurled into the heart of the sea" (Psalm 45: 2-3).

**Nothing is fearful for the person whose hope is in God.** He does not fear men who work evil. "The Lord is my light and my Savior: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the guard of my life; from whom shall I shrink?" (Psalm 26: 1). The horrors of war are not fearful for him. "Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise against me, my hope is in Him" (Psalm 26: 3). He is calm when he lives at home. "He who dwells in the help of the Most High, will live in the protection of the God of Heaven" (Psalm 90: 1). He is ready to sail across the sea. "Thy ways are in the sea, and Thy paths in many waters" (Psalm 76: 20). Boldly, literally on wings, he flies through the sky to distant lands, saying, "Even there Thy hand will guide me and Thy right hand will hold me" (Psalm 138: 10). He

knows that if it pleases God to protect his life, "A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand: but it will not come near you" (Psalm 90: 7).

Even death is not fearful for him, because, for the person whose life is Christ, death is gain (Philippians 1: 21). "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For Thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8: 35-39). "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7: 1).

This is what the Lord says: "Loose the bonds of wickedness; forgive unjust debts; let the oppressed go free; tear up every unjust agreement. Share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house. When you see the naked, cover him, and do not mistreat your own people. Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, Here I am" (Isaiah 58: 6-9).

Lord, teach me to do Thy will and hear me on the day that I call upon Thee!

May Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, for we have placed our hope in Thee.

**Humble John, Bishop of Shanghai**

August 30, 1937

St. Alexander Nevsky

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