

## **One Prostration**

Fr. John Konkle

On one occasion, Fr. Roman said to me, “I knew an elder in Romania who would tell his disciples that they only needed to do one prostration a day.” There was no obvious reason for why he said these words; we hadn’t been talking about prostrations, or about praying with the body, or about Romanian spiritual elders, or about anything apparent to me that would have prompted such a comment. I don’t recall saying anything in reply, but simply wondering, “Why did he say that?”, and reflecting on the meaning of his words.

About six weeks or so later, Fr. Roman again said to me, “I knew an elder in Romania who would tell his disciples that they only needed to do one prostration a day”—the very same words, equally without context, and without any additional discussion. My perplexity increased. Did he forget that he had already told me this story? Unlikely. Did he know that I didn’t understand the significance of what he was saying? Surely. Was I really supposed to be doing only one prostration a day? That seemed unimaginable to me.

And so it went, every six weeks or so he would repeat this abbreviated story without context and without discussion. Then, after a weekday liturgy, when we were standing in the sanctuary on the North side of the altar, he repeated these words yet again—as he had done at least a half-dozen times before—and he started to turn to leave the sanctuary. But after taking a step or two he turned back toward me and, with a bright face and jovial delight, said, “But he didn’t tell them that they needed to do a thousand prostrations in order to learn how to do that one.” He began to cross himself, explaining, “As we cross ourselves and say ‘have mercy on me’, we are crucified with Christ.” The crossing of himself flowed naturally into a bow—but not the full prostration he was illustrating as he was well into his 80s at the time (on another occasion, Fr. Roman told me, “Do prostrations when you are young; you won’t be able to do them when you’re old!”)—while continuing his explanation, “And as we say ‘the sinner’ we descend into the tomb with Christ so that we are buried with him—dead to sin” Standing back upright and beginning to raise his hands, Father completed his explanation, “And as we say ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God’, we are raised with him into life eternal.” “Every prostration,” he went on to say, “united to the Jesus Prayer, is our death, burial and resurrection with Jesus Christ. Every prostration is Holy Friday, Holy Saturday and Pascha Sunday.”