



BOOK REVIEW

Published in the *Holy Trinity Parish Bulletin*

TITLE: *Living in Christ: Essays on the Christian Life by an Orthodox Nun*

AUTHOR: *Mother Raphaela (Wilkinson)*

Mother Raphaela, Abbess of Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery in Otego, New York, presents here a rare and compelling collection of essays on the Christian life. With a firm foundation in Scripture and the Fathers, Mother Raphaela sets out the clear, yet strenuous path of the Christian, especially in relation to today's society. She stresses the many subtle dangers that are ever-present in the current culture, especially the false, though seductive, notion that one can live a full life in Christ while at the same time strive for the things of this world.

The life in Christ is not a partial decision, but one which embodies the full person; and to be Orthodox is not simply something one does, but who one is. To embark on this narrow and unpaved way, the Christian should expect to enter into a fierce spiritual battle, one which requires great discipline and steadfastness in the faith, but which ultimately will be one's final and greatest joy, Christ Himself. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

This book is especially good for those considering the monastic life. Mother Raphaela explains in detail the discipline and obedience required of the monastic, and the necessity that the monastic's only goal be to serve God and his neighbor. She warns against the many enticing, though incorrect, draws to the monastic life. This compilation of essays is also important for lay persons who question the place and function of the Monastery in the Church and society.

While Mother Raphaela focuses on the monastic calling, she does make the point that there is no real higher calling among Christians. All Orthodox are called to give their lives completely over to God, and to renounce all that which separates them from Him. The whole of life is a working out, with the grace of God, of one's salvation, and sometimes the very incident of being turned away from monastic life may lead a person to an eventual higher calling. She explains that everyone is required to go into a wilderness of sorts. While the monastic separates himself physically from the world, the Christian living in the world must also create a wilderness for himself where he is completely still and alone to hear the word of God.

What is especially sobering about these essays is how unwaveringly they are grounded in reality. There is no argument against the Christian life that is not at least touched upon by Mother Raphaela in this book. Reading them, one is at first overwhelmed with the discovery of what is ultimately required of him, but at the same time understands that there is no alternative for one desiring to live a life in Christ. Here, it is God's truth unarguably which pours from the pages, and will serve as a guidance and inspiration to all who read them.

Reviewed by Matushka Katherine Gaudreau

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