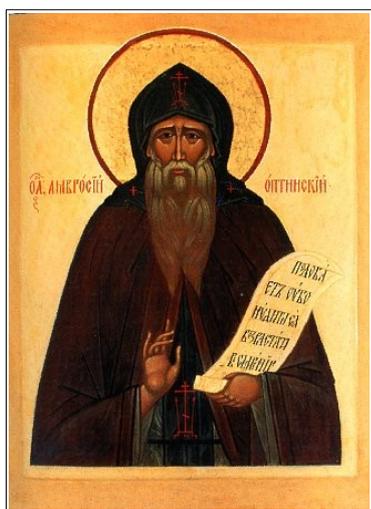


## St. Ambrose of Optina, Hieromonk

(†1891)

Commemoration Days: July 10, October 23, October 24



The Hermitage of Optina, situated at the edge of deep forests in the Kaluga Region, was the center of Russian spiritual *renewal* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Hermitage became known for its holy monks or staretsy, who led an ascetic life and practiced the ancient tradition of *contemplative* prayer. God *deemed* them *worthy* of the gifts of *prophecy*, healing and *clairvoyance*. Hundreds of people in search of salvation came to Optina to receive spiritual guidance. All fourteen monks who lived in the Monastery were glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Among them was Fr. Ambrose.

Hieromonk Ambrose was born Alexander in 1812 in a village of the Tambov region to Michael Grenkov, a *sexton*, and his wife, Martha. He was the sixth of eight children. Alexander's grandfather was a priest. The boy, brought up in a strict but loving family, learned to read early and liked to sing in the church choir. A lively and *gregarious* child, Alexander had many friends and *stood at the top of his class*. Study came to him with no effort. As one of the best pupils in the Tambov clerical school, he was sent to the Seminary. A year before graduation, Alexander became so dangerously ill he promised God that, if he recovered, he would be *tonsured* as a monk. The illness passed, but the young man delayed fulfilling of his vow – although he never forgot it. He spent a few years as a tutor for a rich family and later as a Greek teacher in a clerical school in Lipetsk.

In 1839 Alexander Grenkov went on a pilgrimage to the Troitsa-Sergiev Monastery, and then – having firmly decided to forsake the world – quietly, without telling his friends, departed for Optina.

As a *novice*, Alexander worked in the monastery bakery and served as staretz Leo's cell assistant and reader. In 1842 Alexander was tonsured and given the name Ambrose, in honor of St. Ambrose of Milan. Bodily infirmities trained the spirit of the future great staretz. Never a healthy man, Fr. Ambrose all his life suffered one *malady* after another. Once, he

became so weak that he was prepared to die. But, as he would say later, “In a monastery, the sick do not die soon, as long as the sickness brings them real benefit.”

In spite of physical weakness, which kept him bedridden most of the time, Fr. Ambrose every day received crowds of people and answered dozens of letters. Russian intelligentsia, struggling with doubts and loss of direction, often sought his guidance. Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky came to the holy staretz for comfort and advice. A man who in the past had loved worldly things so much, Fr. Ambrose well understood the spiritual *thirst* of his visitors. He saw into the depths of their souls.

In the last years of the saint’s life, with his help and blessings, a convent was built not far from Optina – with a school, hospital, orphanage and *almshouse*. The convent accepted sick, blind and destitute women and, by 1890, about a thousand nuns lived there. It also was the place where Fr. Ambrose drew his last breath. While visiting, he had become very ill and couldn’t return to Optina.

At his end-time, the holy man’s pain was intense as never before. He lost his voice and hearing. After much suffering, on October 10, 1891, in the presence of monks from Optina, St. Ambrose crossed himself with great difficulty and fell asleep in the Lord.

### Vocabulary

renewal	[ri'nu: əl]	возрождение
contemplative	[kən'tem plə tɪv]	созерцательный, вдумчивый; contemplative prayer – умная молитва
deem worthy	[di:m 'wə: ðɪ]	удостоить
prophecy	['prɑ: fə saɪ]	пророчество
clairvoyance	[,kler'vɔɪ əns]	ясновидение
sexton	['seksɪn]	пономарь
gregarious	[grɪ'ge ri əs]	общительный
stand at the top of the class		быть самым лучшим учеником (распространённое устойчивое выражение)
tonsure	['tɑ:n ʃə]	постриг
novice	['nɑ: vɪs]	послушник
malady	['mæ lə di]	недуг, болезнь

thirst	[θə:st]	жажда
almshouse	[ 'almshaus]	богадельня

Примечания. Грамматический строй английского языка очень отличен от русского и не всегда удаётся подобрать точные эквиваленты каким-то идиоматическим или устойчивым выражениям – поэтому не пытайтесь переводить «дословно». Чтобы перевод получился естественным, исходите прежде всего из правил своего родного языка. Английский часто бывает более экономичным, «сжатым», в то время как в русском переводе требуется более подробное пояснение. Например, предложение *Never a healthy man, Fr. Ambrose all his life suffered one malady after another* перевести с полным сохранением английской грамматической структуры будет невозможным. Один из вариантов перевода: «Отец Амвросий никогда не отличался хорошим здоровьем, и его всю жизнь преследовал один недуг за другим.» Или: «Здоровье отца Амвросия никогда не было крепким, и он всю жизнь страдал то от одного, то от другого недуга.»

В английском главное и придаточное предложения могут присоединяться без союза (чаще всего опускается союз *that*), но при переводе мы должны связать предложения в зависимости от того, как требуют грамматические нормы русского языка. Например, *Alexander became so dangerously ill he promised God* мы переведём «Александр так опасно заболел, что дал Богу обещание...»

Слово «старец» вошло в английский без изменений и обычно пишется *staretz* (иногда *starets*), множественное число – *staretsy*.

### **From the Sayings of Fr. Ambrose**

- The Lord will deliver you from all improper thoughts; just humble yourself.
- Do not be greatly disturbed by the arrangement of your fate. Have an unwavering desire for salvation and, standing before God, await His help until the time comes.
- Let us live more simply, and God will have mercy on us.
- We must begin with thanksgiving for everything. The beginning of joy is to be content with your situation.
- Why are people bad? Because they forget that God is over them.