

WEEKLY MEDITATION

A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psalm 50)

We pray using the words of this psalm every day. When we are hurt, or worn out, we find consolation in them. In this experience we touch upon the core experience of all believers, that it is precisely in our neediness that God seems closest to us, and that when we cry out in pain and sorrow the Lord hears us. There is a paradox here. We seem closer to Him when we hurt. We can seem further from Him when we don't. All our striving in life is to feel good, be comfortable, relax, enjoy ourselves, be happy. And yet so often, in pursuit of these things, God seems distant and our sense of His presence dwindles away. All this striving is ultimately unsatisfying. We know that it is really only the presence of God that brings joy, peace, happiness - even in the most trying circumstances.

The elder Paisios once said that for love to blossom in the heart, we must pray *with pain of heart*. In explaining this he noted that when we hurt some part of our body - our hand, for example - all our attention and energy focuses on where we hurt. So too it is a hurting and broken heart that focuses our spiritual attention. When asked what can we do if, in fact, we are not suffering and our heart is not hurting, the elder relied: *'We should make the other's pain our own! We must love the other, must hurt for him, so that we can pray for him. We must come out little by little from our own self and begin to love, to hurt for other people as well, for our family first then for the large family of Adam, of God.'*

Fr. Andrew

