

# Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

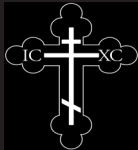
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## In This Issue:

- **Entering the Arena of Spiritual Combat (p. 3)**
- **If He Was not Flesh... and If He Was not God... (p. 5)**
- **The Way and the Truth of Christ & the Council of Crete (p. 7)**
- **On the New Year (p. 9)**
- **On the Fire of Zeal (p. 12)**
- **The Created, the Uncreated and the Incarnation (p. 21)**
- **Education in God (p. 24)**
- **The Atheist Student that Visited the Holy Mountain (p. 28)**
- **Avarice, Anger, Sorrow & Sloth (p. 29)**



- **Ὁ Χρόνος καὶ ἡ Αἰωνιότης (σελ. 13)**
- **Τὸ Μεγαλύτερο Ρελιζίκι (σελ. 15)**
- **Τότε οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, Σήμερα οἱ Ἕλληνες... (σελ. 19)**



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## ON THEOPHANY

By St. Philaret of New York.

On the feast day of the Theophany, the Baptism of the Lord, every Orthodox Christian would do well to remember another baptism, the one performed over each one of us Orthodox Christians, the baptism in which each of us, through the mouths of our godparents, gave God an oath that we would always renounce Satan and his works and would always join with, *unite with* Christ.

I repeat, this is especially fitting for this day. Now we will begin the ceremonious rite of the great blessing of the water. Its center, one might say its main part, is the grand prayer in which the Lord is glorified and the grace of the Holy Spirit is invoked upon the water which is being blessed. This prayer begins with the wonderful words: *Great art Thou, O Lord, and wonderful are Thy works, and no word doeth justice to the praise of Thy wonders.* Those who have attended the rite of baptism and listened carefully know that this prayer for the blessing of the water in which a person is to be baptized begins with the same words, and the first part of this prayer is performed in the same way as during the great blessing of the water. Only later, in the last part, does the prayer change at the completion of the Mystery of baptism, which is especially composed for this Sacrament, as a new human soul is to be baptized.

It would be worth remembering the promises made during baptism on be-

half of each one of us. When a person is baptized as an adult, which happens these days sometimes but happened much more often in ancient days, he makes these oaths himself, but if he is baptized as a child, his godfather or godmother make these promises—they are the “adopters,” as the Church calls them. And these promises, in which the Christian makes a promise to God to renounce Satan and all his works, and joins with, unites with Christ, are not only forgotten by people, but many do not even know about them or that they were spoken, and that they must think about how these promises are to be fulfilled.

What if on the last day of the history of mankind, the Day of Judgment, it turns out that a person made some promises (or that promises were made on his behalf by his godparents), but he does not know what these promises were? What will happen with such a person? Think, brethren, what it means to renounce Satan and all his works and to unite with Christ.

The time has come when mankind has been consumed with activities which displease God, in which the Enemy of mankind reigns, and, as they said in old days, this Enemy makes everyone dance to his flute. This fuss and bother, which envelops our daily lives, is distasteful to God, and God is absent from it, and the Enemy of God is master and ruler of it. If we gave the promise to renounce Satan and all his works, then we must fulfill it, and try not to crush our souls with daily cares, remembering what the

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Church teaches: *There is one thing needful*, only one thing necessary—to remember that we must unite ourselves with Christ, that is, not only fulfill His commandments but to try to unite with Him.

Think about this, Christian soul, on this bright and great feast day, think about it and, as you pray that the Lord sends you staunch faith and the decisiveness to fulfill these promises, do not drown in the daily cares of this world and thereby lose your bond with the Lord, with Whom you promised to be united forever.

Today’s holiday [i.e., *holy day!*] is called the Baptism of the Lord, or the Theophany, but those who know the Church rule well, know that it is also called *The feast of the holy Theophanies* in the plural.

Why? Because of course, the central commemoration of this feast day is what the choir chanted through the words *God the Word shone forth in the flesh to the human race*. The Incarnate Son of God, of Whose birth only a few knew at the time, *shone forth to the human race*, for His baptism is as His ceremonial appearance in His service, which He performed until His death and resurrection.

But at the same time, today’s holiday is also noteworthy, as is sung in the troparion, because it is during this very holiday that *the worship of the Trinity was made manifest*. All three Persons of the Holy Trinity for the first time appeared in Their

distinctness, which is why this is called *The feast of the holy Theophanies*. People heard the voice of God the Father *This is my Son, the Beloved, with Whom I am well pleased*, the Son of God received baptism from John (meanwhile, we know from



the Gospel that John the Baptist, distraught when the Savior of the world came to him, tried to refuse), and the Holy Spirit in the form of a Dove descended from the Father to the Son. In this way, *the worship of the Trinity was made manifest*, and that is why the Church sings this in the troparion, and calls this holiday *The feast of the holy Theophanies*.

Christ the Savior appeared in order to commence His salvific service. Not long ago, we celebrated another great feast day here, the Nativity of Christ, when we spoke about how the Lord in His birth in a poor cave, condescending to lie in a manger for beasts, emphasized His rejection of any earthly glory or vanity and pomp, for He did not appear in a royal palace or mansion, but amid

such humble surroundings. He showed right away that He was bringing to earth a new beginning, the beginning of humility.

Note how He was, in a way, true to Himself, how today, on this great feast day, He also brings humility to us clearly and without a doubt. For where did He go? To Jordan. Why? To receive baptism from John. But sinners were the ones who

came to John, confessing their sins and receiving baptism. Yet He was without sin, *untouched by sin*, absolutely free of it and pure, and yet he humbly took his place among the sinners, as though He were in need of cleansing by water. We know, however, that it was not water that cleansed Him, Most-Holy and sinless, but that He sanctified water by consenting to be washed by it, as we sang today during the blessing of the water: *Today the nature of water is sanctified*. So Christ brought to earth the beginning of humility, and was devoted to it throughout His earthly life. But there is more. He also left us the commandment: *Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*"

Remember yet another bright, joyous springtime holiday—the Annunciation.

Here the Most-Blessed Virgin Mary hears from the Archangel the good news that through her, the Incarnation of God is to be manifested. What does her most-holy, most-pure and sinless soul say when she comes to visit her relative Elizabeth in order to share her joy? She says only: *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*. This humility was the beauty of her soul. From the account of the Annunciation we know that the Archangel appeared to her at the very moment when she, having read the prophesy of Isaiah about the Incarnation of God from a virgin, did not think to associate this to Herself, but only thought within the depths of her humility: *How joyous I would be if I were the last of servants of this blessed Virgin*, and suddenly Archangel Gabriel appears before Her with his Annunciation. The Lord beheld her humility, Who Himself was meek and humble.

He gave us the commandment of humility, in opposition to pride and self-love, which mankind today flounders in.

See how many conflicts we have, even within the church and within our parishes? Because everywhere the stoked passions of human pride cause strife, and if we only had humility, towards which the Lord calls us, we would have none of this.

Let us learn, brethren, from our Savior, Who like the last of sinners went to John in order to be baptized by him, let us learn from this God-loving and aromatic good, without which, as the Holy Fathers said, no other good deed can be performed. Amen.



**W**e think we know a lot, but what we know is very little. Even all those who have striven all their life to bring progress to mankind—learned scientists and highly educated people—all realize in the end that all their knowledge is but a grain of sand on the seashore. All our achievements are insufficient.

Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica (+2003)

## ENTERING THE ARENA OF SPIRITUAL COMBAT

*Holy Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller and Hesychast.*

**R**ejoice in the Lord, beloved child, whom the grace of my Jesus has enlightened and delivered from the world; who has flown to the wilderness and dwelt in a monastery with a holy *synodia*, and now glorifies and thanks God with all his soul.

Divine grace, my child, is like bait which enters the soul and without coercion attracts a person toward higher and superior things. It knows how to catch us rational fish and to pull us out of the sea of the world. But then what?

Once God takes the monastic aspirant out of the world and brings him to the wilderness, He doesn't immediately show him his passions and the temptations, until he becomes a monk and Christ binds him with His fear. Then the trial, the struggle, and the fight begin.

If a novice exerts himself from the beginning and lights his torch of asceticism with his struggles before it is too late, it will not go out when grace withdraws and temptations come. Otherwise, when grace does withdraw, he will return to his previous state. Then, corresponding to the passions he had in the world, temptations will arise and will revive his former habits which used to enslave him because he used to cater to them.

First of all, my child, know that there are great differences from man to man and monk to monk. There are souls with a soft character that are very easily persuaded. There are also souls with a tough character that are not subordinated so easily. They are as different as cotton is from iron. Cotton needs only to be rubbed with words, but iron requires fire and a furnace of temptations to be worked. Such a soul must be patient during temptations to be purified. When a monk does not have patience, he is like a lamp without oil: soon it will burn out.

So, when a person with a nature harder than iron comes to be a monk, as soon as he enters the arena, he rebels against obedience. Immediately he breaks his promises and gives up the battle. Then you see that as soon as grace withdraws a little to test his intentions and patience, at once he throws away his weapons and starts regretting that he came to be a monk. Then he passes his days full of disobedience and bitterness, always talking back arrogantly.

Then, through the prayers of his elder, grace disperses the clouds of temptations somewhat so that he comes to his senses a little and mends his ways. But soon afterwards he returns once more to his own will, to disobedience, agitation, and annoyance.

You write about the brother you see there and are amazed that although he works so hard at his *diakonema* (work

assigned to a monk or a nun by the abbot or abbess of the monastery, *Ed.*), his ego within still overcomes him. But do you think it is easy for man to conquer a passion?

Good deeds and almsgiving and all other external good things do not subdue the haughtiness of one's heart. But mental work, the pain of repentance, contrition, and humility are what humble the un-submissive spirit. An insubordinate person is unbearable and toilsome to deal with. Only with utter patience can he be handled. Only with utter patience on behalf of the elders and with the forbearance and love of the brethren can stiff-necked disciples come to their senses. But behold: many times they, too, are as useful as your right hand. Almost always such people, who are in some way more gifted than the others humble themselves with difficulty. They think highly of themselves and look down upon others.

So a great deal of hard work and patience are needed until this old foundation of pride is dug up, and another foundation is set with Christ's humility and obedience. But the Lord, seeing their efforts and good intentions, allows another trial to come upon them which counteracts their passion, and by His mercy, He *Who will have all men to be saved* saves them too. As for you, emulate whomever you want.

It would be wonderful if everyone had a good character, humility, and obedience. But if one's nature happens to be tougher than iron, he should not despair. He needs to struggle, and by the grace of God he can win. God is not unjust in His expectations. He seeks repayment according to the gifts He has given.

For from the beginning of creation He separated men into three classes: He gave five talents to one, two to another, and one to the other. The first one has the highest gifts: he has greater mental capacity and is called *taught by God*, because he receives teachings from God without a teacher, just like St. Anthony the Great, St. Onouphrios, St. Mary of Egypt, Cyril Philotes, Luke of Steirion, and thousands of others in the old days who became perfect without a guide. The second type of person has to be taught what is good in order to do it. And the third one, even if he hears, even if he learns, he hides it in the ground: he doesn't do anything.

So that is why there is such a big difference among the people and monks that you see. And that is why first and foremost you must *know thyself*. That is, know who you really are in truth, and not what you imagine you are. With this knowledge you become the wisest man. With this kind

of awareness, you reach humility and receive grace from the Lord. However, if you don't obtain self-knowledge, but consider only your toil, know that you will always remain far from the path. The prophet does not say, "Behold, O Lord, my toil," but says, *Behold my humility and my toil*. Toil is for the body, and humility is for the soul. Moreover, the two together, toil and humility, are for the whole man.

Who has conquered the devil? He who knows his own weaknesses, passions, and shortcomings. Whoever is afraid of knowing himself remains far from knowledge, and he doesn't love anything else except seeing faults in others and judging them. He doesn't see gifts in other people, but only shortcomings. And he doesn't see his own shortcomings, but only his gifts. This is truly the sickness that plagues us men of the eighth millennium: we fail to recognize each other's gifts. One person may lack many things, but many people together have everything. What one person lacks, another person has. If we acknowledged this, we would have a great deal of humility, because God, Who adorned men in many

ways and showed inequality in all of his creations, is honored and glorified; not as the unbelievers say, who toil trying to bring equality by overturning the divine creation. God made all things in wisdom.

Therefore, my child, now that it is still the beginning, see to it that you know yourself well, so that you set humility as a firm foundation. See to it that you learn obe-

dience and acquire the prayer.

*May Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me* be your breath. Do not leave your mind idle, so that you aren't taught evil things. Do not let yourself look at the faults of others, because without knowing it, you will become the evil one's partner without any progress in virtue. Do not, out of ignorance, ally yourself with the enemy of your soul.

The cunning enemy knows very well how to hide behind passions and weaknesses. So in order to strike him, you must fight and mortify yourself—all your passions, that is. When the "old man" dies, the strength of your hostile enemy is abolished.

We are not battling with a man, whom you can kill in many ways, but with the powers and rulers of darkness. They are not fought with sweets and marshmallows, but with streams of tears, with pain of soul until death, with utter humility, and with great patience. Blood must flow from over-exhaustion in saying the prayer. You have to collapse from exhaustion for weeks as if gravely ill. And you



must not give up the fight, until the demons are beaten and withdraw. Then you will receive freedom from the passions.

And so, my child, force yourself from the beginning to enter the narrow gate, because only it leads to the spaciousness of paradise. Cut off your own will every day and hour, and seek no other path besides this one. This is the path that the feet of the Holy Fathers trod. Reveal your path unto the Lord and He will guide you, too. Reveal your thoughts to your elder, and he will heal you. Never hide a thought, because the devil conceals his cunning within it: as soon as you confess it he disappears. Do not reveal another person's fault to justify yourself, because at once grace, which had covered you until that point, will reveal your own faults. The more you cover your brother with love, the more grace warms you and guards you from the false accusation of men.

As for the other brother you mentioned, it seems that he has some un-confessed sins, because he is ashamed to tell them to the elder. And this is why that temptation takes place. But he must correct this improper behavior, for without frank confession, one cannot be purified. It is a shame to be ridiculed by the demons. Deep down his ego is hiding. May the Lord enlighten him to come to his senses. And you should pray and love him as well as everyone; yet guard yourself from all.

In any case, now that you have entered the arena, you will undergo many kinds of temptations, so prepare yourself to be patient. Say the prayer constantly, and the Lord will help you with His grace. Temptations are never stronger than grace.



When only the outer man is educated, education proves to be harmful; because it gives rise to an inflated idea of self. This idea then becomes a barrier that prevents the Grace of God from coming close to us. But when we put away our false self-importance, then God—Who is a benevolent and generous Father—will enrich us with His divine and luminous ideas. By contrast, those who are not willing to give up their sense of self-importance certainly have a brain and body, but they lack the Grace of God, the Holy Spirit.

In other words, there is danger that too much knowledge may inflate the head and turn it into an air balloon that may either explode in mid air (from schizophrenia) or break up into pieces (because of pride). This is the reason why knowledge should proceed with fear of God and in alignment with action; it should be balanced. When these elements or missing, knowledge will only cause harm.

**St. Paisios the Athonite**

## IF HE WAS NOT FLESH... AND IF HE WAS NOT GOD...

*St. Ephraim the Syrian, an excerpt from his sermon on our Lord's Transfiguration.*



The facts themselves bear witness and his divine acts of power teach those who doubt that He is true God, and his sufferings show that He is true man. And if those who are feeble in understanding are not fully assured, they will pay the penalty on His dread day.

If He was not flesh, why was Mary introduced at all? And if He was not God, whom was Gabriel calling Lord?

If He was not flesh, who was lying in the manger? And if He was not God, whom did the Angels come down and glorify?

If He was not flesh, who was wrapped in swaddling clothes? And if He was not God, whom did the shepherds worship?

If He was not flesh, whom did Joseph circumcise? And if He was not God, in whose honour did the star speed through the heavens?

If He was not flesh, whom did Mary suckle? And if He was not God, to whom did the Magi offer gifts?

If He was not flesh, whom did Symeon carry in his arms? And if He was not God, to whom did He say, *Let me depart in peace?*

If He was not flesh, whom did Joseph take and flee into Egypt? And if He was not God, in whom were words *Out of Egypt I have called my Son* fulfilled?

If He was not flesh, whom did John baptise? And if He was not God, to whom did the Father from heaven say, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased?*

If He was not flesh, who fasted and hungered in the desert? And if He was not God, whom did the Angels come down and serve?

If He was not flesh, who was invited to the wedding in Cana of Galilee? And if He was not God, who turned the water into wine?

If He was not flesh, in whose hands were the loaves? And if He was not God, who satisfied crowds and thousands in the desert, not counting women and children, from five loaves and two fishes?

If He was not flesh, who fell asleep in the boat? And if He was not God, who rebuked the winds and the sea?

If He was not flesh, with whom did Simon the Pharisee eat? And if He was not God, who pardoned the offences of the sinful woman?

If He was not flesh, who sat by the well, worn out by the journey? And if He was not God, who gave living water to the woman of Samaria and reprimanded her because she had had five husbands?

If He was not flesh, who wore human garments? And if He was not God, who did acts of power and wonders?

If He was not flesh, who spat on the ground and made clay? And if He was not God, who through the clay compelled the eyes to see?

If He was not flesh, who wept at Lazarus' grave? And if He was not God, who by His command brought out one four days dead?

If He was not flesh, who sat on the foal? And if He was not God, whom did the crowds go out to meet with glory?

If He was not flesh, whom did the Jews arrest? And if He was not God, who gave an order to the earth and threw them onto their faces.

If He was not flesh, who was struck with a blow? And if He was not God, who cured the ear that had been cut off by Peter and restored it to its place?

If He was not flesh, who received spittings on his face? And if He was not God, who breathed the Holy Spirit into the faces of His Apostles?

If He was not flesh, who stood before Pilate at the judgment seat? And if He was not God, who made Pilate's wife afraid by a dream?

If He was not flesh, whose garments did the soldiers strip off and divide? And if He was not God, how was the sun darkened at the cross?

If He was not flesh, who was hung on the cross? And if He was not God, who shook the earth from its foundations?

If He was not flesh, whose hands and feet were transfixed by nails? And if He was not God, how was the veil of the temple rent, the rocks broken and the graves opened?

If He was not flesh, who cried out, *My God, my God, why have you abandoned Me?* And if He was not God, who said *Father, forgive them?*

If He was not flesh, who was hung on a cross with the thieves? And if He was not God, how did He say to the thief, *Today you will be with me in Paradise?*

If He was not flesh, to whom did they offer vinegar and gall? And if He was not God, on hearing whose voice did Hades tremble?

If He was not flesh, whom did the Apostles see in the upper room? And if He was not God, how did He enter when the doors were shut?

If He was not flesh, the marks of the nails and the lance in whose hands and side did Thomas handle? And if He was not God, to whom did He cry out, *My Lord and my God?*

If He was not flesh, whose side did the lance pierce, and blood and water came out? And if He was not God, who smashed the gates of Hades and tear apart its bonds? And at whose command did the imprisoned dead come out?

If He was not flesh, who ate by the sea of Tiberias? And if He was not God, at whose command was the net filled?

If He was not flesh, whom did the Apostles and Angels see being taken up into heaven? And if He was not God, to whom was heaven opened, whom did the Powers worship in fear and whom did the Father invite to *Sit at my right hand?* As David said, *The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand*, etc.

If He was not God and man, our salvation is a lie, and the words of the Prophets are lies. But the Prophets spoke the truth, and their testimonies were not lies. The Holy Spirit spoke through them what they had been commanded.



God does not want those whom He will save, who seek His mercy, to be ignoramuses, unmanly, cowardly, or spiritually untested. It is a matter of divine inheritance stored up for experienced Christians. So He places temptations before us so that our obedience to His commandments may be demonstrated. His illumination is within us; knowledge of His will is taught by the Scriptures; furthermore, our conscience guides us like a compass. All of the above enlighten us in the face of temptations. But when evil prevails over our will, we do not obey His commandments.

We were created with free will, and free will cannot be controlled by others. As such, if we feared God, we would not fall into temptation. If we did not love ourselves more than God, we would not tend towards sin. But His goodness did not leave our falls without a rectifying remedy, whereby we return once again and a victory occurs in spite of our fall.

All who compel themselves to be saved, the Scriptures call righteous, justified by faith. God will not let them fall, for they are struggling properly. He will not let them be tempted beyond their strength when they are making every effort to be patient. But when we are cowardly and lukewarm, when we have a slothful will, this constitutes an occasion for a temptation beyond our strength.

Your grumbling is sinful; it is a result of self-love and unmanliness. Have patience in everything; thank God; blame your lukewarmness, and not God, Who was crucified for you and, consequently, must love you. Since He loves you, how can He let you fall into temptation? Seek forgiveness from Him, and secure yourself with patience.

**Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona**  
From "*Counsels from the Holy Mountain*"

## THE WAY AND THE TRUTH OF CHRIST & THE “COUNCIL” OF CRETE

*An interview with Protopresbyter Peter Heers, from the Journal of the Holy Monastery of Samtavro, Mtskheta, Georgia. This interview was conducted in August of 2016 and published in the August-September edition of the Monastery's Journal. Fr. Peter Heers is the Rector of the Parish of the Prophet Elias, Petrokerasa, Greece, Diocese of Ierissou and Agion Oros (Orthodox Church of Greece).*

**P**lease give us your assessment of the Cretan council.

Sadly, the council in Crete is a false council which produced unorthodox texts which now must be rejected by the Orthodox *pleroma* (entire Body).

Christ is the Way and the Truth and on both counts the “Cretan Council” departed from rightly representing Christ. Both in terms of methodology (how it was prepared, organized and conducted) and in terms of essence (the final texts were heavily tainted by the non-orthodox ecumenist mentality) the “Cretan Council” departed from the Way and Truth of the Holy Fathers and Oecumenical Councils. A foreign spirit, alien to the Holy Fathers but at home in this world, animated the proceedings, proclaiming foreign teachings and not those *strange words, strange doctrines, strange teachings of the Holy Trinity* (Praises of Orthros of the Feast of Pentecost) which have been spoken in the past at every true Oecumenical Council.

In spite of the excessive claims to the contrary, both the preparatory process and the organization and governing rules did not reflect the Orthodox Way of conciliarity (*συνοδικότητα*). Major decisions regarding the Council, including the final decision to hold the Council, were consistently made without the knowledge, let alone the participation, of the Synods of the Local Churches. In practice, then, a new form of Papalism was practiced and promoted, wherein the Primates of the Local Churches operated not as *first among equals* but as “first without equals” and as “popes” over their bishops. This was most evident in the unprecedented and unorthodox practice of limiting voting to the Primates of the Local Churches. As one bishop noted,

without the possibility of voting, the only difference between the Orthodox Bishops in attendance and the observers of the various heterodox confessions was that the former (the Orthodox bishops) could speak publicly, even if only for a limited time.

The Truth of Christ, that “sign spoken against,” “divisive” and revealing of hearts’ desires, was also absent or skewed in Crete. The well-known criteria of all Orthodox Councils is that they were called to confront doctrinal and, by extension, pastoral challenges to the Church’s unity and thus chiefly addressed matters of Faith (and thus heresy) and only secondarily related matters of canonical order. In Crete, this relation of Faith and Order, Dogma and Ethos, was set aside, with any reference to schism and heresy, let alone living heretics, completely absent. In this most heretical of all ages, in which syncretism and the New Age reigns and the devil “walks naked through history,” the Cretan Council referred even to those well-known heresies condemned by past Oecumenical Councils and the consensus of Church

Fathers, as “churches.”

Unfortunately, it is also clear that the Council was neither “great” nor “holy.” It was a minor gathering which will be remembered at best as an episcopal conference without pan-Orthodox authority both on account of the small number of bishops invited and the rather secondary issues it addressed. Moreover, however, it was also not “holy” on account of a glaring departure from Holy Tradition and the promotion of syncretistic ecumenism with, among other things, the nonchalant endorsement of unorthodox



**The delegation of theologians from Greece meeting with the Hierarchs of the Church of Georgia at the Patriarchate to discuss the “Council” of Crete and the post-council path**

texts issued in the dialogue with the Papacy (e.g., Balamand) and in the so-called “World Council of Churches” (e.g., Pusan and Porte Alegre). This tragic departure from Holy Tradition is also apparent in the text approved by the Council, “The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments,” which directly overturns the 72<sup>nd</sup> canon of the Penthekte Oecumenical Council (“in Trullo”). In allowing for intermarriages with the heterodox this document subtly but clearly expresses the so-called “baptismal theology” and the new ecumenist ecclesiology of “partial churches” outside of the One Church. Both it and the document “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World,” which recognizes the existence of “heterodox churches,” are

unorthodox texts which must be rejected by the Orthodox Church.

In conclusion, the overwhelming majority of the faithful in Greece were greatly disappointed with the “Cretan Council” and are looking forward to its clear rejection by the hierarchies of the Local Churches which did not attend, first of all which is the venerable Church of Georgia, but also from the Church of Greece’s own hierarchy, the pre-council decisions of which were un-canonically set aside by the Archbishop of Greece when he and his retinue accepted the “historical name” of “heterodox churches.”

### What was the resonance of the position of the Georgian Church in Greece?

The Church of Georgia stands, at this moment in history, as light unto the faithful everywhere and their hope for the unity of the Church and a future victory of Orthodoxy over the new heretical ecclesiology of syncretistic ecumenism. In particular, the pre-synodical stance of the Holy Synod and His Beatitude, Patriarch Ilia II, with regard to the unorthodox texts on marriage and on the heterodox, as well as the Patriarch’s epistle sent to the Patriarch of Constantinople during the Council itself, explaining the reasons for not attending, gave great joy to the faithful everywhere and especially in Greece.

The faithful in Greece are now looking to the Georgian Church to stay the course and remain strong, standing fearlessly on the firm rock of the confession of faith in the One and Only Body of Christ, which is the Orthodox Church, the salvation of the world. We ourselves are engaged in a terrible struggle against anti-Christian forces in our country, which are openly working for the uprooting of the Christian faith from Greece. Syncretistic ecumenism is a part of this anti-Christian agenda. Thus, the witness of the Georgian Church is immensely important.

### What was your impression of meeting with the Patriarch of Georgia?

Our meeting with His Beatitude was the highlight of our visit and a great blessing. His words and graciousness were an encouragement to us in our struggle for the saving Faith and against the new ecclesiology of ecumenism. It was clear to us that the Patriarch and Hierarchy are committed to Orthodox unity and will not be swayed to entertain any of the divisive innovations introduced in Crete.

His Beatitude showed us that he understands that only on the basis of the Orthodox confession of faith in the One Church and rejection of the new ecclesiology can *the unity of the faith and the communion of the Holy Spirit* be built and remain steadfast. His Beatitude assured us that for the Church of Georgia “there are not many churches, but only one Church, the Orthodox Church,” and that he and the Holy Synod will “work for the unity of all the

Orthodox,” which can only be assured on the basis of the Faith once delivered.

We will be forever grateful to His Beatitude Ilia II, the reverend metropolitans and pious clergy and faithful of the Church of Georgia for the exceptional hospitality and loving-kindness they showed to us during our visit. It is our prayer that our short visit will be the beginning of a close and fruitful cooperation between the faithful of Georgia and Greece on the all-important matters of the Faith which binds us together in Christ and His Church. May it be blessed!



### ON PRAYER

By St. Ignatii Brianchaninov (+1867).

The sign of purity is to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep; to be in pain with the sick and in anguish with the sinners; to rejoice with the repentant and to participate in the agony of those who suffer; to criticize no man and, in the purity of one’s own mind, to see all men as good and holy.

In teaching us how to pray, the Lord compares a praying soul to a widow—wronged by a rival—who pesters a just and impartial Judge (Luke 18:1-8). [Note: In the beginning of the parable, the widow is pestering an unjust judge, but in this teaching St. Ignatii has journeyed to the very end of the parable; where we stand before the One Righteous Judge Who loves us.]

Do not let the disposition of your soul differ from this model. Let your prayer be, so to speak, a constant complaint against sin, which does violence to you. Look into yourself, reveal yourself by attentive prayer; and you will see that you are precisely a widow in regard to Christ, on account of the sin that dwells in you, which is hostile to you and which causes inner conflict and suffering, and which estranges you from God.

So, I repeat to you that the sign of purity is to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep; to be in pain with the sick and in anguish with the sinners; to rejoice with the repentant and to participate in the agony of those who suffer; to criticize no man and, in the purity of one’s own mind, to see all men as good and holy.



## ON THE NEW YEAR

By St. Theophan the Recluse, his 1864 New Year homily; translation by Nun Cornelia (Rees).

What is renewal? When will the new heaven and new earth we hope for come? The explanation is in the Apostle's words, *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* (2 Cor 5:17).

† † †



Happy New Year, we greet each other now. But has anyone given any thought as to how new this coming year is? And where or, rather, how would we get anything new from it? In what way does the present day differ from yesterday, or from the first day of the past year? And in the future, will there not be the same interchange of days and nights,

the same turn of months and seasons as there was before? Will the course of events not be new?

But Divine Wisdom also rejects this, saying: *The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, see, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us.* (Eccl 1:9–10).

So, does this mean our New Year greetings are pointless?

It could not be that such a widespread custom sanctified by antiquity should have no meaning—and deep meaning at that. No matter how much we doubt the sincerity of these good wishes, we nonetheless cannot reproach them as unnecessary or pointless. There should be something truly new for the soul to believe in, regardless of the agedness of everything around us, something for which it assuredly searches and yearns; and it is ready to embrace it in everything that seems new. What could this “new” thing be?

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, says the Lord. (2 Pet. 3:13). This is the first true newness! It will be revealed in all its glory at the end of the world, when all will be purified by fire. But preparation for it ensued almost from the beginning of heaven's and earth's existence, and has been at work since that time—invisibly to the physical eye, but visibly to the eye of faith. The restorative powers placed in the cycle of the temporal passing of created things are so effective and true that, at the thought of them the Apostle

calls out: *Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* (2 Cor. 5:17).

And looking mentally over all creation, having tasted the seeds of renewal, he heard its complaint that the time will not soon come when it shall cast off its present garment of decrepitude and decay and put on a new one full of life's radiance. *For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.* (Rom 8:19–22).

Establish your thought in this teaching and you will see that in our present condition, one thing is seen from without, while another is working within, both in us and outside us. The present state—both ours and of the whole world—is a transient state, like the state of a sick man covered with bandages, or of a tree frozen for the winter, or a house under renovation and encompassed with scaffolding. When the time comes, they will take the bandages off the sick man, and he will appear healed and healthy in a renewed life; the renovation will end, they will take away the scaffolding, and everyone will see the new house in all its beauty; the spring of a new age will come and the tree of the world's existence, now bare, will put forth its leaves, flowers, and fruits.

In the beginning, when God looked upon the universe He had just created, everything in it was very good. (Gen 1:31). When man fell, everything went bad, like a chain when the first link is broken. *Unto the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.'* And unto Adam He said, *'Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'* (Gen. 3:16, 18–19). Thus, all was clothed in mourning, or a penance was laid upon everything. Everything took on a decrepit and decaying state.

It would have remained thus forever if not for the ever creative wisdom of God that, through His love, goodness, and power, began to bring to pass a mysterious means of correction and restoration of everything to its better, former, and perfect form. The seed of a woman, it was said, *will crush the head of the snake* and destroy the evil that was poured

into man and through him into all creation. And it was at that exact moment that this divine promise began to work.

The most wise divine economy, however, was not immediately manifest in full strength. The full effect of its power in creation was destined to be revealed through human flesh, which is always limited by conditions of time and place. The Seed of salvation, although it appeared in the flesh, It had everything in itself: the heavenly and the earthly, the past, the present, and the future. Through this it was able to penetrate all things with its restorative powers, without cancelling the mystery of their action. The outward state remains—the painful, disconsolate, decaying, corrupting state.

Enter, brothers, with the faith of your mind into the contemplation of this order of God's economy on the meaning of time, establish yourself in it and stand there. For the sake of your faith, the Lord will give you the strength to withstand the calumny of the father of lies, who by corrupting those minds that believe his suggestions steals from them the ability to see renewal working amidst decay. They deceive themselves and lead others into deception, thinking that the seeming disorder around us is the natural (normal) state of things, and they allow themselves to make overly bold judgments against the creation of the Most Wise

and the providence of the All-Good. Stand therefore in faith, brothers, and confirm yourselves in it!

This is the first newness, which could be called universal. But for each one of us there is a similar newness, which enters us and manifests its power in us, when we become partakers of the restorative powers brought to earth. *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.* (2 Cor. 5:17). You already know that all the powers needed for new life are entrusted to the Holy Church, and all of us as true sons of the Church are undoubtedly fulfilled by them and obtain renewal through them.

Our renewal begins with holy Baptism, in which we put off the old man and clothe ourselves in the new, or are reborn to a new life. The power of inner renewal does not cease to work in those who preserve the grace of Baptism. It ceases in those who fall into mortal sins after Baptism. But it begins to work once more, when they again partake in a godly life in Christ Jesus through the sacrament of Confession. Whether one receives the grace of renewal in Baptism or in Repentance (Holy Confession), if he preserves it and acts according to its demands, the seed of new life no longer dies

in him, but grows even more. And in this manner, the secret man of the heart grows and strengthens even more, becoming full of wisdom, spiritual reason, moral beauty, strength of character, and inner joy in the Holy Spirit—though he may be outwardly poor and naked. Inner beauty matures under an unsightly covering, like a beautiful butterfly in its unsightly cocoon. Reaching maturity, the butterfly breaks open its encasement and begins rejoicing in life on God's earth. Once our hidden man has matured in his weak body, and when God judges it time, he throws off this encasement, rises to the heights, and begins to live a fully renewed life at the very source of life.

This, brothers, is our predestination. Therefore, the image of this renewal is brought into the soul, and an awareness of it is revealed in the soul's presentiments and secret desires, even when the soul is a stranger to those renewing powers. This is the reason why we so love the new, and try so hard to find it!



You can see from what we have said how this longing can be satisfied. Nevertheless, I will cite to you several lessons from the Apostolic epistles. *As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.* (1 Pet 2:2). *Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump.* (1 Cor 5:7). *Put off concerning the former conversation the old*

*man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind. And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* (Eph. 4:22-24). You must become new within yourself, and then your thirst for the new will be satisfied, and satisfied perpetually. For new spiritual life in Christ Jesus is continually new in its essence. The perpetual newness present within us will quench our thirst for the new. May the Lord vouchsafe this to all of you. I could not wish you anything better for this New Year.

I was ready to end my sermon here, but the thought comes to me to give you a little word of caution, just in case. It is not surprising that you meet individuals who think otherwise concerning newness, and consider that which is in fact renewal to be dilapidation, and what is dilapidation to be renewal; what the Apostle exhorted us to put on as the new, they advise us to cast off as the old. You can understand what is going on here. I will offer two or three cases as instruction to you, so that you might correctly judge concerning this.

Before Christ the Savior's coming to the world, outside of the people of God, ancient paganism colored all areas of

life—intellectual, moral, aesthetic, family, and civil. After Christ the Savior and the spread of Christianity, the power of God’s word and the grace of the Holy Spirit expelled the pagan principles and Christian principles began to reign everywhere and in all spheres—the intellectual, moral, aesthetic, family, and political. These principles continued to be at work uninterrupted in the Holy Orthodox Church in the East. In the West the pope, who separated from the Church, first accepted the root of pagan life: pride. Around this center, all the other elements of paganism were not slow to collect.

By the fifteenth century, they became rather strong, lifted their head and vocally entered again into contest with Christianity. A circle of people formed who were filled with a pagan spirit, and made it their task to introduce pagan principles once again, in all spheres—the intellectual, moral, aesthetic, family, and civil. The time when this was happening is called the Western Renaissance. Remind yourselves, that the Western Renaissance is the restoration of paganism in opposition to Christianity. Such is the significance of the Renaissance.

But as the seed, so the fruit. All the current developments in the West in all their forms are the sum of that movement given impetus by the Renaissance. It is its fruit. Therefore, both in spirit and body, in the main and in its parts it is entirely penetrated with pagan principles that are hostile to Christianity. Anyone who comes into contact with it and makes friends with it in any way becomes more or less an enemy of Christ. Experience shows this to be true.<sup>[1]</sup>

But what do we care about the West? Let it do as it sees fit. We once lived simply under the influence of the life-giving principles of Christianity and never knew what was going on in the West, and we never would have known had not the need arisen to enter into relations with it. Having entered into relations, we began to adopt from it not only what is useful, but also its spirit of pagan education, which also produced here what they have; that is, whoever comes into contact with it immediately rises up against Christ the Savior and His Holy Church.

A class of people has grown here also who insist that Christian religion is something old that should be cast off, and European education is renewal, which should be assimilated. Knowing now what European education is, you can well understand what they are advising us to do. Here is what it is. The Apostle Paul says that God sent the holy Apostles, clothed in the grace of the Holy Spirit, to the world in order to bring everyone out of darkness into light, from Satan’s realm to God; and these people advise us to go from light back into darkness, and away from God to the realm of Satan, where there is not renewal of life, but death that kills all sprouting of true life.

See what benefactors they are! Entire books should be written in order to explain this in detail. I have offered you this truth in brief postulates, only just in case. *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, . . . Henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.* (Eph. 5:15;4:14–15). Amen.

† † †

[1] At the time of St. Theophan’s writing, various socialist movements were gathering strength in Russia. The Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution, both of which persecuted Catholicism, were already history. The final result in Russia was the overthrow of the entire order and establishment of a militant atheistic regime. Thus, St. Theophan’s words came ever so bitterly true in his own country.



A priest from the region of Samosota came a great distance to visit St. Symeon Stylites. He told him about a spring in his village which irrigated all their fields and from which by the Lord’s design their lives were sustained. All of a sudden it failed and dried up, and they were exhausted from thirst and hunger. They had brought workmen. They had dug and labored and spent a good deal of money and they did not find one drop of water in it.

When the priest came and told the whole matter just as it was, the saint said, “I trust in the Lord Jesus that when you start to leave this enclosure our Lord will make it return to normal. But go, keep vigil, and celebrate the Eucharist and give thanks to our Lord.”

The priest noted the time the saint spoke to him and our Lord did a favor. The priest went and found that the spring had gushed forth and overflowed and irrigated all the fields of the village. When he asked the villagers they told him that on such and such a day it suddenly gave a violent sound and gushed forth and watered all the fields of the village double what it used to. He took out the note he had written and saw that the spring had gushed forth into its canal at the very moment the saint blessed him. Then the priest led all his congregation and they came and ministered before the saint for three days. Then they returned rejoicing and praising God.

From “The Life of St. Symeon Stylites”

## ON THE FIRE OF ZEAL

*By St. Theophan the Recluse.*

What success can one expect when there is no enthusiastic zeal for a Christian pleasing of God? If there is something that involves no labor, one is ready to do it; but as soon as one is required to do a little extra labor, or some kind of self-sacrifice, immediately one refuses, because one is unable to accomplish it oneself. For then there will be nothing to rely on that can move one to good deeds: self-pity will undermine all the foundations. And if any other motive besides the one mentioned becomes involved, it will make the good deed into a bad deed.

The martyrs willingly went to death because they were kindled by an inward fire. A true zealot does not do only what is according to the law, but also what has been advised and every good suggestion that has been secretly imprinted on the soul; he does not only what has been given, but he is also an acquirer of good things; he is entirely concerned with the one good thing which is solid, true, and eternal.

St. John Chrysostom says that everywhere we must have fervor and much fire of the soul, prepared to be armed against death itself. For otherwise it is impossible to receive the kingdom. The work of piety and communion with God is a work of much labor and much pain, especially in the beginning. Where can we find the power to undertake all these labors? With the help of God's grace, we can find it in heartfelt zeal.

A merchant, a soldier, a judge, or a scholar has work which is full of cares and difficulties. How do they sustain themselves in the midst of their labors? By enthusiasm and love for their work. One cannot sustain oneself by anything else on the path of piety. Without this we will be serving God in a state of sluggishness, boredom, and lack of interest. An animal like the sloth also moves, but with difficulty, while for the swift gazelle or the nimble squirrel movement and getting about are a delight. Zealous pleasing of God is the path to God which is full of consolation and gives wings to the spirit. Without it one can ruin everything.

One must do everything for the glory of God in defiance of the sin which dwells in us. Without this we will do everything only out of habit, because it seems "proper," because this is the way it has always been done, or the way others do it. We must do all we can, otherwise we will do some things and neglect others, and this without any contrition or even knowledge of what we have omitted. One must do everything with heedfulness and care, as our chief task; otherwise we will do everything just as it comes.

And so, it is clear that without zeal a Christian is a poor Christian. He is drowsy, feeble, lifeless, neither hot nor cold—and this kind of life is not life at all. Knowing this, let us strive to manifest ourselves as true zealots of good deeds, so that

we might truly be pleasing to God, having neither stain nor spot, nor any of these things.

Therefore, a true witness of Christian life is the fire of active zeal for the pleasing of God. Now the question arises, how is this fire ignited? Who produces it? Such zeal is produced by the action of grace. However, it does not occur without the participation of our free will. Christian life is not "natural life." This should be the way it begins or is first aroused: as in a seed, growth is aroused when moisture and warmth penetrate to the sprout which is hidden within, and through these, the all-restoring power of life comes. So also in us, the divine life is aroused when the Spirit of God penetrates into the heart and places there the beginning of life according to the Spirit, and cleanses and gathers into one the darkened and broken features of the image of God. A desire and free seeking are aroused (by an action from without); then grace descends (through the Mysteries) and, uniting with our freedom, produces a mighty zeal. But let no one think that he himself can give birth to such a power of life; one must pray for this and be ready to receive it. The fire of zeal with power—this is the grace of the Lord. The Spirit of God, descending into the heart, begins to act in it with a zeal that is both devouring and all-active.

To some the thought arises: should there be this action of grace? Can we ourselves really not do good deeds? After all, we have done this or that good deed, and, if we live longer, we will do some more. Perhaps it is a rare person who does not ask this question. Others say that of ourselves we can do nothing good. But here the question is not only of separate good deeds, but of giving rebirth to our whole life, to a new life, to life in its entirety—to such a life as can lead one to salvation.

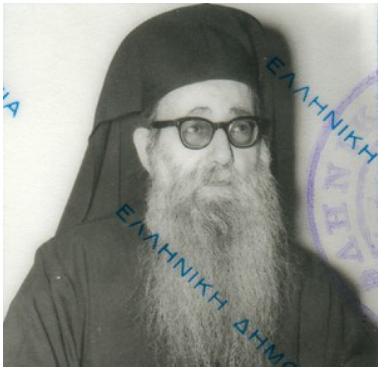
As a matter of fact, it is not difficult to do something which is even quite good, as the pagans also did. But let someone intentionally define a course for himself of a continuous doing of good, and define the order of it according to what is indicated in the word of God—and this not for one month or for a year, but for one's whole life—and place as a rule to remain in this order unwaveringly; and then, when he remains faithful to this, let him boast of his own power. But without this it is better to close one's mouth. How many cases there have been in the past and in the present of a self-trusting beginning and building of a Christian life. And they have all ended and continue to end in nothing.

A man builds a little in his new order of life—and then throws it away. How can it be otherwise? There is no strength. It is characteristic only of the eternal power of God to support us unchanging in our disposition in the midst of the unceasing waves of temporal changes. Therefore one must be filled abundantly with this power; one must ask for and receive it in order—and it will raise us up and draw us out of the great agitation of temporal life.

## Ὁ Χρόνος καὶ ἡ Αἰωνιότης

### Νέο Ἔτος Ἀνατέλλει στὸν Ὁρίζοντα τῆς Ἀνθρωπότητος

Ὁμιλία τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης στὸν ἱερό ναὸ τοῦ Ἁγίου Παντελεήμονος Φλωρίνης 31-12-1974, κατὰ τὴν ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ ἔτους τὸ μεσονύκτιο.



**Τ**ι εἶναι ἓνα ἔτος ἐν συγκρίσει μὲ τὰ χρόνια ποὺ πέρασαν καὶ τὰ χρόνια ποῦ θὰ περάσουν; Εἶναι μία σταγόνα τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ. Ἔνας σοφὸς συγγραφεὺς, γιὰ νὰ δώσει μία ιδέα τοῦ χρόνου ἐν συγκρίσει μὲ τὴν αἰωνιότητα, ἔπλασε

τὴν ἐξῆς εἰκόνα. Φανταστήτε, λέει, ἓναν ἀπέραντο ὠκεανὸ καὶ πάνω ἀπὸ τὰ νερά του νὰ πετάει ἓνα πουλί. Τὸ πουλί, ἀφοῦ διαγράφει κύκλους, κατεβαίνει, παίρνει μὲ τὸ ράμφος του μία σταγόνα ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιφάνεια τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ, καὶ μετὰ φεύγει κ' ἐξαφανίζεται. Ἀφοῦ περάσουν χίλια χρόνια, τὸ πουλί ξαναεμφανίζεται, γιὰ νὰ πάρει πάλι μόνο μία σταγόνα ἀπὸ τὸν ὠκεανό. Φανταστήτε λοιπὸν νὰ γίνεται αὐτὸ συνεχῶς δηλαδή, μία φορὰ στὰ χίλια χρόνια τὸ πουλί νὰ παίρνει μία σταγόνα. Σὰς ἐρωτῶ· πόσες χιλιάδες; Τι λέω;... Πόσα ἑκατομμύρια; Τι λέω;... Πόσα δισεκατομμύρια ἔτη, τὴν ἰλλιγγιώδης ἀριθμὸς ἐτῶν θὰ πρέπει νὰ περάσουν, ἕως ὅτου τὸ πουλί πάρει καὶ τὴν τελευταία σταγόνα τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ;

Φαίνεται ἀδύνατο αὐτό; Ὁχι, δὲν εἶναι. Ἐὰν ρωτήσετε τοὺς μαθηματικούς, θὰ σὰς ποῦν ὅτι, ἂν ὁ ὠκεανὸς παραμένει σταθερὸς καὶ δὲν τροφοδοτῆται καὶ δὲν ἀνανεώνεται μὲ νέα νερά (βροχῆς, χεμιάρρων, ποταμῶν), ἀσφαλῶς θὰ ἔρθει μία στιγμή, κατὰ τὴν ὁποία τὸ πουλί θὰ πάρει καὶ τὴν τελευταία σταγόνα του.

Ὁ ὠκεανὸς λοιπὸν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐξαντληθεῖ, ἡ αἰωνιότης ὅμως δὲν ἐξαντλεῖται ποτέ. Ὡ αἰωνιότης!

Ὁ χρόνος ἀντιθέτως ἐξαντλεῖται, ἔστω καὶ ἂν φαίνεται σὰν ἓνας ἀπέραντος ὠκεανός. Πόσο διάστημα ἔχει περάσει ἀφ' ὅτου δημιουργήθηκε ὁ κόσμος; Διότι εἶναι ἐπιστημονικῶς ἀποδεδειγμένο, ὅτι κάποτε κόσμος δὲν ὑπῆρχε· δὲν ὑπάρχει κανεὶς ἐπιστήμων ποῦ ν' ἀμφιβάλλει γι' αὐτό. Ἡ ὕλη δὲν εἶναι αἰωνία. Κάποτε ἐμφανίστηκε. Κάποτε ἐμφανίστηκαν οἱ ἀστέρες, κάποτε ἐμφανίστηκε ὁ ἄνθρωπος, κάποτε ἐμφανίστηκε ὁ ὅλος αὐτὸς ὁ ὠραιότατος κόσμος.

Ἀπὸ τότε λοιπὸν ποῦ δημιουργήθηκε ὁ κόσμος μέχρι σήμερα πόσα χρόνια πέρασαν; Κατὰ τὴν ἁγία Γραφή πέρασαν 7.500 περίπου χρόνια (5.500 μέχρι τὴ γέννησι

τοῦ Χριστοῦ + 2.000 μέχρι σήμερα). Ὁ Χριστὸς μὲ τὴ γέννησί του χώρισε τὸ χρόνο σὲ «πρὸ Χριστοῦ» καὶ «μετὰ Χριστόν».

Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ ποῦ ἦρθε ὁ Χριστὸς μέχρι σήμερα ἔχουν περάσει 2.000 περίπου χρόνια. Καὶ πόσα ἄραγε νὰ ὑπολείπονται μέχρι τῆς συντελείας τοῦ κόσμου; Τὸ σκεφτήκατε; Μπορεῖ κι ἀπόψε νὰ σημειωθεῖ τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου! Πῶς; Ἄγνωστη ἡ ὥρα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἄλλ' ἀκόμα καὶ ἡ δαμονικὴ ἐπιστήμη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀπειλεῖ νὰ φέρει τὴ συντέλεια. Ἐὰν αὐτὲς οἱ βόμβες ποῦ ἔχουν συγκεντρώσει τόσο οἱ Ἀμερικάνοι ὅσο καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ἐκτραγοῦν ὅλες μαζὶ ταυτοχρόνως, μόνο ὁ Θεὸς ξέρει τι μπορεῖ νὰ συμβεῖ. Ἀλλὰ καὶ κατ' ἄλλο τρόπο κινδυνεύει ὁ κόσμος. Γιατὶ ἡ γῆ, ὅπως ξέρουμε, μέσα στὰ ἔγκατά της ἔχει ὀλόκληρο ἠφαίστειο. Ἐὰν τὸ ἠφαίστειο αὐτὸ ἐκτραγεῖ, τι θὰ μένει ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; Πάνε καὶ οἱ Παρθενῶνες καὶ τὰ μέγαρα καὶ τὰ πάντα, ὅλοι οἱ πολιτισμοὶ ἐξαφανίζονται.

Πότε λοιπὸν θὰ ἔρθει τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου; Ἄγνωστο. Ἔνα ὅμως εἶναι γεγονὸς ἀναμφισβήτητο· ὅτι θὰ ἔρθει ὅπωςδήποτε. Αὐτὸ πάλι ἐπιστημονικῶς ἀποδεικνύεται. Διότι ὅλα ἔχουν ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος· ἐπομένως κάποτε θὰ σημειωθεῖ καὶ τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου.

Τὸ «πῶς» κατὰ τὰς Γραφὰς εἶναι σαφές, κατὰ τὴν ἐπιστήμη εἶναι ἀμφιβαλλόμενο.

Ἐν πάσει περιπτώσει τὸ τέλος θὰ ἔρθει, καὶ θ' ἀρχίσει τότε νέα περίοδος, ἡ αἰωνιότης. Ἡ πρώτη περίοδος εἶναι πρὸ Χριστοῦ. Ἡ δευτέρα περίοδος εἶναι μετὰ Χριστόν. Καὶ κατόπιν, κατὰ τὴ Γραφή, «καινοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ γῆν καινὴν κατὰ τὸ ἐπάγγελμα αὐτοῦ προσδοκώμεν» (Β' Πέτρο, 3:13).

Τότε, ἀγαπητοί μου, ἡ αἰωνιότης θὰ χωρισθεῖ σὲ δύο μεγάλες καταστάσεις. Ἡ μία ὀνομάζεται αἰώνιος κόλασις, καὶ ἡ ἄλλη παράδεισος, αἰώνιος ζωὴ.

Μπά, παραμύθια λές, θὰ πεῖ κάποιος.

Καὶ ὅμως αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι παραμύθι σὰν ἐκεῖνα ποῦ ἀκούγαμε ἀπὸ τὴς γιαγιάδες στὸ παραγώνι κοντὰ στὴ φωτιά. Εἶναι πραγματικότης.

Μακάρι, λέει ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, νὰ μὴν ὑπῆρχε κόλασις· γιατί κ' ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἁμαρτωλὸς καὶ φοβᾶμαι τὴν κόλασις. Ἄλλ' ὅμως, ὅσο εἶναι γεγονὸς ὅτι ὑπάρχει ἡμέρα καὶ νύχτα, καὶ ὅσο εἶναι γεγονὸς ὅτι ὁ ἥλιος ἀνατέλλει καὶ δύει, τόσο εἶναι γεγονὸς ὅτι ἡ αἰωνιότης εἶναι μία σκληρὰ πραγματικότης. Διότι χωρίζεται ἀφ' ἐνὸς μὲν σὲ νύχτα ἀπέραντη, ποῦ ὀνομάζεται αἰώνιος κόλασις, ἀφ' ἐτέρου δὲ σὲ λαμπρὰ καὶ φωτοβόλο ἡμέρα, ποῦ ὀνομάζεται αἰώνιος ζωὴ καὶ μακαριότης.

Αὐτὸ ποιὸς μας τὸ βεβαιώνει; Ἐκεῖνος ποῦ ποτὲ δὲν εἶπε ψέματα. Ὅλοι ψεύδονται, Ἔνας ὄχι· εἴκοσι αἰῶνες διέρρευσαν καὶ κανεὶς ποτὲ δὲν τὸν διέψευσε. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. Αὐτὸς τὸ βεβαιώνει.

Πηγαίνετε στο σπίτι, πιάστε και διαβάστε το Ευαγγέλιο, πού είναι η ύψιστη αλήθεια.

Το 1942 ήμουν στη Φλώρινα και είχα μία ομάδα έκατο νέων παιδιών, στα όποια έδίδασκα τὰ λόγια του Θεού. Αυτά εργάζοντο τιμῶς μέσα στην πόλι και, ενώ πέφτανε οί βόμβες αυτοί φώναζαν «Ζήτω ή Έλλάς!». Τότε ένα από τὰ παιδιά εκείνα, ένα τίμιο λουστράκι, έγραψε στο κασσελάκι του τη φράσι: «Το Ευαγγέλιο είναι ή ύψιστη φιλοσοφία της ζωής». Τόν έπλησίασα, και μου λέει: Είμαι αγράμματος, αλλά άφ' ότου έπιασα στα χέρια μου το Ευαγγέλιο και το διάβασα, δεν φαντάζομαι να υπάρχει στον κόσμο άλλο τέτοιο βιβλίο.

Διάβασε λοιπόν κ' έσον το Ευαγγέλιο. Άνοιξε το κατά Ιωάννην και διάβασε στο 5<sup>ο</sup> κεφάλαιο τούς στίχους 25 έως 29, κ' εκεί θα δεις τὰ τρομερά λόγια του Χριστού. Είναι τὰ λόγια που άκούμε στην εκκλησία όταν γίνεται κηδεία αγαπητών μας προσώπων, αλλά ποιός τὰ προσέχει; Αυτά θ' άκουστούν και για μās όταν θα μās κηδεύσουν. Τι λέει ο Χριστός εκεί; «*Άμην άμην λέγω υμίν...*». Τι σημαίνει «*άμην άμην*»; Είναι έβραϊκή φράσι. Μ' αυτήν ο Χριστός βεβαιώνει κατηγορηματικώς, ότι «*έρχεται ώρα εν ή πάντες οί εν τοις μνημείοις ακούσονται της φωνής αυτού (του υιού του Θεού), και εκπορεύονται οί τὰ αγαθά ποιήσαντες εις ανάστασιν ζωής, οί δε τὰ φαύλα πράξαντες εις ανάστασιν κρίσεως*». (Ιωάν. 5:28-29).

Πρός τὰ εκεί λοιπόν βαδίζουμε, αγαπητοί μου. Όπως τὰ ποτάμια τρέχουν και πέφτουν στη θάλασσα, έτσι και ή ζωή του καθενός μας θα πέσει μέσα στην πλατειά θάλασσα που λέγεται αιωνιότης. Το βεβαιώνει ο Χριστός.

Θέλεις κι άλλη απόδειξι; Νά, ή φωνή της συνειδήσεως. Όταν κάνεις το καλό τι αισθάνεσαι; Χαρά και αγαλλίασι, και άς τρώς κρεμμύδι και έλιά. Παράδεισο έχεις μέσα στην ψυχή σου, βασιλιάς είσαι. Αυτό που σε κάνει να νιώθεις χαρά είναι μία ήχώ του παραδείσου. Κι όταν κάνεις το κακό μέσα σου αισθάνεσαι λύπη, κόλασι έχεις, άς είσαι και βασιλιάς και αυτοκράτορας. Διαβάστε και Σαίξπηρ: θα δητε εκεί κάποιον που διέπραξε το κακό, και εν μέσω έκθαμβωτικού συμποσίου παρέλυσαν τὰ χέρια του κ' έπεσαν τὰ πιρούνια κάτω, γιατί ή σκιά του έγκλήματος έτάραξε τη ζωή του. Κάνεις, δηλαδή, το κακό και αισθάνεσαι μέσα σου λύπη. Τι είναι αυτό; Κόλασις. Από εδώ λοιπόν, από την παρούσα ζωή, ο άνθρωπος προγεύεται ή τον παράδεισο ή την κόλασι.

Πρός την αιωνιότητα βαδίζουμε, άδελφοί. Και νά, ένα έτος πέρασε. Νέο έτος χαιρετίζουμε. Τι θα μās φέρει; Άγνωστον.

Κοντόφθαλμοι έμεις, δεν ξέρουμε αν θα ζούμε αύριο. Πάντοτε πρέπει να περιμένουμε την αναχώρησί μας, ιδίως έμεις οί γέροντες που φθάσαμε στην δύσι του βίου. Άλλά και οί νέοι. δεν γνωρίζουμε «*τι τέξεται ή*

*έπιούσα*». Άραγε του χρόνου τέτοια μέρα πόσοι θα είμεθα στη ζωή; Άραγε στο νέο έτος τι περιπέτειες περιμένουν το έθνος μας; Και τι θα γίνει στα Βαλκάνια και στη Μεσόγειο και στον κόσμο; Κ' έσον μεν πλάθεις όνειρα και φαντάζεσαι τον βίον άτελεύτετον' αλλά ή αιωνιότης έγγίζει, ή μεγάλη ώρα έρχεται.

Τι να εύχηθούμε, αγαπητοί μου; Πλούτη; Δόξες; Τιμές; Απολαύσεις; Ήδονες;... Μηδέν είναι όλα. «*Ματαιότηης ματαιοτήτων, τὰ πάντα ματαιότης*» (Έκκλ. 1:2). Ένα μένει. Να πιστέψεις στο Χριστό. Δεν υπάρχει άλλο όνομα που μπορεί να μās δώσει χαρά και έλπίδα κατά το έτος αυτό. Μόνο το όνομα του Ίησου Χριστού *ών, παίδες, ύμνεϊτε και ύπερυσουτε εις πάντας τούς αιώνας*. Άμην.

† Επίσκοπος Αύγουστίνος



### Το Βλέμμα της Γαλήνης!

Ποιός δεν θα ήθελε να αντικρύσει, έστω και για μία στιγμή, αυτό το γλυκό βλέμμα που μυρίζει ούρανό!

-Αυτό το βλέμμα που πηγάζει ή γαλήνη!

-Αυτό το βλέμμα που σου άνοίγει διάπλατα την καρδιά!

-Αυτό το βλέμμα που δάκρυσε μπροστά στον Σταυρό!

Το βλέμμα της Παναγιάς μας, το γεμάτο στοργή και παρηγοριά!

Η Παναγιά, ως στοργική μάνα, θα μās κοιτάει με αυτό το βλέμμα της. Άς αναρωτηθούμε όμως:

Έμεις θα μπορούμε να την αντικρύσουμε κατάματα; Το βλέμμα το δικό μας θα είναι καθαρό ή θα είναι γεμάτο ένοχές, ώστε να μη γευθούμε της χαράς και της αγαλλίασης, που σκορπίζει το βλέμμα της Παναγιάς.

Ποτέ δεν είναι άργα να αλλάξουμε πορεία, να κάνουμε μία επανεκκίνηση στην ζωή μας! Η νέα αρχή γίνεται ξεκινώντας την προσπάθεια καταπολέμησης του έγωισμού μας, της μιξερίας και της λύπης, στα όποια μās έχει οδηγήσει ο έγωισμός μας, ξεφεύγοντας από τὰ δίχτυα της άπελπισιάς. Έτσι, με θάρρος και έλπίδα, με βλέμμα πλέον καθαρίο να άξιωθούμε να αντικρύσουμε με ευθύτητα το γλυκό και ούρανιο βλέμμα της Παναγιάς, μέσα από το όποιο θα διακρίνουμε ξεκάθαρα και φωτεινά το πρόσωπο του Χριστού μας. Άμην!

† Αρχ. Βαρθολομαίος  
Καθηγούμενος Ι. Μ. Έσφιγμένου

## Τὸ Μεγαλύτερο Ρελιζίκι...

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου.

### Ἡ Ἀγάπη γιὰ τὴν Ἄνθρωπότητα Εἶναι Ὑποκρισία

Ἐὰν εἶχε πάψει νὰ ὑφίσταται ἡ ἀδικία, τὸ μῖσος καὶ τὸ ψέμμα, τότε ἡ εἰρήνη θὰ ἦταν τὸ ἐπιστέγασμα τῆς ἀνθρώπινης εὐδαιμονίας. Ἡ ἐνότης θὰ ἦταν ἓνα φυσικὸ καὶ ὄχι τεχνητὸ ἀποτέλεσμα. Ὅμως παρατηρεῖται κάτι τὸ τελείως διαφορετικὸ. Σήμερα ποὺ ὅλοι μιλοῦν γιὰ εἰρήνη καὶ γιὰ ἐνότητα, ἡ φιλαυτία καὶ τὰ μίση, ἡ ἀδικία καὶ τὸ ψέμα, ἡ φιλοδοξία καὶ ἡ πλεονεξία μεσουρανοῦν. Ὅλοι, ὁ καθένας μὲ τὸν τρόπο του, μιλοῦν γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα. Δὲν ὑπῆρξε ὅμως ποτὲ μεγαλύτερη ὑποκρισία ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν δῆθεν ἀγάπη. Γιατὶ ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς κάτι τὸ θεωρητικὸ, πρὸς κάτι τὸ φανταστικὸ, ὅπως εἶναι ἡ ἔννοια «ἀνθρωπότης» εἶναι ἐξ' ἴσου θεωρητικὴ καὶ φανταστικὴ. Δὲν ἔχει καμμία σχέσι μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν συγκεκριμένον ἄνθρωπο ποὺ ἔχουμε μπροστὰ μας. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς ἓνα συγκεκριμένον πρόσωπο, ὅταν ὑπάρχει, εἶναι ἡ μόνη πραγματικὴ. Εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν πλησίον μας ποὺ ἐζήτησε ὁ Χριστός.

Αὐτὸς ὁ συγκεκριμένος ἄνθρωπος μὲ τὶς ἀτέλειες καὶ τὶς ἀδυναμίες του, ἀντὶ νὰ ἀγαπηθῆ, μισήθηκε στις ἡμέρες μας περισσότερο ἀπὸ κάθε ἄλλη φορὰ. Καὶ ὄχι μόνον μισήθηκε, ἀλλὰ περιφρονήθηκε καὶ ἐξευτελίσθηκε, θεωρήθηκε ἓνα «πρᾶγμα», χωρὶς ἰδιαίτερη ἀξία, μέσον γιὰ τὴν ἐπίτευξι «ὑψηλῶν» σκοπῶν, ἓνα μόριο τῆς μάζας. Αὐτοὶ ποὺ μιλοῦν περισσότερο γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα, γιὰ τὴν εἰρήνη καὶ τὴν ἐνότητα, εἶναι ἀκριβῶς ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ μισοῦν περισσότερο τὸν πλησίον τους, τὸν γνωστό τους. Τὸ ὅτι τάχα ἀγαποῦν τὸν ἄνθρωπο εἶναι πλάσμα τῆς φαντασίας τους. Δὲν ἀγαποῦν τὸν ἄνθρωπο: αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ πραγματικότητα. Αὐτὴ ἡ λατρεία τοῦ εἰδώλου «ἄνθρωπος» εἶναι στὴν πραγματικότητα ναρκισσιμὸς, εἶναι ἡ λατρεία τοῦ «ἐγώ».

Θὰ ἦταν λοιπὸν ἀφέλεια νὰ πιστέψη κανεὶς ὅτι ἡ φιλειρηνικὴ διάθεσις ποὺ χαρακτηρίζει τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα σήμερα προέρχεται ἀπὸ ἀγάπη. Ὅχι! Τὰ περὶ ἀγάπης εἶναι ὑποκρισία ἢ αὐταπάτη. Ὁ πόθος τῆς εἰρήνης προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸ χάσιμο τῶν ἰδανικῶν, ἀπὸ τὸν φόβο καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη τῆς καλοπέρασης. Εἶναι ὁ πόθος νὰ μᾶς ἀφήσουν ἡσυχους νὰ ἀπολαύσουμε τὰ ἀγαθὰ τῆς γῆς. Εἶναι ἡ κατὰ συνθήκην συνεργασία γιὰ τὴν ἀπόκτησι τῶν ἀγαθῶν ποὺ χωριστὰ ὁ καθένας δὲν θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ ἀποκτήσῃ. Εἶναι ἡ παγκόσμιος συνεννόησις πάνω σε κάτι ποὺ ἔγινε τὸ πάθος ὀλοκλήρου τῆς γῆς: τὴν φιληδονία καὶ τὴν φιλοῦλια. Εἶναι προῖόν τῆς ἀνάγκης.

Ἡ εἰρήνη γιὰ τὴν ὁποία μιλάει σήμερα ὁ «Κόσμος» εἶναι ἡ ἄνευ ὄρων συνθηκολόγησις κάθε καλοῦ καὶ μεγάλου καὶ ἡ ἐπικράτησις τῆς μικρότητος, τῆς μετριότητος καὶ τῆς χλιαρότητος. Εἶναι ἡ ἐξάλειψις τῆς προσωπικότητος τῶν ἀτόμων καὶ τῶν λαῶν. Εἶναι μία μαρμελάδα συμβιβασμῶν καὶ ὑπολογισμῶν, μία θάλασσα ὑποκρισίας, ἡ ἀδιαφορία γιὰ τὴν ἀλήθεια, ἡ προδοσία κάθε ἱεροῦ καὶ ὁσίου.

Ὁ πόλεμος εἶναι κάτι τὸ φοβερό, ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς πτώσεως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, καὶ κανεὶς δὲν πρόκειται νὰ τὸν ἐξυμνήσῃ. Ὅμως ἡ εἰρήνη ποὺ παζαρεύει ὁ σύγχρονος κόσμος εἶναι κάτι ἀπείρως φοβερώτερο. Ὁ πυρετὸς εἶναι κάτι τὸ πολὺν δυσάρεστο, δείχνει ὅμως τουλάχιστον ὅτι ὁ ὀργανισμὸς ἀντιδρᾷ στὸ κακὸ ποὺ τὸν βρῆκε. Ἡ εἰρήνη ποὺ θέλουν νὰ φέρουν δὲν εἶναι δυστυχῶς ἐκεῖνη ποὺ ἔρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν κατανίκησι τοῦ κακοῦ, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνη ποὺ ἔρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἡττα. Εἶναι ἡ ἀπυρεξία τοῦ πτώματος.

### Ὑπάρχει Ἐνας Ὁκεανὸς Σχίσματος

Στὴν προσπάθεια τοῦ κόσμου γιὰ εἰρήνευσι, οἱ λεγόμενοι Χριστιανοὶ παίζουν σημαντικὸ ρόλο. Μὲ τὸ σύνθημα «Χριστιανοὶ ἐνωθήτε» ξεκινοῦν γιὰ τὸ παζάρι ὅπου θὰ πουληθῆ ἡ ἀλήθεια.

Κάποτε οἱ Χριστιανοὶ πίστευαν καὶ ἦταν ἔτοιμοι νὰ πεθάνουν γιὰ τὴν πίστι τους. Σήμερα ὁ ζῆλος τους γιὰ τὴν ἀλήθεια ἔχει κρυώσει. Ἄρχισαν νὰ τὴν θεωροῦν σὰν κάτι τὸ δευτερεύον. Βρίσκουν τὶς διαφορὰς τῶν «Ἐκκλησιῶν» (γιὰ τὶς ὁποῖες ἄλλοτε πρόθυμα θυσιαζόντουσαν οἱ μάρτυρες, ἐξωρίζοντο οἱ Πατέρες, ἀκρωτηριάζονταν οἱ πιστοὶ) σὰν ἀσήμαντες καὶ ἀνάξιες λόγου.

Οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπ' αὐτοὺς εἶναι κατὰ τὸ πλεῖστον νοσηροὶ καὶ ἀδιόρθωτοι αἰσθηματῆται, ποὺ νομίζουν ὅτι ἡ θρησκεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι μία δεοντολογία ποὺ ἀφορᾷ στὶς ἀνθρώπινες σχέσεις. Οἱ ἄλλοι ἐπιδιώκουν πολιτικούς σκοποὺς καὶ σκοτεινὰ συμφέροντα. Ὅλοι μαζὶ κτίζουν τὴν πόλι τοῦ ἀντιχριστοῦ. Ζητοῦν τὴν ἐνωσι ἀδιαφορώντας γιὰ τὴν ἀλήθεια, ζητοῦν τὸ ἐξωτερικὸ πλησίασμα ἀδιαφορώντας γιὰ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ διάστασι, ζητοῦν τὸ γράμμα ἀδιαφορώντας γιὰ τὸ πνεῦμα.

Πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἐλπίζουν ὅτι αὐτὸ ποὺ ἀπέτυχε τοὺς πρώτους αἰῶνες τοῦ σχίσματος, θὰ ἐπιτευχθῆ τώρα ποὺ οἱ δογματικὲς διαφορὰς καὶ οἱ διαφορὰς τῆς νοοτροπίας ἔγιναν, μὲ τὸ πέρασμα τῶν αἰῶνων, ἀπὸ χάσματα ὠκεανοί;

### Ἡ Ἐνωσι τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν Εἶναι ὁ Καλύτερος Τρόπος Ἐξουδετερώσεως τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ

Πῶς ὅμως θὰ διδαχθοῦν οἱ Δυτικοὶ ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἡ Μία καὶ Ἀληθινὴ ὅταν τὴν βλέπουν νὰ συναναστρέφεται μὲ τὶς ψεύτικες «Ἐκκλησίες» σὰν ἴσος πρὸς ἴσον; Δὲν θὰ νομίσουν

μάλλον έτσι πώς ή Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι σάν καί τῖς ἄλλες, σχετική καί μερική;

Κολακεύουν μόνον τοὺς Ὁρθοδόξους, καί αὐτὸ γιὰ νὰ τοὺς προσελκύσουν πρὸς τὸ μέρος τους. Ἄν εἶχαν πραγματική νοσταλγία γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία καί ἤθελαν νὰ τὴν γνωρίσουν, δὲν θὰ εἶχαν ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὰ συμβούλια καί τῖς συνεδριάσεις. Θὰ πήγαιναν νὰ πιοῦν ἀπὸ τῖς πηγές της, ἀπὸ τοὺς Πατέρας καί τοὺς ἁγίους της.

Ἀλλὰ γιὰτί συγκινοῦνται τόσο εὐκόλα οἱ Χριστιανοί μας ἀπὸ τὰ κηρύγματα περὶ ἐνώσεως τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν καί ἀντὶ νὰ γεμίζουν μὲ ζήλο γιὰ τὴν μετάγγισι τῆς ἀληθείας σ' αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμον ποὺ τόσο πολὺ τὴν στερήθηκε, πιπιλίζουν συνεχῶς τὴν καραμέλα τῆς εἰρήνης, ζυγίζοντας νὰ δοῦν ἂν εἶναι περισσότερα αὐτὰ ποῦ χωρίζουν ἢ αὐτὰ ποῦ ἐνώνουν τοὺς Χριστιανούς;

Γιὰτί στερηθήκαν οἱ ἴδιοι τὴν γνώσι τῆς ἀλήθειας. Μέλη οἱ περισσότεροι κοινωνικο-χριστιανικῶν ὀργανώσεων καί ἀδελφοτήτων, κατηχήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὰ νεανικὰ τους χρόνια σὲ ἓνα ἠθικο-φιλοσοφικὸ σύστημα μὲ ἐπίχρισμα χριστιανικὸ, ποὺ ἄφηνε νὰ ἐννοηθῇ ὅτι σκοπὸς τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ εἶναι νὰ ἐπιτύχη τὴν εἰρηνική καί ἀγαπημένη συμβίωσι μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἡ αἰωνιότης καί ἡ θεωρία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἦταν πράγματα τόσο μακρινὰ γιὰ τοὺς Χριστιανούς αὐτοὺς καί συχνὰ τόσο ἀδιάφορα. Οἱ περισσότεροι, ὄντες ἐξωστρεφεῖς, ἄνθρωποι τῆς δράσεως, ἦλθαν στὸν Χριστιανισμὸ γιὰ νὰ βροῦν ἓναν ὀργανωμένον καί καθωδηγημένον *modus vivendi* (συμβιβασμός), ἓναν τρόπο γιὰ νὰ ζήσουν ὡς καλοὶ καί τίμιοι πολῖται ἐπάνω σὲ τούτη τὴ γῆ. Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι γιὰ τοὺς τέτοιους ἀνθρώπους ὁ Μέγας Ὑπερέτης τῶν προσωπικῶν συμφερόντων τους, ἡ δὲ αἰώνιος ζωὴ μιὰ καλὴ ἀλλὰ εὐτυχῶς μακρινὴ ἐλπίς ἀποκαταστάσεως.

Ἀλλὰ ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος γιὰ νὰ σώσῃ τὸν ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κείμενον κόσμον, ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ σώσῃ τοὺς δικούς του ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς τραβήξῃ ἀπὸ τὴν παράταξι τοῦ πονηροῦ, νὰ τοὺς ἐνώσῃ μαζί του καί νὰ τοὺς θεώσῃ κατὰ χάριν, καί μαζί μ' αὐτοὺς νὰ σώσῃ ὁλόκληρο τὴν στενάζουσα κτίσι. Ὁ κόσμος βαδίζει τὸν δρόμο τοῦ θανάτου. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ἡ παράταξι τοῦ

ἄρχοντος τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, ἡ παράταξις τοῦ ἐχθροῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ. «Οὐ περὶ τοῦ κόσμου ἐρωτῶ, ἀλλὰ περὶ ὧν δέδωκάς μοι». (Ἰωάν. 17:9).

Αὐτοὶ ὅμως ἐρωτοῦν περὶ τοῦ κόσμου, καί θυσιάζουν, (γιὰ τὸ χατίρι τῆς διαβολικῆς αὐτῆς παρατάξεως ποὺ ποτὲ δὲν πρόκειται νὰ σωθῇ) τὰ διαμάντια τῆς χριστιανικῆς πίστεως καί βιοτῆς. Γιὰτί περὶ αὐτοῦ πρόκειται. Δὲν τὴν ζητάει ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν λεγόμενη «ἔνωσι τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν», ἀλλὰ ὁ κόσμος. **Δὲν ζητάει ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν ἐνωσι τῆς ψευτιάς μὲ τὴν ἀλήθεια, ἀλλὰ ὁ κόσμος, ποὺ ζητάει νὰ νοθεύσῃ τὴν ἀλήθεια, νὰ τὴν κἀνῃ σχετικὴ καί μερική.** Γι' αὐτὸ ὅταν ἡ συζήτησις ἔλθῃ γιὰ τὴν ἐνωσι «τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν», βλέπει κανεὶς νὰ τὴν ὑποστηρίζουν μὲ ἐνθουσιασμὸ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ποτὲ

ἄλλοτε δὲν ἐνδιαφέρθηκαν γιὰ τὰ τῆς θρησκείας. Ἡ ἐνωσις εἶναι ὁ καλύτερος τρόπος ἐξουδετερώσεως τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, ποὺ ἀνεκάλυψε ἡ παράταξις τοῦ διαβόλου, ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ ξεφτίσματος του καί ἡ ὑποταγὴ του στὰ θελήματα τῆς πολιτικῆς, ἡ μετατροπὴ του σὲ ὑπηρετὴ τῶν συμφερόντων τοῦ κόσμου.

Μὲ τὴν ἐνωσι ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς ἴσως νὰ ἀποκτήσῃ μεγαλύτερη κοσμικὴ ἰσχύ, θὰ χάσῃ ὅμως ὅλη τὴν πνευματικὴ του δύναμι, αὐτὴν ἀκριβῶς ποὺ ἐνοχλεῖ τὸν κόσμον. Μήπως δὲν ἔγινε ἤδη ἀκριβῶς αὐτὸ μέσα στὴν Ρωμαιοκαθολικὴ «Ἐκκλησία»; Ἡ δίψα τῶν Παπικῶν γιὰ κοσμικὴ ἰσχύ τοὺς ἔκανε νὰ κατεβοῦν

στὸν στίβο τῶν πολιτικῶν ἐλιγμῶν, ἀπ' ὅπου βγήκαν ὑπηρετὰι τῶν μεγάλων πολιτικῶν ρευμάτων.

### Ἡ Μαρτυρία τοῦ Μακρυγιάννη

Τῖς πρώτες ἐνωτικὲς τάσεις τῶν Βυζαντινῶν ἀρχόντων μὲ τὴν Ρωμαϊκὴ πλάνη ἀνέκοψε, εὐτυχῶς, ἡ στάσις τοῦ λαοῦ καί ἡ ὑποδούλωσις τοῦ Βυζαντίου στὸν Τούρκου. Μόλις ὅμως τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ Ἔθνος βρήκε τὴν ἐλευθερία του, ὁ παλαιὸς πειρασμὸς ξανακτύπησε τὴν πόρτα του.

Οἱ γνήσιοι Ἕλληνες, ἄνθρωποι τοῦ λαοῦ καί τῶν παραδόσεων, ἀντιστάθηκαν στὴν ἀρχὴ στὸ ρεῦμα τοῦ ἐξευρωπαϊσμοῦ. Ἦσαν ὅμως ἀγράμματοι καί παρ' ὅλον ὅτι αὐτοὶ εἶχαν δώσει τὸ αἷμα τους γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία αὐτῆς τῆς χώρας, γρήγορα παραγκωνίστηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς ξενόφερτους γραμματισμένους, ποὺ μαζί μὲ τὴν οἴσι





πὸ δίνει ἡ ἡμιμάθεια, εἶχαν καὶ τὴν δύναμι τῆς Αὐλῆς τοῦ Ὁθωνος.

«*Αὐτῆνοι κατάντησαν τὴν πατρίδα καὶ τὴν θρησκείαν καὶ κλονίζεται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄθρησκους. Εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τῆς Τουρκίας μίαν πέτρα δὲν πείραζαν ἀπὸ τὰ παλιοκκλήσια, καὶ αὐτῆνοι οἱ ἀπατεῶνες σύνδεσαν τὰ συμφέροντά τους μὲ τοὺς μολεμένους Φαναριῶτες καὶ ἄλλους τοιούτους, ὁποῦ ἦταν εἰς τὴν Εὐρώπη μόλεμα, καὶ μᾶς χάλασαν τὰ μοναστήρια καὶ τὶς ἐκκλησίες μας—μαγαρίζουν μέσα, καὶ ἄλλες ἔγιναν ἀχούρια. Ἀπὸ τοὺς τοιούτους γερωμένους πολλοὺς πάθαμεν αὐτά, καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς τοιούτους λαϊκούς, στρατιωτικοὺς καὶ πολιτικοὺς, ἀφοῦ χύσαμεν ποταμοὺς αἵματα, κιντυνεύομεν νὰ χάσωμεν καὶ τὴν πατρίδα μας καὶ τὴν θρησκεία μας».* (Μακρυγιάννη: Ἀπομνημονεύματα, σελ. 398).

Αὐτοὶ οἱ ἡμιμαθεῖς μορφωμένοι περιφρόνησαν τὸν Ἑλληνικὸ λαὸ μὲ τὸ πάθος κάθε πεμπτοφαλαγγίτου. Περιφρόνησαν τὴν γλώσσα του, τὰ ἦθη καὶ τὰ ἔθιμά του, τὴν νοοτροπία του. Ἔβαλαν ὅλα τους τὰ δυνατὰ νὰ νοθεύσουν τὴν ἀλήθεια τῆς πίστεώς του, νὰ ἀλλοιώσουν τὶς παραδόσεις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας του, νὰ μπολιάσουν τὸ κοσμικὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸν ὀρθολογισμὸ ἐπάνω στὸ ἀγιασμένο δέντρο τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, πὸν τόσους αἰῶνες εἶχε μείνει ἀμόλυντο κάτω ἀπ' τὸν βάρβαρο κατακτητῆ. Γιὰ νὰ κτυπήσουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία κατάκαρδα, κτύπησαν τὰ μοναστήρια της. Ἄλλα ἔκλεισαν, ἄλλων τὴν περιουσία ἐστέρησαν, σὲ ἄλλα ἔστειλαν ἡγουμένους «προοδευτικούς» οἱ ὁποῖοι τὰ διέλυσαν εὐκολώτερα ἀπὸ κάθε δίστομο κρατικὴ μάχαιρα.

### **Ἐπέκταση τῆς Διαφθορᾶς: Ἡ Πίστη τοῦ Ἐργαστηρίου**

**Ἡ** Βυζαντινὴ μουσικὴ ἄρχισε νὰ μεταποιῆται πρὸς τὸ εὐρωπαϊκώτερο γιὰ νὰ μεταπέση στὴν θεατρικὴ τετραφωνία. Οἱ εἰκόνες ἄρχισαν νὰ φαίνονται πολλὴ ἀυστηρὲς καὶ ἄσχημες στὰ μάτια τῶν γυναικαριῶν τῶν «ἀνωτέρων» τάξεων, πὸν ζητοῦσαν «γλυκεῖς Ἰησοῦς» γεμάτους συγκατάβασι γιὰ τὶς ἀνομίες τους καὶ ἀνίκανους νὰ προκαλοῦν τὸ δέος καὶ τὸν σεβασμὸ. Τὰ γένεια καὶ τὰ μαλλιά τῶν ἱερωμένων ἄρχισαν νὰ ἐνοχλοῦν, καὶ αὐτοί, ἀνταποκρινόμενοι στὶς ἀπαιτήσεις τοῦ σύγχρονου κοινοῦ, ἄρχισαν νὰ καλλωπίζονται. Οἱ θεολόγοι καὶ οἱ μέλλοντες ἱερεῖς καὶ ἀρχιερεῖς δὲν ἐκκολάπτοντο μέσα στοὺς κόλπους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς φυσικῆς τους μητέρας, ἀλλὰ μέσα στοὺς κόλπους ἑνὸς κρατικοῦ Πανεπιστημίου, γεμάτου ἀπὸ ὀρθολογιστικὴ δυσωδία καὶ πνευματικὴ ρηχότητα, χωρὶς καμμία δυνατότητα νὰ γευθοῦν στὴν πράξι τὴν μυστικὴ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ τῆς ἀγιότητος, πὸν μόνη ἀναδεικνύει πραγματικούς θεολόγους. Φύτρωσαν ἔτσι σὰν ζιζάνια μέσα στὴν

Ἐκκλησία θεολόγοι πὸν εἶχαν τὰ μυαλὰ γεμισμένα μὲ πολλὰς φιλοσοφικὰς θεωρίες προτεσταντικῆς ἢ ρωμαϊκῆς προελεύσεως, ἀλλὰ τὶς καρδιὰς κενὰς ἀπὸ τὸ βίωμα τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ ἦταν ἀνίκανοι νὰ δοῦν τὸ χάσμα πὸν χωρίζει τὴν Ἀνατολικὴ ἀπὸ τὶς Δυτικὰς «Ἐκκλησίες». Τὸ θεωροῦσαν ζήτημα δογματικῶν διατυπώσεων, ἀλλὰ ὄχι ζήτημα ζωῆς καὶ οὐσίας. Γι' αὐτοὺς ἢ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ ἦταν σειρὰ συναισθηματικῶν καταστάσεων καὶ ἠθικῶν πράξεων. Τὸ ἴδιο ὅμως εἶναι ἢ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ καὶ γιὰ τοὺς Δυτικούς. Ἡ θεωρία τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸ βίωμα τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῆς ἐπιφοιτήσεως τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἢ κατοίκησις δηλαδὴ τῆς ἀληθείας μέσα στὴν καρδιά τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τοὺς ἦταν ἄγνωστη. Αὐτοὶ ὅταν μιλοῦν γιὰ ἀλήθεια ἐννοοῦν τὸ ξηρὸ δόγμα. Τὸ δόγμα ὅμως, τόσο γι' αὐτοὺς ὅσο καὶ γιὰ τοὺς Δυτικούς, ἦταν ἕνας ξεχωριστὸς κόσμος ἐγκεφαλικῶν διατυπώσεων, ἀρκετὰ ἐνοχλητικὸς, τὴν ἀξία τοῦ ὁποῖου, ὕστερα ἀπ' αὐτὴν τὴν διάσπασι τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τῆς πίστεως, ἦταν ἀδύνατον νὰ ἐκτιμήσουν.

Τὰ θεμέλια λοιπὸν ἐπάνω στὰ ὁποῖα θὰ ἔκτιζαν γιὰ νὰ ὑπερασπισθοῦν τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία τους, ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ πιὸ καλοπροαίρετοι ἀπὸ τοὺς θεολόγους μας, ἦταν σαθρότατα. Εἶναι φοβερό, ὅταν ἀναλογισθῆ κανεῖς, ὅτι ἐπάνω σ' αὐτὰ τὰ σαθρὰ θεμέλια ἔχει κτισθῆ ὀλόκληρη ἢ σύγχρονη Ἑλληνικὴ θρησκευτικότης. Γιατί, ἐνῶ κάποτε ἢ θρησκευτικότης τοῦ λαοῦ ἐπήγαξε ἀπὸ τὶς Μονὰς καὶ αὐτὲς εἶχε γιὰ πνευματικὸ ἀποκούμπι καὶ καθοδήγησι, στὸ Ἑλληνικὸ βασίλειο ἢ θρησκευτικότης θεμελιώθηκε ἐπάνω στὸν θεολόγο πὸν περιγράψαμε, ἱερωμένο ἢ λαϊκό.

Ὁ θεολόγος αὐτός, μιμούμενος τὰ δυτικὰ πρότυπα, ὠργάνωσε ἀδελφότητες καὶ χριστιανικὰς ἐνώσεις καὶ πῆρε στὰ χέρια του τὸ κήρυγμα καὶ τὴν κατήχησι. Καὶ ἐνῶ πρὶν ἢ θρησκευτικότης ἑνὸς τόπου εἶχε σὰν κέντρο τῆς τῶν μοναστηρίων τῆς περιοχῆς καὶ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ δὲν διέφερε σὲ τίποτε ὁ Χριστιανὸς τοῦ Α' τόπου ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστιανὸ τοῦ Β' τόπου, γιὰτὶ ὅλοι ἦταν τὸ ἴδιο παιδιὰ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, τώρα ὁ θεολόγος ὠργάνωσε τὴν φατρία, καὶ ἔτσι σ' ἕναν καὶ τὸν αὐτὸ τόπο ὑπάρχουν Χριστιανοὶ τῆς Α' φατρίας καὶ Χριστιανοὶ τῆς Β' φατρίας, πάντοτε ἀντίδικοι καὶ ὑποβλεπόμενοι, χωρισμένο—χωρὶς οἱ ἴδιοι νὰ καταλαβαίνουν ποιὲς εἶναι οἱ διαφορὲς τους.

Καὶ ὅμως, μ' ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ μίση καὶ τὰ μεταξὺ των σχίσματα, οἱ φατρίες εἶναι σύμφωνες πὸς ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τοὺς Δυτικούς «περισσότερα εἶναι ἐκεῖνα πὸν μᾶς ἐνώνουν παρὰ ἐκεῖνα πὸν μᾶς χωρίζουν» καὶ «πρέπει νὰ βλέπουμε αὐτὰ πὸν μᾶς ἐνώνουν καὶ νὰ παραβλέπουμε αὐτὰ πὸν μᾶς χωρίζουν». Βλέπουν

δηλαδή πιδ εύκολη τήν ένωση και τήν άγάπη με τους Δυτικούς «άδελφούς» τους πού ούτε τους είδαν ούτε τους γνώρισαν ποτέ, παρὰ με τους Όρθοδόξους συμπολίτες και γείτονες, πού και βλέπουν καθημερινώς και γνωρίζουν. Άλλά είπαμε: οί άνθρωποι σήμερα κόπτονται για τήν άγάπη του ανθρώπου, για τήν άφρημένη άγάπη τής ανθρωπότητας, τήν στιγμή πού είναι άνίκανοι να αγαπήσουν τον πλησίον τους.

### Τι Ένωση Ζητάει ο Χριστός;

Άλλά ως καταλάβουν όσοι με τόση έλαφρότητα μιλούν για ένωση των Έκκλησιών, πως η ένότης τής Έκκλησίας είναι δώρον μυστικόν τής Θείας Παρουσίας. Δέν είναι κάτι πού αποφασίζεται σε συνέδρια, αλλά κάτι πού υπάρχει ή δέν υπάρχει. Καμμία απόφασις των ανθρώπων δέν μπορεί να έξαναγκάση τον Θεό.

Άσφαλώς τύποις ή ένωσις μπορεί να γίνη και να αρχίσουν όλοι να δηλώνουν, Προτεστάνται, Καθολικοί και Όρθόδοξοι, πώς τώρα πιδ είμαστε μιὰ Έκκλησία και να μνημονεύουμε έμεις τον Πάπα Ρώμης και ο Πάπας Ρώμης τον Πατριάρχη Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Έάν συμφωνήσουν όλοι επάνω σε ένα «ελάχιστο άληθείας», επάνω σε ένα «πιστεύω» άπλουστευμένο, και κανονισθούν και μερικά άλλα ζητήματα, μπορεί να γίνη ή ένωσις. Θα γίνη ένα σύστημα νομικώς και τυπικώς ισχύον, ένα σύστημα όμως πού δέν θα έχη καμμία σχέση με τήν Έκκλησία του Χριστού, έστω και αν όλα τα έξωτερικά φαινόμενα τδ κάνουν να μοιάζη με τήν Έκκλησία. Ό «Θεός ού μυκτηρίζεται». Όταν δέν υπάρχουν στους ανθρώπους οί προϋποθέσεις τής Παρουσίας Του, ο Θεός δέν έρχεται στους ανθρώπους.

Η Έκκλησία του Χριστού δέν ήταν ποτέ ένα σύστημα ανθρώπινο. Η Έκκλησία γεννήθηκε, δέν κατασκευάσθηκε. Οί συζητήσεις των ανθρώπων μπορούν να κατασκευάσουν κάτι και να του δώσουν τδ όνομα «Έκκλησία». Αυτό όμως τδ κατασκευάσμα θα είναι κάτι χωρίς ζωή. Η ζωντανή Έκκλησία δέν θα έχη καμμία σχέση μ' αυτό.

### Δέν Χάθηκε Κάθε Έλπίδα

Εύτυχώς, μέχρι σήμερα, όλες οί παρεκκλίσεις από τήν Παράδοσι πού περιγράψαμε δέν έχουν αποκόψει τις Όρθόδοξες Έκκλησίες από τήν ρίζα τους. Τδ δέντρο παραμένει ζωντανό και άκμαίο, παρ' όλα τα φτιασίδια πού του έχουν προσθέσει. Οί Όρθόδοξες Έκκλησίες δέν έχουν ξεραθί, όπως έγινε με τις «Έκκλησίες» τής Δύσεως. Λίγο αν τινάξης τή σκόνη πού έρριξε τδ κοσμικό πνεύμα επάνω τους θα βρής τδ δροσερά φύλλα τής γνήσιας Παραδόσεως. Η Παράδοσις δέν έπαψε ποτέ να ζή και να ισχύη μέσα στον περίβολο τής Όρθοδοξίας.

Υπάρχουν ακόμη μοναχοί πού ζούν τον Όρθόδοξο Μοναχισμό. Υπάρχουν ακόμη γνήσιοι θεολόγοι πού

δέν έχουν νοθεύσει τήν άλήθεια, αλλά τήν κρατούν λαμπερή και όλοκάθαρη, μακριά από κάθε ξένη πρόσμιξι. Υπάρχουν ακόμη Βυζαντινοί ψαλλάδες και γνήσιοι συνεχιστάι τής Όρθοδόξου είκονογραφικής παραδόσεως. Υπάρχουν ακόμη ιερείς σαν τους παλιούς, άφοσιωμένοι στο ιερό τους λειτούργημα, πού ή συνεχής έπαφή τους με τον Θεό, δέν τους αφήνει τδ στενοχωρηθούν από τὰ μακριά γένεια και τὰ μαύρα ράσα, αλλά τὰ κάνει να άκτινοβολούν άγιότητα. Υπάρχει ακόμη άπλως λαός πού αξιώνεται να δη θαύματα φοβερά.

Η γνήσια Παραδοσις λοιπόν—ή ζωή, τὰ βιώματα και ή διδασκαλία των Άποστόλων και των άγιων Πατέρων όλων των εποχών, τὰ ίχνη αυτά των βημάτων του Άγίου Πνεύματος μέσα στις καρδιές των Χριστιανών—υπάρχει και συνεχίζεται, ζωντανή ανάμεσα σε ζωντανούς, χωρίς καμμία διακοπή από τους Άποστολικούς χρόνους. Υπάρχει μιὰ συνεχής άρμονία σ' όλες τις εκδηλώσεις των Όρθοδόξων όλων των εποχών μέχρι σήμερα, γραπτες και άγραφες, και αυτός είναι ο χρυσός κανών επάνω στον όποιον πρέπει ο καθένας να μετράη τις σκέψεις και τὰ έργα του για να βλέπη αν βρίσκεται μέσα ή έξω από τον χώρο τής Όρθοδοξίας. Μπορεί τὰ φαινόμενα να δίνουν τήν εντύπωσι ότι έχη χαλάσει, ότι έχη διακοπή ή συνέχεια, όμως λίγο αν σκάψη κανείς, τήν βλέπει να αναβλύζει και να δροσίζει αυτούς πού τήν άποζητούν...



Τρία τα τελειωτικά μέσα δια των όποιων ο άνθρωπος γίνεται τέλειος Χριστιανός και είκων Θεού: (1) **Μόρφωσις του νοϋ**. Δια τής εύσεβούς διδασκαλίας, δια τής προσοχής και χαλινώσεως του νοϋ από κακας και πονηρας σκέψεις, δια τής καλής συναναστροφής και δια τής μνήμης του θανάτου. (2) **Μόρφωσις τής καρδιάς**. Δια τής αναγνώσεως θρησκευτικών και ήθικων βιβλίων, δια τής ψαλμωδίας εκκλησιαστικών και σεμνοθητικοθρησκευτικών ασμάτων και ποιημάτων, και εν γένει φυλάττοντας τήν καρδιάν καθαρὰν από αισχροους λογισμούς, βοώντας ως ο Δαυιδ προς τον Θεον «*καρδιάν καθαρὰν κτίσον εν έμοι ο Θεός*» έχοντας υπ' όψιν τον Μακαρισμον «*Μακάριοι οί καθαροί τή καρδιάν*». (3) **Βούλησις άγαθή**. Δια τής άγαθής βουλήσεως (θελήσεως) να σκεπτώμεθα και εκτελώμεν παν άγαθον προς ωφέλειαν ήμων αυτών και του πλησίον. Μη αφήνοντες τον νοϋν ήμων να περιφέρηται εις μάταια και ψυχοβλαβή πράγματα.

**Μοναχός Σάββας Φιλοθείτης (+1970)**

## Τότε οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, Σήμερα οἱ Ἕλληνες... «Ἀπιστία νοσήσαντες, θεϊκῆς ἐξέπεσον χάριτος...»

Γράφει ὁ Ἡλιάδης Σάββας, δάσκαλος.

*«Νῦν εἰς σημεῖον τοῖς πᾶσιν, ἐμφανῶς αἰ  
γλῶσσαι γεγόνασιν Ἰουδαῖοι γάρ, ἐξ ὧν κατὰ  
σάρκα Χριστός, ἀπιστία νοσήσαντες, θεϊκῆς  
ἐξέπεσον χάριτος, καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ φωτὸς οἱ ἐξ  
ἐθνῶν ἠξιώθημεν, στηριχθέντες τοῖς λόγοις τῶν  
Μαθητῶν, φθεγγομένων τὴν δόξαν τοῦ εὐεργέτου  
τῶν ὄλων Θεοῦ, μεθ' ὧν τὰς καρδίας σὺν τοῖς γόνασι  
κλίναντες, ἐν πίστει προσκυνήσωμεν, τῷ ἁγίῳ  
Πνεύματι στηριχθέντες, Σωτῆρι τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν.»*

[Ἰδιόμελο τῶν ἀποστίχων τοῦ Ἑσπερινοῦ  
τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος]

† † †

Τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι δὲν θέλησαν νὰ δεχτοῦν «*πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν*», ποὺ ἀποκαλύφθηκε διὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος στοὺς Ἀποστόλους, παρέμειναν στὴν ἀπιστία καὶ ἐξέπεσαν τῆς Θείας Χάριτος. Ἔτσι, ἀρρώστησαν βαρῶς ἀπὸ τὴν ἀσθένεια αὐτή. Διότι εἶναι βαρῶς ψυχοσωματικὴ ἀσθένεια ἡ ἀπιστία. Εἶναι ἀσθένεια ψυχοπαθολογική.

Ἀφορὰ ἄμεσα ἡ στάση αὐτὴ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ ἐμᾶς, τοὺς Ἕλληνες Ὁρθόδοξους τοῦ εἰκοστοῦ πρώτου αἰώνα, καθὼς ἀπιστία δὲν εἶναι μόνον ἡ ἔχθρα πρὸς τὸ Χριστὸ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἀδιαφορία πρὸς τὸ πρόσωπό Του καὶ τὴ δυνατότητα σωτηρίας διὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας Του. Καὶ αὐτὸ συμβαίνει κυρίως μὲ τοὺς Ἕλληνες σήμερα. Διότι παρόλο ποὺ γιὰ αἰῶνες πολλοὺς «*τοῦ θεοῦ φωτὸς οἱ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἠξιώθημεν, στηριχθέντες τοῖς λόγοις τῶν Μαθητῶν*», τώρα ἀκολουθοῦμε τὰ ἴχνη τῶν Ἰουδαίων. Βάλλεται καὶ προσβάλλεται ἡ Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἡ πίστη Του, ὑβρίζονται τὰ Θεῖα, καὶ ὁ Ἕλληνας, μὲ τὴ στάση του ὁμολογεῖ ὅτι δὲν συμβαίνει καὶ τίποτε τὸ τραγικόν. Μὲ τὴν ἀναδιάρταξη καὶ πλήρη ἀνατροπὴ τῶν ἀξιῶν, ὅλα αὐτὰ φαίνονται πῶς δὲν τὸν ἀγγίζουν.

Διὰ τῆς προσωπικῆς του ἐπιλογῆς, ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἀρνεῖται τὴν συνέργεια τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἀρνεῖται τὴν παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴ ζωὴ του καὶ ἐμπιστεύεται τὸν ἑαυτό του. Ἔτσι, μένει μόνος μὲ τὰ πάθη του, μὲ τὸν ἐγωισμό καὶ τὴν ὑπερηφάνειά του, μὲ τὸν σκοτεινὸ πλεόν ἑαυτό του, προσβλέποντας στὰ γήινα καὶ πρόσκαιρα καὶ μένοντας σὲ παρὰ φύση κατάσταση.

Αὐτὴ ἡ «μοναξιά» ὁμως, δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἴδια μὲ τὴ μοναξιά ποὺ βιώνει μὲ τὴν ἀπουσία τῶν ἄλλων προσώπων. Πάσχει μοναξιά ὀντολογικοῦ περιεχομένου ὁ ἄπιστος, ποὺ πλήττει τὰ τριῖσθατα τῆς ὑπαρξῆς καὶ τὰ μετατρέπει σὲ κόλαση. Κι αὐτὴν τὴν κόλαση τὴν ἀποπνέει στὸ περιβάλλον ποὺ ζεῖ. Τὴν ἐκφράζει μὲ φόβο, μὲ ἄγχος, μὲ ἀγωνία, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ μῖσος, μὲ ἐπιθετικότητα ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ μὲ ὑποκριτικὴ ἀγάπη, ζητώντας νὰ τὴν μοιραστεῖ μὲ

τοὺς ἄλλους, καθὼς σὰν φωτιὰ τοῦ καίει τὴν καρδιά. Γιὰ νὰ μὴν ὑποφέρει μόνος. Νὰ πάρει μαζί του ὅσους περισσότερους μπορεῖ

Αὐτὰ ἐνεργοῦν σήμερα οἱ ἀγαπολόγοι, οἱ εἰρηνολόγοι, οἱ ὑποκριτὲς τοῦ κρατούντος φρονήματος τῆς ἄρνησης. Εἶναι περισσότερο ἀκραῖοι καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς πλεόν ἀκραίους. Οἱ χειρότεροι δικτάτορες καὶ τύραννοι, ἀσχετῶς μὲ τὸ πῶς αὐτοαποκαλοῦνται καὶ αὐτοχαρακτηρίζονται. Ναί, διότι γίνονται θηρία, ὅταν ἀκοῦνε γιὰ πίστη καὶ Χριστό. Δὲν τὰ ἀνέχονται!

Θέλοντας λοιπὸν ὁ ἄπιστος ἄνθρωπος νὰ ἀναπληρώσει καὶ νὰ καλύψει τὴν ἀπουσία τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ καὶ Πατέρα, ἀναζητᾷ νὰ ἀκουμπήσει σὲ μύθους, σὲ παραμύθια γιὰ παρηγοριά. Στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἀναφέρονται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀποστόλους Παῦλο καὶ Πέτρο τριῶν εἰδῶν τέτοιοι μῦθοι: Οἱ γραῶδεις, οἱ βέβηλοι καὶ οἱ σεσοφισμένοι.

Στὴν Α΄ πρὸς Τιμόθεον ἐπιστολὴ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος γράφει: «*Τοὺς δὲ βεβήλους καὶ γραῶδεις μύθους παραιτοῦ, γύμναζε δὲ σεαυτὸν πρὸς εὐσέβειαν*». (Α΄ Τιμ. 4:7). Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος χάσει τὴν πίστη του, χάνει ἅμα καὶ τὴν εὐσέβειά του πρὸς τὰ ἅγια. Βρίθκει ἢ ἐποχὴ μας ἀπὸ μύθους. Προσφέρονται μύρια ὅσα ἐλκυστικὰ παραμύθια, γιὰ νὰ «*πληρωθεῖ*» τὸ κενόν.

Πρῶτα τοὺς βέβηλους μύθους. Τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς καὶ βλάσφημους, τοὺς ὑποτιμητικὸς καὶ ἀκάθαρτους, «*ὡς ἀναξίους ὑγιοῦς ἀκοῆς καὶ καθαρῶς ὄντας*» (Ζιγαβηνός). Τοὺς προσβλητικὸς καὶ ὑβριστικὸς γιὰ τὴν Πίστη καὶ τὰ Θεῖα. Αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἀπαξιῶνουν τὰ Μυστήρια τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, δείχνουν ἀσέβεια στὸ χῶρο τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ σὲ κάθε ἱερὸ χῶρο. Ἀπαξιῶνουν τὸν κλῆρο. Ἄλλοιώνουν τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Παράδοση, μὲ ἐπεισαγωγὴ ξένων καὶ ρυπαρῶν στοιχείων, «*ἀνάρμοστων*» στὴν ψυχοσύνθεση καὶ τὸ «*ἦθος*» τοῦ Ῥωμοῦ, προερχόμενων ἀπὸ τὸν «*πολιτισμένο κόσμον*».

Βέβηλοι μῦθοι εἶναι καὶ ἡ διοργάνωση ἀσεβῶν ἐκδηλώσεων, ποὺ προσβάλλουν τὴ σεμνότητα, τὸ ἦθος καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ. Τὰ «*αἰσχροὺν ἐστὶν καὶ λέγειν*» καλλιτεχνικὰ δημιουργήματα διαφόρων θεωρούμενων καλλιτεχνῶν ἀπὸ τὸν σημερινὸ ἐκπεσόντα ἄθεο κόσμον. Πολιτιστικὲς ἐκδηλώσεις εἰδωλολατρικῆς προέλευσης, καρνάβαλος, Santa Claus κ.λ.π. καὶ οἰουδήποτε ἄλλου, μὴ συνεργοῦντος στὴν εὐσέβεια.

Ἐπίσης τοὺς γραῶδεις μύθους. Ἱστορίες, θὰ λέγαμε, ποὺ ἔλεγαν κάποτε οἱ γριές, γιὰ νὰ τρομάξουν ἢ νὰ ἐντυπωσιάσουν τὰ μικρὰ παιδιά. Δεισιδαίμονες πράξεις καὶ δεισιδαίμονες ἱστορίες, χωρὶς ἔρεισμα πνευματικόν, χωρὶς βάση λογικὴ καὶ φυσικὰ χωρὶς πνευματικὸ περιεχόμενον, ὅπως τὰ αἰσχροὺ καὶ εὐτράπελα ἀνέκδοτα, ποὺ προσβάλλουν τὴ νοημοσύνη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τὸ φλιντζάνι, οἱ χαρτορίχτρες, οἱ ἀστρολόγοι καὶ οἱ κάθε εἶδους ἀγυρτίες. Λόγια

του άερα, που άποκοιμίζουν τη συνείδηση και την άποχαυνώνουν. «Γραυσι φιλομύθοις προσήκοντες» (Ζιγαβηνός). «Γραιδίων λεληρηκότων ρήματα» (Οικουμενιος). «Μύθους δια τας παραποιήσεις η δια τδ άκαιρον» (Χρυσόστομος). (Π. Τρεμπέλα, Ύπομνήματα εις την Καινήν Διαθήκην).

Δέν άφορούν αυτες οι συμβουλες του Άποστόλου μόνο στους παραληπτες της έπιστολής του αλλά και σε μās, όπως θα δοϋμε παρακάτω. Ο άπόστολος Πέτρος, αναφέρει και τους σεσοφισμένους μύθους, τα «ισχυρότερα όπλα της άπιστίας της εποχής μας». «Οϋ γάρ σεσοφισμένοις μύθοις έξακολουθήσαντες έγνωρίσαμεν υμίν την του Κυρίου ημών Ίησου Χριστου δύναμιν και παρουσίαν, άλλ' έπόπται γενηθέντες της εκείνου μεγαλειότητος». (Β' Πέτρο. 1:16).

Σεσοφισμένοι είναι οι μύθοι που παρουσιάζονται με πονηρία, με τη μάσκα του έπιστημονισμού. Του προσανατολισμένου στις θεωρίες του υλισμου και της έξελίξεως, αλλά και λοιπών παρόμοιων αναφυόμενων κατά καιρους ψευδαλαζδώνων θεωριών.

Καθως η έπιστήμη σήμερα έχει προχωρήσει και έχει κάνει μεγάλα και έπιτυχή άλματα σε όλους τους τομείς, προήχθη σε θεότητα, προς αντικατάσταση του Θεου της αλήθειας. Με όπλο την άδυναμία και την όλιγοπιστία των ανθρώπων, αυτών που αναφέραμε στην αρχή, αυτών που έπέλεξαν αυτεξουσίως και αυτοπροαιρέτως την άποτίναξη του Θεου από τδ σβέρκο τους. Αυτών, που δεν είχαν οι ίδιοι έμπειρίες, αλλά δεν πίστεψαν και στις άγιοπνευματικές έμπειρίες των άγιων. Που δεν άγωνίστηκαν στον εύλογομένο στίβο της Παραδόσεως της Πίστεως, για την άπόκτησης του Άγιου Πνεύματος και δεν είχαν την ύπομονη και την έμπιστοσύνη στην άγάπη του Θεου, να παραμείνουν άγωνιζόμενοι. Έτσι άφησαν τις έλπίδες τους στις ύποσχέσεις της ματαιότητος.

Έξάλλου, ο άπόστολος Πέτρος τα λέει αυτά, διότι υπήρξε μάρτυρας άμεσης παρατήρησης και πείρας, καθότι βρέθηκε μαζί με τον Ίάκωβο και τον Ίωάννη στο όρος Θαβώρ και είδε τη δόξα του Θεου «καθως ηδύνατο», δηλαδή, όσο άντεχε η ανθρώπινη φύση του. Δεν πίστεψε σ' ό,τι έλεγαν οι άπιστοι και οι αίρετικοί αλλά στην έμπειρία. Έρμηνεύει ο Ζιγαβηνός στο: «Κύριε, καλόν έστιν ημās ωδε είναι». (Ματθ. 17:4), τδ όποιο είπε ο Πέτρος στο Χριστό κατά την Μεταμόρφωση: «Είπε (ο Πέτρος) καλόν είναι να συνεχίσουν να βρίσκονται σε εκείνο τδ όρος, ώστε αυτός και οι άλλοι που ήταν μαζί του να εύφραίνονται, θεωρούντες την Μεταμόρφωση του Ίησου και τδ πρόσωπό του, που έλαμπε σαν τον ήλιο και τα λευκά σαν τδ φως ιμάτιά του και μαζί μ' αυτά να βλέπουν συνεχώς και τον Μωυση και τον Ήλία, οι όποιοι μία φορά μόνο φάνηκαν μέσα στη δόξα του Θεου.

Να εύφραίνονται δε άκόμη με όσα θα ακούσουν να συνομιλουν οι δύο τους με τον Ίησου και ο Ίησους με αυτους». Αυτή ηταν η έμπειρία του Άποστόλου. Πως να πιστέψει σε ότιδήποτε άλλο;

Στδ κνήγι του εύδαιμονισμού και της πρόσκαιρης άπόλαυσης της ηδονής, πρότυπα καθαρά άντορθόδοξα, άντιπαραδοσιακά και άντιευαγγελικά, ο Έλληνας, ο άπόγονος των ήρώων και των άγιων μαρτύρων, δε θέλησε να ανασύρει από την παράδοσή του όπλα άμυντικά και έπιθετικά, για να άντισταθει στο κακό, τδ όποιο εισορμούσε στη ζωή του παντοιοτρόπως επί δεκαετίες. Δεν είχε τα προσόντα αλλά και τους κατάλληλους οδηγούς, να άντισταθει στους δαιμονικούς μύθους, τους βέβηλους, τους γραώδεις και τους σεσοφισμένους, που τον μάγεψαν και τον αίχμαλώτισαν.

Έτσι, μη διαθέτοντας άντιστάσεις πνευματικές, έμεινε στην πλειοψηφία του να παρακολουθει ένεος τα τεκταινόμενα από τους άσεβεις, άπλδς παρατηρητής. Μετά τον πνευματικό θάνατο, όλα έπιτρέπονται. Όλα γίνονται άποδεκτά και εύκολοχώννευτα, κι ως είναι και σκουπίδια και κόπροι. Έτσι φτάσαμε στην κατάσταση των κατοίκων των Σοδόμων και των Γομόρων και χειρότερη.

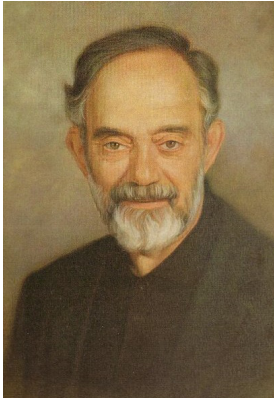
Νοσήσαμε στην άπιστία και εκπέσαμε της Θείας Χάριτος. Διαταράχτηκε όλη η ύπαρξή μας από τδ χωρισμό αυτό, με άποτέλεσμα την έκπτωση από τη Θεϊκή Χάρη και την βαριά ασθένεια της ψυχής και του σώματος. Τι βλέπουν σήμερα τα μάτια μας! Άλλά τι έχουν άκόμη να δοϋν! Τδ δε χειρότερο πάντων, πως δεν υπάρχει διάθεση, έπιθυμία έπιστροφής. Δεν υπάρχει τδ κατάλληλο συνειδός, για να αναγγείλει την έγερση και την κίνηση για θεραπεία, για μετάνοια. Διότι, άκόμη και μόνο με αυτήν, την μετάνοια, μπορούν να αλλάξουν άρδην τα πάντα και να ξεκινήσει η νέα αρχή. Και βέβαια μαζί με τα πνευματικά και τα ύπόλοιπα, που ταλανίζουν τη ζωή μας.



**Παρακαλούμε τους άναγνώστες μας να μη λησμονουν την παραβολή της έτήσιας συνδρομής προς κάλυψη των σχετικών έξόδων για την έκδοση του παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Έπίσης, όσοι έχουν την οικονομική εύχέρεια, ως συνδράμουν, αν θέλουν, στην ταπεινή προσπάθειά μας άποστέλλοντας κάτι περισσότερο από την έτήσια συνδρομή των 24 δολλαρίων προς ένίσχυση της άδελφότητος «Όσιος Ποιμήν».**

## THE CREATED, THE UNCREATED AND THE INCARNATION

By Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (+2001).



There is no similarity whatsoever between this uncreated glory of God and creation. The Fathers say that, although we do not know God's essence, we do know some, and only some, of God's energies. When they say this, however, they are not using the verb "to know" in the standard sense of the word. They are not making any analogy or contrast.

When we Orthodox say that we know the energy of God, this does not imply that our knowledge of God's energy is like our knowledge of the energy of created things. For example, our knowledge of God's glory is not like the knowledge of nature's energies (nuclear energy, thermal energy, solar energy, kinetic energy, the force of gravity, and so forth) studied by biologists, physicists, astronomers, archaeologists, and others, because when we say "we know" something in the sciences, it means that we have knowledge about some object or phenomenon that we can describe. The known object is describable. We know its description and are able to describe it. But what enables us to describe it? Its resemblance to another object that we already know. A similarity exists between the object we want to describe and something else.

Another aspect of knowledge is difference. Similarity and difference form the basis of human created knowledge. When similarity and difference are present, an object can be described. Similarity and difference make an object susceptible to description and classification according to genus, species, etc. These categories of similarity and difference are the foundations of human knowledge.

According to Aristotle's logic, the law of contradiction also applies in the sphere of human knowledge. This law states that it is impossible for a thing to be simultaneously its opposite. For example, it is impossible for an object to be totally white and totally black at the same time. It will either be white or it will be black. In a similar way, it is impossible for an object to be simultaneously big and small, heavy and light, existent and non-existent, good and bad, and so on.

The Church's Holy Fathers, however, do not observe this law of Aristotle if they are speaking about God. Although this law is invalid in Patristic theology, the heretics both accepted it and used it. Why is it that the Fathers do not observe Aristotle's law of contradiction, this axiom from

Aristotle's logic? Because there is no similarity whatsoever between the created and the Uncreated. And since no similarity whatsoever exists, no description of the Uncreated whatsoever can be made. Furthermore, since there is no similarity, there also cannot be any difference.

Created things are relatively similar and relatively different. What makes up this similarity among created things?

First of all, they are similar in substance. All created and material things are composed of the same essence or universal substance, including all visible and material substances such as the earth, clouds, mist, air, stars, stones, plants, animals, as well as the various forms of energy such as light, heat, and so forth. Einstein proved this with his law of mass-energy equivalence ( $E=mc^2$ ), which shows that energy and mass are equivalent physical concepts, differing only by the choice of their units. In philosophy, the common name for this universal substance is matter. It is the dust, clay, and earth mentioned in theological texts.

Secondly, material and visible things are similar in structure. All material bodies are made up of atoms and all atoms resemble each other to a certain degree. So from this point of view, all material things are relatively similar.

What makes material things different is the form of the universal substance and the structure of the atoms. That is, two objects may differ because one is in the form of energy and the other is in its condensed state as matter or because of differences in the composition of individual atoms and their collective arrangement within a lattice structure.

The same phenomenon is observed in the cells of living organisms. They are also relatively similar and relatively different. Irrational living organisms (plants and animals) and human beings are relatively similar insofar as they are structurally and materially made up of the same basic building blocks (that is, atoms and cells). They differ insofar as humans by nature have an immortal soul formed in the image of God and capable of noetic activity, while other living beings do not.

Angels and human beings are relatively similar in terms of immortality, the ability to reason, to be depicted, to be self-determining, and so forth. Yet they differ in terms of glory, immateriality, and the like. Angels and demons are relatively similar in nature, but differ in glory (angels are glorified by Grace, whereas demons are deprived of Divine Glory).

Now **God and creation have absolutely no similarity**. This means that when we say that the uncreated differs from the created, we are not using the concept of difference the way we would in science or philosophy (speaking about relative differences). We are talking about an absolute difference. (It should be noted that Christ is the one bridge between the created and the uncreated.) This is why the Fathers went so far as to say, *presence of the vision of God*.

*In regard to the names which we apply to God, these reveal His energies which descend to us, yet do not draw us closer to His essence, which is inaccessible. For Saint Gregory of Nyssa, every concept relative to God is a simulacrum, a false likeness, an idol. The concepts, which we form in accordance with the judgment and understanding which are natural to us, basing ourselves on an intelligible representation, create idols of God instead of revealing to us God Himself. There is only one name by which the divine nature can be expressed: the wonder which seizes the soul when it thinks of God. (Vladimir Lossky, "The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church").*

St. Dionysios the Areopagite has written a very beautiful passage that is cited by the Fathers. It tells us that in the final analysis God is neither Unity nor Trinity: *It is not something, neither is it any kind of degree; it is not mind; it is not soul; it is not moved, nor again does it remain still; it is neither in space nor in time; it is in itself of one kind, or rather without kind being before all kind, before movement, before stillness, for all these things concern being and make it many.*

*Thus, when we make affirmations and negations about things which are inferior to it, we affirm and deny nothing about the Cause itself, which, being wholly apart from all things is above all affirmation, as the supremacy of Him Who, being in His simplicity freed from all things and beyond everything is above all denial. Vladimir Lossky quoting St. Dionysios the Areopagite, in "The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church").*

This is so because God does not correspond to anything the human mind conceives or could possibly conceive. For example, we say that there is one God. Of course, when we say the word "one," we visualize a number or a unit. We imagine that there is one God just like any isolated individual is one person. The same thing happens when we say that God is three Persons. But God is not three anything. He is not three subjects. He is not three objects. He is not one subject and He is not one object.

Whenever we think, we always think in terms of a subject and an object. The subject is what observes while the object is what is observed. But when we say that the Father loves the Son, we are not dealing with a subject-object relationship as St. Augustine mistakenly thought. In this case, the Father is not the subject or the One Who loves and the Son is not the object or the One Who is loved. Augustine called

God "Love that loves itself" and used this subject-object relationship in order to construct a theology of the Holy Trinity. (Augustine, "On the Trinity"). But since God is neither a subject nor an object, He cannot be construed as the subject of His love or the object of His love. So in God, there are not three Persons like three persons in a family.

Now there are certain Orthodox theologians of Russian descent who claim that God is a personal God. They claim that God is not the God of philosophy, a construction of human philosophical thought, but that He is a personal God. Western tradition makes similar statements.

But in the Patristic tradition, God is not a personal God. In fact, God is not even God as most, if not all, perceive. God does not correspond to anything that we can conceive or would be able to conceive. The relationship between God and man is not a personal relationship and it is also not a subject-object relationship. So when we speak about a personal relationship between God and man, we are making a mistake. That kind of relationship between God and human beings does not exist.

What we are talking about now has bearing on another error that some people make when they speak about a communion of persons and try to develop a theology based on a communion of persons using the relations between the Persons in the Trinity as a model. The

relations between God and man are not like the relations between fellow human beings. Why? Because we are in no possible or conceivable way on the same level or in the same business with God.

What we have just said holds true until the Incarnation. **However, after the Incarnation of God the Word, we can have a personal relationship with God by means of and on account of the Incarnation.** But this relationship is exclusively with God as the God-man (as the Son of God and the Son of man).

Since God became man, the Incarnation brought about a special relationship between God and man or Christ and man, a relationship that is nevertheless non-existent when we consider the Holy Trinity as a whole. We do not have a relationship with the Holy Trinity or with the uncreated Divinity that is like our relationship with Christ. In other words, our relationship with the Father or with the Holy Spirit is not like our relationship with Christ. Only with



Christ do we have a personal relationship. **The Holy Trinity came into personal contact with man only through the Incarnation, only through Christ.** This relationship did not exist before the Incarnation, because we did not have a relationship with God as we do with other people before the Incarnation.

Being uncreated, God is accordingly not a human being. That is, in His uncreatedness God neither is a human being nor resembles a human being. So when God became man, He did not become something that He already resembled. Incarnation does not mean that God assumed a nature that was somehow similar to His own. There is absolutely no similarity whatsoever between human nature and divine nature.

This is the reason why the Fathers stress that man is not the image of God. **Only the Word or Son is the exact image of God.** The Word is the image of the Father. And since the Word is the image of the Father, Christ as the Word is also the image of the Father. But there is an interchange of properties. [*Communicatio idiomatum* (Latin) or *apodosis idiomaton* (Greek) is the theological consequence of the union of the two natures in the Person of Christ. When the Word became flesh, the flesh also became Word. In the person of Christ, human nature remains human, but is penetrated by divine nature]. Thus, the very humanity of Christ is also the image of the Father on account of the Incarnation; man is not the image of God. Although some people certainly refer to man as the image of God, it is improper to do so.

To explain this in a literal manner, man is fashioned in the image of God, but he is not the image of God. Christ is the image of God and man is the image of Christ, i.e., man is the image of the image, that of Christ. Although the Bible relates that *in the image of God created He him*, precisely what is meant by this verse was fully revealed only in the Incarnation. The Incarnation revealed that man had indeed been created in the image of Christ, his chronologically subsequent prototype, because from the very beginning human destiny was to become like Christ, to become god by grace, and to attain the state of being *in the likeness*.

A person actively becomes *in the image* when he becomes like Christ in compassion. So when someone manages to imitate Christ, he also begins to become an image of the Father by grace as he partakes of the glory of Christ. In this way, someone who attains to a state of *theosis*, in other words, a state of being *in the likeness of Christ*, becomes Christ by grace and god by grace. That is when he becomes

like Christ and differs from Christ only in terms of nature. Notwithstanding, Christ is God by nature, not by grace.

When the Word became flesh, He became human by nature. The Word did not become human by grace. The Incarnation does not imply a mere adoption of human nature, in order to dwell within Him and in so doing to make that human being God. Rather, through the Incarnation, the very Word and Son of God became human by nature.

In this way, **divine and human natures were united in the person of Christ.** The divine nature of the Word and human nature coexist in the person of Christ in a union without confusion, without alteration and without division. Christ is not merely a man. He is the God-man. He is simultaneously both God and man with the distinct properties of both natures. When we look upon Christ, we are gazing at the incarnate Son of God. After the Incarnation, the Word and Son of God is united once and for all with human nature in the person of Christ.

When the Lord was transfigured, His countenance shone like the sun and His garments became as white as light. In this way, the inward *theosis* of His human nature by the hypostatic union of God the Word could be recognized by the outpouring of divine rays. Hence, John from Damascus celebrates the feast with the following words: *the flesh is simultaneously glorified by being brought from non-being into being, while the glory of the Divinity becomes the glory of the humanity, for both are one in Christ Who is consubstantial with the Father and of one nature with the*



*human race.*

It is not that He transfigured what He had not assumed or transformed, but what appeared to His familiar disciples was transfigured. What did the human nature of the Lord enjoy on account of this divine work? By communion, His human nature directly enjoyed the advantages and the magnificence of the divinity, so that His human nature became life-giving, all-powerful, all-knowing.

St. Nicodemos further explains: *We must know that although the nature hypostatically united to God the Word was deified, it nevertheless remained unchanged and did not lose its natural characteristics—that is, being subject to suffering, corruption, mortality, and the other natural and so-called blameless passions. It continued to have these characteristics even after its theosis so that first of all they would make Christ's Incarnation believable and people would not consider it to have been imaginary. Secondly, so that by these sufferings the Lord would heal what we suffer, irradiate the irrational pas-*

sions by the natural ones, and, simply, so that He might be victorious as a man and grant the victory to us His relatives who share His human nature. (St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, "The Way of the Feasts.").

Now when someone attains to a state of *illumination*, he becomes by grace *a temple of the Holy Spirit*. When he attains to a state of *theosis*, he becomes god by grace and like Christ by grace, but never by nature. This is why the union between all other human beings and God is not hypostatic, as it is in the case of Christ. There is only one hypostatic union between God and man and that takes place in the person of Christ through the union of the Son and Word of God with human nature.

**Man is united only with the energy or grace of God. Man is never united with the essence of God or with the hypostasis of the Word.** He is only united with the human nature of Christ during Holy Communion. In other words, man is united with the deified, resurrected, and glorified human nature of Christ and thereby he is united with the uncreated energy of the human nature of Christ or uncreated divine grace. This grace from Christ's humanity is what saves, resurrects and heals man, body and soul.



All who have lived according to God still live unto God, although they have departed this life. For this reason, God is called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, since He is the God, not of the dead, but of the living.

Yesterday I was crucified with Him; today I am glorified with Him.

We needed an Incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. We were put to death together with Him, that we might be cleansed; we rose again with Him because we were put to death with Him; we were glorified with Him, because we rose again with Him.

It is better to choose a commendable war than peace which separates from God. The faith which I was taught by the Holy Fathers which I taught at all times without adjusting according to the times, this faith I will never stop teaching; I was born with it and I live by it.

As a fish cannot swim without water, and as a bird cannot fly without air, so a Christian cannot advance a single step without Christ.

St. Gregory the Theologian

## EDUCATION IN GOD

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos. A lecture to Athens University students in the Hall of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece on the 2nd Sunday of the Lent 1989 (9th of April 1989).

Education is a widely discussed issue in our days. The problem is that we have very much distorted views on this important subject. We hear various things that are at least unorthodox. By this we do not mean humanists, that is, those who have a humanist education based mostly on the intellect and rationality, but rather we mean those Christians who identify man-centered education with Christian education. The identification and equality of these two wisdoms, these two types of knowledge is a heretical position and has been denounced by all Holy Fathers.

The subject is very serious. In this article we intend to elaborate on the great subject of education in God. Before proceeding to a precise analysis of education in God, I think it is worthwhile to see the differences between the two educations, in accordance to the teaching of a great Father of the Church, St. Gregory Palamas. St. Gregory lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when there was a strong humanist trend out of which humanist renaissance was born. The 14<sup>th</sup> century has many common features with our own era, so the reference to the debate between St. Gregory and Barlaam is very constructive.

### The Two Types of Education

Barlaam, being a bearer of a humanistic spirit, taught that there exists one and single truth. In other words, truth is single and was given by God to mankind by the prophets and the philosophers. Naturally, St. Gregory refutes this position. After presenting his whole teaching which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, which we will quote below, he ends with a question: "How is the truth one?" More specifically, Barlaam argued that what happens in philosophy is similar to what happens in health. There is no difference between the health offered by God and the health offered by medical care, and the same holds true of wisdom. "God gave it to the prophets and the apostles, and He gave it to us through the words of the divine workers (*theourgoi*) and the lessons of philosophy, by which we seek and find wisdom."

Barlaam's teaching is revealed clearly in the question posed by Akindynos to St. Gregory Palamas. As is well known, Akindynos expresses Barlaam's view. He (Akindynos) says that he has heard some people saying that monks, too, should seek worldly wisdom, because one cannot be delivered from ignorance and false beliefs, nor attain perfect dispassion, nor achieve sanctity "unless he collects knowledge from everywhere, especially from Greek education." In other words, Barlaam argued that ancient Greek philosophy is God's gift given to philosophers by revelation, similar to the way it was given to the Apostles and the Prophets, and,



therefore, this education provides the knowledge of beings as well as the knowledge of God. So Barlaam and many others like him argued about the singleness of truth and this was done to the detriment of Revelation and in favor of philosophy. It was truly a great danger for the Orthodox Church.

St. Gregory Palamas detected the risk of the secularization of the Orthodox theology and this is why he addressed this falsehood. I do not intend to include all arguments and the whole teaching by St. Gregory. I will mention only the central points which will illustrate his differentiation from Barlaam the philosopher.

First of all, in his writings the saint had to make a distinction between the two wisdoms and the two types of knowledge. There can be no confusion between these two wisdoms. A strong support for this teaching, apart from his own personal experience, is derived from the experience and teaching of St. Paul. Our saint uses the words of the Apostle repeatedly: *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.* (1 Cor 1:21).

He also uses another quote by the Apostle: *My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.* (1 Cor 2:4-8). He also refers to the passage by St. James the Lord's Brother who says on divine wisdom: *Such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.* (Jas 3:15). He also mentions other passages from the Bible to show the difference between the two wisdoms and types of knowledge, but I am not going to cite them all. I think that what has been mentioned is sufficient to show that the teaching about the distinction of the two types of knowledge, the mental and the spiritual, is the Church's teaching and an experience of all saints.

Analyzing the apostolic passage from the epistle to the Corinthians we mentioned above, St. Gregory states that there is abyssal difference between the wisdom of the philosophers

and the wisdom of the Prophets and Apostles. He writes characteristically: *The mind of the worldly philosophers is God-given, having by nature intellectual wisdom, but has been diverted by the evil one's suggestions to foolish and wicked and senseless [wisdom], and transformed wisdom to dominating such ideas.* Like sensual pleasure for child-bearing in lawful marriages cannot be called God's gift, but rather of the flesh and of nature, even if nature was created by God, we can say the same about worldly knowledge. Even if man uses it well, it is *a natural not a spiritual gift.* If we add that there is a worldly education which is against God, then we can say that this wisdom is mental and demonic. This is why St. Gregory asks: *What is the relationship between a God-inspired teaching and vanity? And what does divine wisdom care about the truths of the stars?*

But very often humanistic wisdom is not simply different from divine wisdom. It is also opposite to it. Human wisdom is *contrary to the true and spiritual knowledge.* In fact, St. Gregory argues that all human heresies have sprung out of human wisdom, whose center is rationality and human thinking. *And if you examine, you will see that all or most of the heresies have their origin here.*



**St. Gregory Palamas (+1359)**

The saint's observation is remarkable. If we examine Church history carefully we will find out that all heretics originated from human thinking and a man-centered view of life. They always tried to explore and analyze the Church's truth through their reason. On the contrary, the Holy Fathers were based on the method of orthodox piety, which is the *purification* of the heart and the *illumination* of the *nous*. After these two stages of spiritual life, they attained the knowledge of God and theologized inspired by God and unerringly within the Church.

But St. Gregory Palamas does not limit himself to this general point. He goes deeper. He stresses that there is a huge difference between the Prophets-Apostles and the philosophers. If it is true that human wisdom and knowledge brings sanctity to man and guides him to the knowledge of God, then those who have this education would be "more God-like" and "more God-seers" than the Fathers and the Prophets during the times of the Law of Moses. He brings the example of John the Forerunner, who reached a very high level of grace, without ever studying human wisdom. As is well known, St. John the Forerunner lived in the desert since his early childhood. St. Gregory asks: *Where in the desert are the schools of this futile philosophy, which they call redeeming?* He stresses the difference between the principle

of the philosophers “know yourself” and the teaching of the saints *watch yourself*.

If one looks carefully at the philosophers’ command “know yourself,” he will realize that it contains a lot of false belief. It is closely related to the teaching of reincarnation. The philosophers teach that one can obtain perfect knowledge if he examines thoroughly himself and find out where he lived in the past, in what body he was attached, what he did and how he was called. Naturally, by doing this search to himself, in reality he becomes the devil’s obedient instrument who whispers various interpretations to him. For this reason, according to St. Gregory Palamas, there is no relationship and no similarity whatsoever between the saints and the philosophers, nor, of course, between the teaching of the Apostles-Prophets and the teaching of the philosophers. If it seems that there is agreement in certain words and terms, it is an agreement only on external words, while in the depth there is a difference. He writes: *If a Father happens to say the same things as those in the world, the similarity is only in the words; in the meanings there is a lot of distance; because the first have, according to Paul, the mind of Christ, while the second speak out of human intellect, if not something worse.* The Holy Fathers have the mind of Christ, while the philosophers and the worldly wise men speak out of their own thinking and sometimes are instruments of the devil.

This position is not an exclusive teaching of St. Gregory Palamas. It is the teaching of the Church, which is expressed by her genuine children, namely the Holy Fathers. The saint cites passages from the teaching of St. Basil the Great who, speaking on hesychasm as a basic requirement for the acquisition of the knowledge of God, writes: *This is the good and beneficial school for someone devoted to learning; while the school of the Athenians is wicked, for they do nothing but saying and hearing what is new, even though now there are some who imitate the way of life, being a friend of evil spirits.* St. Basil the Great also presents part of St. Basil’s letter to Eustathios, where it is clearly shown that St. Basil regretted for his occupation with human education: *I have wasted a lot of time in useless things and ruined almost all my youth in futility, by spending time in attending lessons of a wisdom made fool by God, and then, like waking up from a deep sleep, I realized the uselessness of the wisdom of the rulers of an age which will be abolished, and I cried a lot for my wretched life, wishing to find some guidance.* In addition to St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory Palamas cites a passage by St. Gregory of Nyssa on philosophy. According to this passage, philosophy is *barren and fruitless, giving product to no one, nor leading to the light of the knowledge of God, while the wisdom of the Spirit is most fertile and gives birth to many children,* has given rebirth to thousands of people right away and led them from dreadful darkness to the marvelous light of God.

St. Gregory Palamas defines also the true philosopher. A true philosopher is *he who seeks and does the will of God, he who has active word and wise act.* This passage reminds us the truth that when Patristic texts mention that a Christian is a true philosopher they do not mean one who possesses worldly wisdom and education, who has an advanced intellect, but rather one who has the Grace of God in him. I point this out because, based on such patristic passages, there are some who claim that the Fathers of the Church were philosophers and cultivated philosophy. But as we have seen before, there is a great difference between theologians and philosophers.

There is also a great difference between worldly education and education in God. St. Gregory teaches that education in God starts with the fear of God, which then brings continuous prayer to God in compunction and the keeping of the gospel commandments. When through these ways man experiences reconciliation with God, fear is transformed to love and the pain of prayer is converted to joy, and then the flower of *illumination* blossoms, and by *illumination* man is offered the knowledge of the mysteries of God. This is true education.

On the other hand, an education which starts not from fear of God, as is done with worldly education and wisdom, does not lead to the knowledge of God. Therefore, education in God is offered to a man whose soul is imbued with the fear of God, compunction, unceasing prayer. He who follows and studies this wisdom reaches the knowledge of the mysteries of God, that is, salvation.

Since I would not like to remain on a theoretical level, in what follows I will analyze in more detail the progression of the education in God. It will be shown that education in God is something specific. Only those who follow this course can become true theologians and, therefore, move from the image to the likeness, that is, to deification. It will be shown that human education is intellectual, rational, while education in God is of the heart. Therefore, there exists an abyssal difference between the two.

### Education in God

Education in God consists of the coming and hiding of the Grace, of all the knowledge about God and the eternal life offered to man who receives these comings and hidings of uncreated Grace. This education in God is a mystery, because everything acted within the Church is a mystery. We are based very much on the teaching of Holy Fathers, who are *initiated by experience* and have received God’s revelation about these realities.

There are several passages about education in God in the Old and the New Testament. We do not intend to cite them extensively. We may refer only to St. Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews. By way of introduction we may state that Christians who originated from the Jews, to whom St. Paul

addresses his epistle, received Christ's Grace and right after that were persecuted by their compatriots. They were a little shaken, so the Apostle writes this epistle stressing some truths including that persecution and, generally, temptation is inextricably linked to the children of God. The whole twelfth Chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is devoted to this mystery of education.

But this temptation was not only external. It was internal, too. The first Christians faced the problem of the lifting of God's Grace from their heart and could not comprehend this abandonment by God. They were completely unable to interpret this phenomenon of spiritual life, that is, the participation in the Cross of Christ. St. Paul aims at this objective. We may say, according to the testimony of our saints, that the Apostle mostly refers to this kind of education. Because God works in a way incomprehensible to human reason.

In the works of the Holy Fathers, spiritual life is presented as having several stages. They mostly distinguish three, the *purification* of the heart, the *illumination* of the nous and *deification*. St. Maximos calls them *practical philosophy, natural theoria and mystical theology*. This distinction originates with Aristotle and continues to the Holy Fathers with a different content, though. Professor Panagiotis Christou elaborating on the "method of religious experience" describes the distinction of the three phases in religious life. Aristotle divides the phases of religious life in ethical, natural and theological. "Origen in his beloved metaphorical method says that a Christian acquires Christ through the practical one as a host, through the natural one as a King, and through theology as God."

The steps of spiritual life are three, according to Christ's saying *I am the way (ethical) and the truth (natural) and the life (theology)*" (Jn 14:6). Evagrius defines Christianity as *doctrine of our Savior Jesus Christ constituted of practical and natural and theological*. The same distinction is observed in St. Diadochos of Fotiki, in St. Symeon the New Theologian (who divided his chapters in *practical, gnostic, theological*) and even in St. Gregory Palamas who used the same distinction in his chapters (ethical, natural, theological).

However, when studying the works of the Holy Fathers, especially the so-called neptic ones, we encounter another gradation of spiritual life. This gradation is deeper without abolishing the former stages of spiritual life. Because, according to the experience of many Holy Fathers, the transition from one stage to another is achieved by the working of the Grace of God and the pain from the deprivation of Grace until its new coming. So, according to this, we can distinguish three stages in spiritual life: the coming of Grace, the hiding of Grace from man, and its new coming to man's heart.

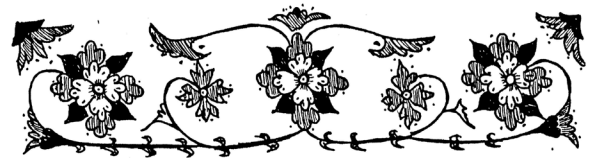
St. Makarios the Egyptian refers to this fact in his spiritual sermons. He writes: *He who hears a word reaches compunc-*

*tion and, after this, grace is lowered by divine providence to man's benefit, and he enters war exercises and education, and struggles and competes against Satan, and after a long road and struggle he is awarded victory and becomes a Christian.*

This is a remarkable observation. It manifests what was said before, namely that education is the fight during the lifting of Grace, and also shows clearly that the stages of spiritual life are identified with the coming, the lowering, and the new coming of the Grace of God. Indeed, he remarks characteristically that a person becomes a Christian not with the compunction caused by the coming of Grace, but rather with the struggle that will follow. Then he acquires the experience and knowledge of God, as will be expressed below.

St. Siluan the Athonite expresses the same experience: *The Elder had an empirical knowledge of spiritual progression. He showed three essential stages of it: first, the receiving of grace; second, its lifting and, third, its re-acquisition by a struggle of humility. There have been many who received the grace, not only within the Church but outside it too—because there is no favoritism in the Lord—but there is no one who has kept the first grace and only a few have re-acquired it. Someone who ignores the period of the second coming, someone who has not passed through the struggle for its return, essentially has an incomplete spiritual experience.*

*Elder Siluan was rich through his personal experience and also well trained theoretically in the ascetic writings of the Fathers of the Church; by God's gift he was not only faithful to the tradition of the Church but also the experience of the great Fathers was repeated in him.*



**B**efore the transgression, Adam shared in divine illumination and brilliance. He was clothed in the true robe of glory and was not naked, nor was he ugly in his nakedness, but was truly unspeakably better adorned than those who wear diadems embellished with much gold and precious stones. When our human nature was stripped of this divine illumination and radiance as a result of the ugly transgression, the Word of God had mercy on this nature and in His compassion took it upon Himself.

On Mount Tabor He showed it clothed once more to His chosen disciples, proving to all what we had once been, and what those of us who believed in Him and attained to perfection in Him would be through Him in the age to come. You will find that the earnest of this perfection of those who live according to Christ is openly given here and now to God's saints. They reap, so to speak, the good of the age to come.

**St. Gregory Palamas**

## THE ATHEIST STUDENT THAT VISITED THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

By Metropolitan Nicholas of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki.

Several years ago I was approached by a young student. With great reluctance, but with the intensity of a demanding seeker, he said he was an atheist, yet would love to believe, but could not. For years he tried and searched, but to no avail.

He spoke with professors and the educated, but his thirst for something serious was not satisfied. He heard of me and decided to share with me his existential need. He asked me for scientific proof for the existence of God.

“Do you know integrals or differential equations?” I asked.

“Unfortunately no,” he replied. “I am a philosopher.”

“Too bad! Because I knew one such proof,” I said, obviously joking.

He felt uncomfortable and was quiet for a bit.

“Look,” I said, “I’m sorry I hurt you a bit. But God is not an equation or a mathematical proof. If it were so, then all the educated would believe in Him. You should know, there are other ways to approach God. Have you ever been to Mount Athos? Have you ever met an ascetic?”

“No, Father, but I’m thinking of going, having heard so much. If you tell me, I can go even tomorrow. Do you know anyone educated to go and meet with?”

“What do you prefer? Someone educated that can make you dizzy, or a saint who can wake you up?”

“I prefer the educated. I fear saints.”

“Faith is a matter of the heart. Why don’t you try a saint. What is your name?” I asked.

“Gabriel,” he answered.

I sent him to an ascetic. I described for him the way to access him and gave him the necessary instructions. I even sketched for him a map.

“You will go,” I said, “and ask him the same thing. I am an atheist, you will tell him, and I want to believe. I want a proof of the existence of God.”

“I am afraid, embarrassed,” he told me.

“Why are you embarrassed and afraid of the saint but not embarrassed and afraid of me?” I asked.

After a few days he went and found the ascetic conversing with a young man in his yard. On the opposite side four others were sitting on some logs waiting. Among them Gabriel found a tentative seat. No more than ten minutes later the Elder finished his conversation with the young man.

“How’s it going, guys?” he asked. “Have you taken a loukoumaki? Did you drink some water?”

“We thank you, Elder,” they replied, with conventional secular nobility.

“Come here,” he said addressing Gabriel, distinguishing him from the others. “I will take the water, and you take

the box with loukoumia, and come closer so I can tell you a secret: It is fine for someone to be an atheist, but to have the name of an angel and be an atheist? This is the first time I have seen such a thing.”

Our friend nearly suffered a heart attack after this revealing surprise. How did he know his name? Who revealed to him his problem? What, finally, did the Elder want to tell him?

“Father, can I speak with you for a bit?” he asked, barely able to mumble.

“Look, now it is getting dark. Take the loukoumi, drink some water, and go to the most nearby monastery to spend the night.”

“My Father, I want to speak with you, is it not possible?”

“What will we say, my lad? For what reason did you come?”

“To this question I felt my breathing open immediately,” he told me. “My heart was flooded with faith. My inside world was heated. My doubts were solved without any logical argument, without any discussion, without the existence of a clear answer. All the ‘if’s, why’s and but’s’ were automatically destroyed, and all that remained was ‘how’ and ‘what from this time forward’.”

What the educated could not give his thoughts, was given to him with the gentle hint of a saint, who was a graduate of only the fourth grade of elementary school. The saints have much discernment. They make a surgery on you, and you feel no pain. They do a transplant without opening your stomach. They raise you to inaccessible peaks without ladders or worldly logic. They plant faith in your heart, without tiring your mind...



If on hearing about the kingdom of heaven we are brought to tears, do not let us be content with these tears, or think that we hear well with our ears or see well with our eyes, and that we need nothing further. For there are other ears, other eyes, other tears, just as there is another mind and another soul. I am referring to the divine and heavenly Spirit, that hears and weeps, prays and knows, and that carries out God’s will. When the Lord promised the great gift of the Spirit to the apostles, He said: *I still have much to tell you, but its burden is more than you can bear now. When, however, He Who is the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth.* (Jn 16:12-13). He, therefore, will pray, and He will weep. For, as St. Paul says, *we do not know what to pray for as we should; but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with cries that cannot be uttered.* (Rom 8:26).

St. Makarios of Egypt

## ON THE PASSIONS OF AVARICE, ANGER, SORROW AND SLOTH

By Blessed Nil Sorsky (+1508).

### Avarice

The passion for the acquisition of wealth, said the Fathers, is not part of human nature and is due to a lack of faith and people's sick way of thinking. This is why it requires no small effort to combat this passion, if, with the necessary vigilance over ourselves, we wish to achieve real salvation and the fear of God in our lives. If this passion takes root in us it becomes the most tyrannical of all. And if we become subject to its encouragement and habits, then we have lost everything, because St. Paul says: *For the love of money is the root of all evil.* (1 Tim 6:10), that is of anger, sorrow and everything else.

Indeed, the Fathers also called it idolatry, because, through avarice, many people have fallen away, not only from the Christian life, but have been damaged in body and soul, as Holy Scripture tells us. And the Fathers tell us that people who hoard gold and silver and trust in themselves, do not believe in God, Who is actually looking after them.

So let us guard ourselves against this passion, which brings the soul to perdition and destruction, and let us pray to God to expel far from us this evil spirit of avarice. And may we guard against not only gold and silver, but against every external and necessary object, since these lead to greed, when we ask for more than we need. Such as, for example, the acquisition of lots of clothes, shoes, residences, gadgets and so on. Everything we need for our lives should not be luxurious and expensive, because then we fall into worldly habits. The real rejection of avarice, of ownership of lots of things and the desire for them is not that we should not have any possessions at all, but that we should not attach ourselves to the transient and vain things of this present life. Emancipation from the things of this world assists us in the purification of our souls.

### Anger

If we are troubled by anger and it urges us to consider an injury and to return with interest the damage that someone has inflicted on us, then we should think upon the words of the Lord, Who said: *But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* (Mt 6:15). It follows, therefore, that people who want their sins to be forgiven are obliged first and foremost to forgive others

with all their heart. Because this is how God has taught us to seek forgiveness for our own transgressions. And if we do not forgive, it is obvious that our sins will not be forgiven. It is in this sense that we should understand the saying of the Fathers that the prayer of angry people is not accepted, even if such people have the power to raise the dead.

The Fathers said this not to indicate that irate people cannot raise the dead, but to show the extent to which their prayer is repulsive to God. This is why we should never become angry, nor do any harm to our fellow human beings, not only with words and deeds, but even by changing the way we look at them. Because we can disdain others merely by a look, according to the Fathers. The perfect victory over thoughts of anger is to pray for the person who has provoked them, as Abba Dorotheos advises when he says: *God, help my brother, and through his prayers have mercy upon me, sinner that I am. Because to pray for other people means love and affection, and to ask for their prayers means humility.* We should even do them good, as far as we can,



because then we will be carrying out the commandment of God that says: *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.* (Mt 5:44).

To those who live by this, the Lord has promised not only the Kingdom of Heaven, some sort of rest or a gift such as those we have in the present, but the very inheritance of adoption, because He says: *That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.* (Mt 5:45). And our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who instituted this commandment and promised this great recompense, carried out everything He taught, giving us Himself as an example, so that we might imitate Him, insofar as we can. How many punishments did He endure from the Jews for us sinners, and not only did He refrain from anger, but prayed for them to His heavenly Father saying: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* (Lk 23:34). In the same way, all the saints walked this path and acquired divine grace, returning good to their persecutors instead of evil. They also prayed for them and covered the sins they saw them committing and taught them with sincerity and affection.

### Sorrow

We have a great struggle to wage against the evil spirit of sorrow, which brings the soul into despair and perdition. If the sorrow is occasioned by other people, we have to suffer it with joy, and pray for those who have saddened

us, as I said before, bearing in mind that whatever befalls us does so with God's sanction. Whatever the Lord sends us, He does only for the benefit and salvation of our soul. It may be that, in the beginning, it does not seem to bring us any benefit, but later we will realize that what God has allowed us to go through has been better for us than what we ourselves would have wanted to happen.

So we should not think in human terms, but should believe with certainty that the un-sleeping eye of God sees all things and that nothing happens without His will. It is from the wealth of His mercy that these situations and temptations happen to us, so that we can earn our heavenly reward through our patience. Because without temptations, no one has ever been crowned. This is why we should offer glory to God for everything, because He is our Dispenser and Saviour, as Saint Isaac the Syrian says: *The mouth that glorifies God is acceptable to God, and grace dwells in the heart which thanks God from its depths.*

Besides, we should avoid complaints and judgments against those who have saddened us and should pray for them, as the same saint says: *God puts up with all the weaknesses that people have, but those who continually censure other people will not go without correction. Though we must have the soul-saving sorrow over the sins we commit, with hope in our repentance to God and in the knowledge that there is no sin which defeats God's love for us, since He forgives everyone who repents sincerely and prays to Him.*

This sorrow is linked to joy (joyful sadness) and kindles in people the desire for everything spiritual and gives them patience in their trials. *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death,* says St. Paul (2 Cor 7:10). So we should seek godly sorrow, because it brings internal repose, whereas the grief that proceeds from Satan should be expelled from our hearts, together with all the other passions, through prayer, the study of sacred texts and the receiving of Holy Communion. Grief which is not from God and for the love of God is the cause of all evils, and, unless we free ourselves from it, despair will overcome us and our soul will be devoid of grace, overwhelmed with sloth and will not even want to pray or read our sacred books.

### Sloth

If sloth is the passion that has a greater hold on us than the others, we face a stern struggle. This evil spirit is terrible.

It is closely related to the spirit of sorrow and particularly defeats those who are living alone. When the enormous waves of thoughts and passions rise up against the soul, people feel at that moment that they will never be redeemed from them. The spiritual enemy visits upon them all sorts of thoughts and reflections such as that, if things are like this today, they are only going to get worse tomorrow and the day after.

So the thought buzzes around their head that God has abandoned them, that this is happening because God is not looking after them, that this has happened only to them and never to anyone else. But things really are not like this at all. Because it is not only to us that these things occur, but also to His saints, who, throughout the centuries have pleased God and have recognized that

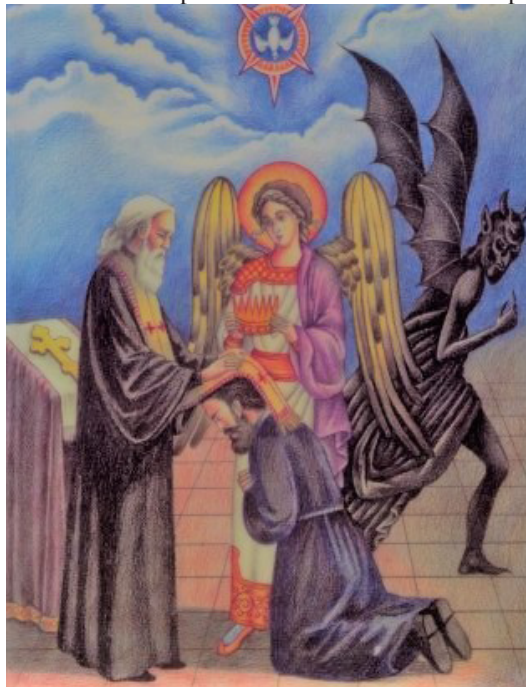
He is a loving God and Father and that He chastises us with His spiritual rod out of love and so that we will acquire virtues. But after that, there quickly comes an alteration, a restoration of the soul and the mercy of God.

At the most difficult moment, people have the impression that they cannot overcome the pandemonium of their thoughts and passions. All the virtues seem unattainable and hateful, because of the machinations of Satan, but then comes a divine change. Everything seems pleasant and the grievous situations are nothing compared to the peace and blessedness of the visitation of divine grace. Besides, they become more open to the virtues, they are

astonished by this spiritual adjustment and take the decision not to deviate from the path of the virtues under any circumstances. People also realize that, in His great mercy, God has disposed these things for their benefit and testing.

Thus it is that they feel surrounded by the love of God, that He is always close to faithful Christians and will never allow them to be tried beyond their bent, because without God's permission, the spiritual enemy cannot do us any harm whatsoever. It is not up to the will of our soul whether we are tempted a little or a great deal; it is God's will and His decision.

With these experiences, striving Christians become wise through temptations and, when they see these alternations of grace in their soul, persevere resolutely in their various trials. With these, a monk expresses his love for God, when he bears them and gradually makes spiritual progress. Because, as John of the Ladder says, *nothing brings the monk so many*



*crowns as the struggle against sloth, provided it is undertaken without any loss of time.*

During the period of relentless warfare, we must arm ourselves against the spirit of ingratitude and blasphemy, because it is with those weapons that the enemy attacks us at that moment. Satan defeats people with doubt and fear and directs wicked thoughts at them like arrows: that God will not have mercy on them; that they will never be forgiven; never be redeemed and saved from the tortures of eternal perdition. Indeed, they are also under fire from other thoughts which I cannot write about, and are not able to work or read because the temptation will not allow them. This is why, at moments like this, we should forcefully cast despair away from us, and should not be indifferent to our prayer life.

We should fall down in prayer, with our faces to the ground, because this attitude of the body is very beneficial in assisting us to pray, as St. Barsanuphius the Great says: *Lord, help me, sinner that I am. Lord, behold my grief and have mercy on me.* As we are taught by St. Symeon the New Theologian: *Lord do not allow me to be tempted beyond my strength. Not with grief nor with pain of the soul. But redeem me and give me strength so that I can withstand everything with gratitude.* Or, as we raise our eyes and hands to heaven, let us pray over these passions, sloth and immorality, as the blessed Gregory the Sinaite teaches us, because he considered them to be the worst of all. In this way we shall strive to force ourselves, insofar as we can, to read and to do our handiwork, both of which are of great assistance in the time of warfare. It sometimes happens that Christians engaged in the struggle do not allow even a single passion to get near their soul. Then there is a great need and opportunity to devote themselves entirely to prayer, with all the strength they have.

In order to defeat the spirit of ingratitude and blasphemy we say: **Get behind me, Satan. I worship my Lord and God and I serve Him alone. I accept all pain and sorrows gratefully, because they are sent from Him, in order to relieve me of my sins. The Prophet Micah says: *I will bear the wrath of the Lord, for I have sinned against Him.* But ingratitude and blasphemy will come back to haunt you, as you will find out soon enough. So get away from me. May the God Who made me in His image and likeness destroy you.**

If he continues to bother you, even after those words, busy yourself with something external, material or spiritual work, that will strengthen your patience and hope, because that is what your soul has to cling onto, if it wants to please God, as St. Makarios says. But you need to be careful in your choice of outside work, because the devil often uses it to entrap us in his snares, to bring us into sloth and to distance our soul from hope in God.

God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be tested beyond its powers, since He knows what we are capable of achieving. People know what a mule or a donkey or a camel can carry and so they load each one accordingly. A potter is in something of a similar position: he knows the temperature at which to fire each of his clay vessels, because too fierce a heat would shatter them; equally, he knows not to take them out of the oven too quickly, because that would render them useless. If people have this much awareness, how much greater and immeasurable is the wisdom of God, Who knows exactly what temptations and how much of each every soul needs to overcome in order to be made worthy of the Kingdom of God. Not only will we be worthy of enjoying the good things to come, but here, too, we will receive the comfort of the Most Holy Spirit.

When we know all of this well, we can be steadfast with courage and silence in our cell. Though sometimes people benefit more from conversation with others, as St. Basil says: *Often, when we are slothful, a blameless visit to our fellow brethren, at an appropriate time, and conversation with them can, up to a point, dispel the passion of sloth.* And so, people who strive, if they are gradually strengthened by divine grace, and their personal experience, devote themselves with even more desire to the good fight for the virtues. But the Holy Fathers, who know this from their personal struggle, say that patience in quietude is more beneficial.



Let everybody know this. He shall be assigned to the place and to the service to which he gave and devoted himself in this life and he can be sure that in eternity he will have as his lot the service and the companionship which he preferred in this life.

Saint John Cassian, “*Conferences*”

God showed Saint Peter the Apostle that he should not consider anyone as common or unclean. Since his heart was sanctified, everyone has been sanctified. For the person whose heart lies in the passions, however, no one has been sanctified, but rather that person considers everyone as in accordance with the passions in his own heart. Even if someone were to say that such and such is a good person, he would immediately become angry in his heart. Therefore, guard yourselves against blaming anyone either by word or in your heart.

Abba Isaias of Scetis, “*Ascetical Discourses*”

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## LOVE OF GOD

From "Life of Monk Herman of Valaam" by Yanovsky, 1868.



Once the Elder (St. Herman of Alaska) was invited on board a frigate that had come from St. Petersburg. The captain of the frigate was a man quite learned, highly educated; he had been sent to America by Imperial command to inspect all the colonies. With the captain were some 25 officers, likewise educated men.

In this company there sat a desert-dwelling monk of small stature, in an old garment, who by his wise conversation brought all his

listeners to such a state that they did not know how to answer him. The captain himself related: "We were speechless fools before him!"

Father Herman gave them all one common question: "What do you, gentlemen, love above all, and what would each of you wish for his happiness?" Diverse answers followed. One desired wealth, one glory, one a beautiful wife, one a fine ship which he should command, and so on in this fashion.

"Is it not true," said Father Herman at this, "that all your various desires can be reduced to one—that each of you desires that

which, in his understanding, he considers best and most worthy of love?" "Yes, it is so," they all replied. "Well, then, tell me," he continued, "can there be anything better, higher above everything, more surpassing everything and in general more worthy of love, than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who created us, perfectly adorned us, gave life to all, supports all, nourishes and loves all, who Himself is love and more excellent than all men? Should not a person then love God high above all and desire and seek Him more than all else?" All began to say: "Well, yes! That is understood! That speaks for itself!"

"And do you love God?" The Elder then asked. All replied: "Of course, we love God. How can one not love God?" "And I, sinful one, for more than forty years have been striving to love God, and cannot say that I perfectly love Him," answered Father Herman; then he began to show how a person should love God.

"If we love someone," he said, "we always think of him, strive to please him, day and night our heart is occupied with this subject. Is it thus that you, gentlemen, love God? Do you often turn to Him, do you always think of Him, do you always pray to Him, and fulfill His holy commandments?" It had to be acknowledged that they did not! "For our good, for our happiness," concluded the Elder, "at least let us make a promise to ourselves, that from this day, from this hour, from this very moment we shall strive to love God above all, and fulfill His holy will!" Behold what an intelligent, superb conversation Father Herman conducted in society; without doubt this conversation must have imprinted itself on the hearts of his listeners for their whole life!



# Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org)

Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

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## In This Issue:

- Hope for Departed Non-Orthodox (p. 4)
- The Healing of the Paralytic in Capernaum (p. 5)
- Remembrance of Death (p. 7)
- Orthodoxy & Faith (p. 9)
- The Holy and Great Fast (p. 10)
- Raising Children (p. 21)
- Spiritual Blindness (p. 23)
- Longing for Paradise (p. 25)
- The Three Stages of Spiritual Life (p. 27)



- Μὴ Φοβηθῆτε, θὰ Βοηθήσῃ ὁ Θεός! (σελ. 13)
- Ἡ Ἀθλιότης τοῦ Ἄνθρώπου (σελ. 14)
- Μαρτυρίες Πίστεως Ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ 1821 (σελ. 16)
- Ὁ Ἀντίχριστος (σελ. 18)
- Παρακαταθήκες τῶν Ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ 1821 (σελ. 20)



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## THE DEPARTURE OF THE SOUL

### A FRIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE

By Elder Ephraim of Philotheou and Arizona, prologue to "The Departure of the Soul According to the Teaching of the Orthodox Church," by St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, first edition (2017), pp. 47-53 ([www.thedepartureofthesoul.org](http://www.thedepartureofthesoul.org)).

*Deliver me from the hands of demons, for many dogs have surrounded me.*

[Canon for the Departure of the Soul]

† † †

When our brotherhood was first established, there was a frightful but also beneficial incident with an elder of the skete; the older fathers certainly would remember this. This elder, who was sick with a heart condition, called me one day to go and confess him. Indeed, we had confession, but the tempter intervened and convinced the elder to hide certain faults. Perhaps these faults occurred when he was still living in the world.<sup>1</sup> When his heart condition became serious and he realized that the time of his departure was approaching, he sent his brother to ask me to return again for confession. His brother, who was also a monk, told me that the elder was impatient and asked me to find out what was happening and to try to calm him down a little before he lost his soul. I was surprised with this because I knew that monks are somewhat patient with temptations and illness, and they do not easily become impatient due to some pain.

When we went there and I saw the elder, I realized that it was not impatience, but instead something new was happening to him, something relevant to his soul. I told his brother to leave us and that I would talk to the elder alone. I sat next to him and understood that he was surrounded by demons.

"Geronda, are you surrounded by evil spirits?" I said to him.

"Yes, holy father."

I saw that he was agitated, looking to his left and right as if he was trying to protect himself from mad dogs that had surrounded him and were attacking him. I also saw that he was very attentive, carried away by something the demons were telling him. Trying to help him, I changed the tone of my voice a little and said to him:

"Geronda, what are the demons telling you?"

"Oh! I can't say what they are telling me."

"No, no, pay very close attention because they know our sins better than we can remember them."

He started little by little to tell me what the demons were telling him. They were accusing him of various faults that he had not confessed, and they were exposing them to him in his despair. I was getting all the information through him, hoping that God would have mercy on this man in this difficult hour of his despair. I kept telling him to confess his sins to me as he was hearing them from the demons, which he did. However, when I saw that he continued to be in a miserable state, agitated, restless, and despairing, I said to him:

"Elder, I am going out for a little while, but I will come back."

"No, my dear spiritual father, stay next to me!"

"It's all right, I will only be gone for two or three minutes; it is not a big deal, I will be back."

I left and went to the fathers in our brotherhood and said to them:

"Fathers, the elder is in a difficult situation. Let us do a prayer rope for him." We all did a prayer rope and when I returned to the elder, I found him in a peaceful state.

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“What is going on, Geronda? Where are they?” I said to him.

“Here. The dogs are still around.”

“But are they saying anything to you?”

“They are quiet now.”

“Excellent!”

At night when I entered my cell for my personal vigil and started the prayer, I sensed that the demons which were at the elder’s place earlier were now in my own cell, causing me trouble. In all my years, this certainly was the first time that I encountered so many demons fighting me, so close, so perceptibly. I turned on the light to read, but I could not read. The demons were everywhere, left and right. However, I was not afraid at all because I knew that they were there to scare me out of going back to help the elder. I told them to do their job and I would do mine. Later I went to the Divine Liturgy, but they did not appear there. After the Divine Liturgy, I went back to the ill and nearly dead man with another spiritual father with whom I performed the mysteries of holy unction and confession. I asked the elder a specific question:

“Well, were the demons the only ones that came? Where is your guardian angel?”

“He is here also.”

“But why doesn’t he take you?”

“He is waiting for an order from above.”

“Well, you see your guardian angel, but do you also see our guardian angels?”

“I see them. And your angels are wearing a kind of crown on their head. Furthermore, they have something special on them which indicate that they guard spiritual fathers.”

He continued to tell me that there would be a festival on Monday—it was Friday then—which certain people, who were presently absent, would attend. Of course, he meant his funeral, and these people were indeed there on Monday.

During his last days, the demons wanted to undermine him with something serious, because he had confessed everything else. Because they had lost on all the other issues, they were enraged and were trying to at least catch him in something at the end. The day before the elder’s death I had sent Father Joseph to keep vigil, pray on the prayer rope for him, and help him. When I went in the morning, the elder said

to me in the presence of others who were there:

“My good confessor, let me tell you how the demons almost caught me, and how I would have completely lost my soul.”



The Last Judgment (and Resurrection)  
[11<sup>th</sup> century]  
The Great Mosaic at the Cattedrale di Santa  
Maria Assunta, Torcello, Italy

“What is it, Geronda?”

“Last night the demons were telling me that I would get well and everything would go away if I would drink this whole jug of water. Of course, I understood they meant that if I drank it I would burst and die, and I was overtaken by the thought of doing it to end my torment. And as I was asking a father to give me the jug of water, my brother prevented it by telling him that if I drank it I would burst. Thus, they didn’t give it to me and I was saved.”

In short, after the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, I visited the elder again and found him very peaceful, sitting in an armchair. I said to him:

“How are you, Geronda?”

“I am very well, my dear confessor. May God reward you for what you did.”

“I am going to lie down for an hour,” I told him, “because I was in vigil last night, and I will come again afterwards to see you.”

“Yes, go rest, Geronda.”

Finally, I left. When I woke up after an hour, the fathers told me that the bells had rung half an hour earlier. Ah, I said, he must have departed from this world. And indeed, the elder had expired.

The above case reveals a man who was not well prepared for his exit from this world. Now I will tell you the case of a well-prepared spiritual man so that you can see the difference in these two cases.

The well-prepared man was my Elder, Joseph the Hesychast. When he was sitting in prayer, at some point he used to think through the events of his day to figure out which passion was still alive, which weakness still disturbed him, and he would make a new decision to fight them and obliterate them. This work took place every night during his prayers. So, all this labor had prepared him as perfectly as is humanly possible. I can say this because he used to tell me, “My child, the difficulty is how to cross the bridge of death. After that, by the grace of God, everything is taken care of.” Those were the words of a well-prepared man.

I have never seen such a brave man facing with so much courage that which every man fears. This was confirmed by various states preceding his death. One of those states was that he was weeping continuously out of great love for Christ and our dear Panagia. He had no regrets. He was awaiting death as a festival, as deliverance from the burdens of the

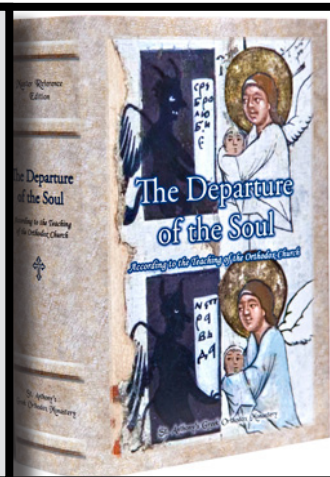
world. He was waiting for this hour in order to see God’s face, to enjoy and be filled with its beauty. He was waiting to enter the angelic order with which he continuously lived. This is why a little before his death he began to worry and say, “But why am I not leaving? The revelation from God was perfect and definite. God has made His decision; why then am I delayed?” I told him then that we would pray for his departure. Indeed, twenty minutes later while he was talking to the fathers, he looked up to the heavens and saw something that only he could see and could not find words to describe it to us. Then he bowed his head and said, “I am leaving, I am departing. Bless; all is finished.” He closed his eyes, received the sleep of a blessed man, and departed for the other world.

We must struggle to attain this precious salvation. The struggle is not a game. We did not come here simply to exist and live as it fell to our lot. The matter is more serious than anyone can imagine. God lives and therefore the salvation of man is something that is beyond seriousness, because if we lose our soul the misfortune is eternal. We must not take this matter lightly and let it escape us. The seriousness will become apparent to us in all its extent when we approach the hour of death. Then our mind grasps this reality and things become serious. Childish thinking is put aside. At that time, a man sees that everything he heard about death, everything he read, and everything he was admonished about is coming true.

Most of all, of course, he now has the sense of death, and he realizes that he is leaving. The mind begins to contemplate and question: “What is going to happen now? Where am I going?” The conscience becomes an eloquent mechanism that works unceasingly: “This happened, and that, and the other thing.” It seems to him that he is hearing all this for the first time: “But when did all this take place and yet never bothered me?” Of course, negligence and indolence and the darkening of the mind had covered all like an obscuring veil. And now the wind of the approaching death blows and things come to light. The soul, seeing the reality of what is happening, begins to lose courage: “Now what is going to happen? Can I go back?”

“No,” says the conscience, “now you will proceed towards the truth.”

***Demons, the tax-collectors of our souls. All a myth to the wicked....***  
[St. Gregory the Theologian]



This article’s source is the newly published book depicted above, a unique treasure for all Orthodox to possess and study.

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The man sees the evil demons approaching. They continuously and invisibly follow the various signs. From experience they understand when the hour of death is approaching, and they anticipate it by getting a front-row seat. They want to be first to come and shock and mortify the soul with their terrible appearance. They present the documents containing the soul's sins in order to create despair and hopelessness. The soul trembles and sighs, and when it sees the guardian angel—or more angels—it turns its eyes in supplication and pleads for help. But the angels help according to the person's deeds. Afterwards the soul turns its eyes towards relatives, friends, and brothers; it raises its hands asking for help, but receives no assistance from the others. And then it turns its only hope to God's mercy.

All these things that we said are the reality and the truth. We have seen many people leave this life. We have heard many accounts of the various events which occur at the hour of death. All these correspond to what we read in the Patristic Tradition. These things will also happen to us, and for this reason we must keep them in mind and take the appropriate course of action. The memory of death must restrain us continuously and keep us above all worldly things that we see down here. Our thought must always revolve around death, the departure, the ascent towards God's court of justice, and the conditions in Paradise versus Hades. Our prayer must be as continuous as possible. We must struggle because the prayer of the soul that struggles is heard by God. It has boldness, especially during the hour of death, and it will face the situation differently.

Let us think about all these things continuously. It is the Patristic truth. It is from life. It is from the revelation of God. And may we be inspired to struggle accordingly in order to attain eternal salvation.<sup>2</sup>

† † †

[1] The monastic term "living in the world" here denotes the elder's life before he became a monk.

[2] From spoken homilies delivered to Elder Ephraim's brotherhood on January 6, 1977 and April 5, 1978 at Philotheou Monastery, Holy Mountain, Greece. For remarkably similar narrations, refer to the source book (i.e., *The Departure of the Soul*), and see the account of Stephen the Hermit from St. John Klimakos's *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p. 169; the account of Chrysaorios from St. Gregory, Pope of Rome's *Dialogues*, p. 161; and St. Tarasios's own experience from the *Life of St. Tarasios*, Patriarch of Constantinople, p. 368.

† † †

*If when traveling in a foreign land or a strange city we are in need of a guide, how much more in need are we of guides and helpers to guide us past the invisible dignities and powers and world rulers of this air who are called persecutors, publicans, and tax-collectors by Holy Scripture.*

[St. John Chrysostom, "On Patience and Gratitude"]

## HOPE FOR DEPARTED NON-ORTHODOX

Source: "Blessed John the Wonderworker," an account of the life and miracles of Archbishop John Maximovitch (1998), pp. 256-258.

*The following incident is from an American convert whose mother died without becoming Orthodox. He was in sorrow and uncertain how to pray for her when he received this answer from Vladika John (Maximovitch), which he also interpreted as a sign that we should be missionaries and show love and concern for the non-Orthodox around us.*

† † †

I was reading in the afternoon from *The Orthodox Word* of May-June, 1974. First, I looked at the photo of Vladika John's sepulchre. As I did, I read again the *troparion* for him and upon finishing, I was moved to kiss his Sepulchre and said to him how sorry I was that I had not visited it more often in San Francisco when I had been there. I then glanced at a picture of my mother and asked him once again to pray for her, and I felt sure that he was praying for her. Then my eyes began to become heavy, and they closed and I entered into a kind of reverie, during which I saw my mother with her apron on, talking much as she did in the last years of her life.

Suddenly I sensed that Vladika was praying for her. I then saw her again, but this time down on her knees, crying and saying how sorry she was for her sins. She cried so loudly and so bitterly that I could almost hear her actual voice in the room. I was impressed to join Vladika in prayer and not to open my eyes. I began to pray simply but fervently for God to have mercy on her, and I was conscious of Vladika's presence very strongly, though I did not see him as I did my mother. She continued to cry with great sorrow and finally disappeared.

Soon I saw Vladika John, but only from the back. I could not see his face, only the veil of his *kamilavka* and the side of his beard, then the top of his episcopal staff and the sleeve of his *rasson*. He began to slowly walk away, and I noticed clearly that he wore a plain black monk's mantle rather than an episcopal one. He then slowly exited with dignity and I never saw his face, but I was sure it was he.

I opened my eyes, arose, and again recited his *troparion* aloud, facing East, and kissed the photo of his Sepulchre.

I do not know the full meaning of what I experienced... One thing I note is that Vladika said nothing and made no promises. I was simply assured of his prayers and of the need of my own and others. I also note that he wore a monk's mantle and staff, rather than episcopal mantle and staff. This would indicate to me that he did what he did in a private capacity rather than as a bishop in official capacity, which would mean that he affirms the Church's prohibition of offering public prayers for departed non-Orthodox, but also affirms the teaching that private prayers for them are of great value and should be encouraged.

Joseph McKean, Youngstown, OH (September 6, 1974)

## THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC IN CAPERNAUM

GOSPEL OF THE SECOND SUNDAY OF THE HOLY AND GREAT LENT

*A homily by St. Nikolai Velimirovic, bishop of Ochrid, from "Homilies, vol. One."*

Today's Gospel speaks of the great efforts and struggles of men of real faith to come into the presence of Christ the Lord.

Four men were carrying one of their kinsmen, or friends, who was sick of the palsy—carrying him on his bed, he being so desperately weak and helpless. They tried in vain to push through the great crowd, to come near the Lord, and, failing in this, climbed up onto the roof of the house; tore away the roof and, with a great struggle, let down the bed on which the sick man lay, till it rested at the feet of the wonder-working Healer. This was the measure of their faith in Christ.

*And Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy:*

*"Son, thy sins are forgiven thee."* The Lord did not hear their faith expressed in words, but He saw it. His perception penetrated to the most secret depths of the human heart and, beholding these depths, the Lord saw their great faith. With His bodily eyes, He had seen and known their efforts and struggles to bring the sick man into His presence. Their faith, then, was clear to both the Lord's spiritual sight and His bodily eyes.

The unbelief of the Scribes who were present at this event was also clear to the Lord. They *reasoned in their hearts:* "Why does this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The Lord, *perceiving in His spirit the thoughts of their hearts, began gently to reprimand them for this:* "Why reason ye these things in your hearts?" The Lord, in His discernment, reads impure hearts as easily as He does pure ones. As He had immediately seen Nathanael's pure heart, in which there was no guile, so He here immediately and clearly sees the impure hearts of the Scribes, filled with guile. In order to show them that He has power over both the bodies and the souls of men, both to forgive sins and to heal the weakened body, the Lord says to the man sick of the palsy: "I say unto thee: Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thy house." At such a powerful command, the sick man *immediately arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying: "We never saw it on this fashion!"*

Look how many miraculous powers the Lord demonstrates all at once:

—He sees into the hearts of men, and discerns faith in some and guile in others.

—He forgives the soul its sin, making it healthy and clean from the source of its sickness and weakness.

—He restores health to the weak and palsied body by the power of His words.

Oh how great and fearsome, wondrous and health-giving is the presence of the living Lord!

But we must come and stand in the presence of the living Lord. This is the most important thing on the path of salvation: to come with faith into the Lord's presence, and to feel this presence. At times, the Lord Himself comes and reveals His gracious presence to us, as He came to Martha and Mary at Bethany, as He suddenly appeared to the Apostle Paul on the road, or to the other apostles on the Sea of Galilee and on the road to Emmaus, in the room with shut doors or to Mary Magdalene in the garden, or to many of the saints in dreams or visions. Sometimes, men were brought by the apostles into the Lord's presence, as Andrew brought Simon Peter and Philip brought Nathanael, and as the apostles' successors and the missionaries have brought thousands and millions of believers to the Lord, and as one believer has brought another. Finally, people themselves sometimes make the greatest efforts to come into the



Lord's presence, as was the case with these four men who tore open the roof of the house in order to let the sick man down in front of the Lord.

These are the three ways that men can feel themselves in the Lord's presence. It is for us to exert ourselves and strive to come into the Lord's presence, and for God to allow us into His presence and illumine us by it. We must therefore take these three ways in reverse order, which is to say that we must, with faith and longing, do all we can to come into God's presence; then we must follow the call and directions of the holy, apostolic Church and the Church's Fathers and Teachers; and lastly, only after fulfilling the first two conditions, we must, with prayer and hope, wait upon God to bring us to Himself and, by His presence, to illumine, strengthen, heal and save us.

How great our efforts to open the way to God's presence must be is most clearly shown in the example of these four men, who did not hold back from climbing onto the roof,

deterred by no shame or fear, in order to let their sick friend down from above into the presence of the living Lord. This example of zeal is similar to—if not greater than—that of the widow who importunately begged the unjust judge to deliver her from her adversary. (Lk 18:1-5). This means the fulfilling of the Lord's command to *cry day and night to God, until He hear them*. This is a proof of the truth of God's other command: *Knock, and it shall be opened unto you*. (Mt 7:7). This is, lastly, the explanation, of Christ's strange words: *The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*. (Mt 11:12). The Lord, then, demands of His faithful followers that they do all they can, that they exert all their strength, work while they have light, pray without ceasing, beg, seek, knock, fast and perform innumerable works of mercy, and all this so that the Kingdom of heaven—the great, fearsome and life-giving presence of God—may be opened to them. *Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, says the Lord, that ye may be accounted worthy ... to stand before the Son of Man*. (Lk 21:36).

Be watchful and vigilant over your heart, that it cleave not to the earth; be watchful over your thoughts, that they do not lead you away from God; be vigilant over your works, to double your talent and not let it diminish and disappear altogether; be vigilant over your days, that death come not upon you unawares and seize upon you unrepentant in your sins. This is our Orthodox faith: active, prayerful and watchful, permeated through and through with tears and with striving. No other faith demands such striving on the part of its faithful to be worthy to stand before the Son of God. It proposes these efforts to the whole world, but our Lord and Saviour Himself demanded them of the faithful, and the Church constantly repeats them from age to age, from generation to generation, holding up to the faithful the ever-greater number of spiritual warriors who fulfilled the law of Christ and were vouchsafed glory and inexpressible power both in heaven and on earth.

But on the other hand, we must not deceive ourselves, thinking that all man's efforts and strivings bring salvation of themselves. We must not imagine that a man will, by his efforts and striving alone, be able to come into the presence of the living God. If God does not will it, no mortal can ever come to stand before His face. For the Lord Himself, who ordained all this effort and striving, says in another place: *When ye shall have done all these things, which are commanded you, say: we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do*. (Lk 17:10). And in another place: *No man can come to Me except the Father... draw him*. (Jn 6:44). And again: *Without Me, ye can do nothing*. (Jn 15:5). And again, in another place: *By grace ye are saved*. (Eph 2:5).

What can we say after all this? Shall we say that all our striving for salvation is in vain? Shall we let our hands fall

and wait for the Lord Himself to place us, by His power, in His presence? Does not the Prophet Isaiah himself say: *All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags* (Isa 64:6)? Should we, then, leave aside all effort and striving? But would we not, then, become as that servant who dug, and hid his lord's talent in the ground, and at whom his lord, because of this, shouted: *Thou wicked and slothful servant!* (Mt 25:26). We must be sober, and exert ourselves to fulfil the Lord's clear commandments. We must exert ourselves to the full, but it is in God's power to bless our efforts and bring us into His presence. The Apostle Paul gave a wonderful explanation of this, when he said: *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*. (1 Cor 3:6-7). All, then, depends on God—on His power, wisdom and mercy. It is, though, for us to plant and to water, and we dare not abandon our duty without being in danger of eternal perdition.

It is a farmer's duty to plant and water, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not the seed will make shoots, grow and bring forth fruit.

It is a scientist's duty to examine and seek, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not knowledge will be revealed to him.

It is a parent's duty to bring up and educate his child in the fear of God, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy how long this child will live.

It is a priest's duty to teach, inform, reprimand and guide the faithful, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not the priest's efforts will bring forth fruit.

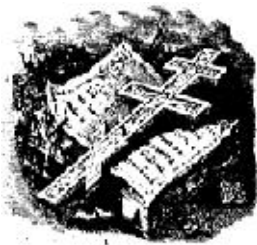
It is the duty of all of us to strive and endeavor to be made worthy to stand in the presence of the Son of God, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not we will be allowed near to the Lord.

But we must not strive without hope in God's mercy. May all our endeavors be illumined by the hope that the Lord is near us, and that He will receive us into the presence of the light of His countenance. There is no deeper and more inexhaustible fountain than the fountain of God's mercy. When the Prodigal Son repented after his terrible fall to the level of the swine, his merciful father went to meet him, embraced him and forgave him. God is tireless in going to meet His repentant children. He extends His hand to all who turn to face Him. *I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people* (Isa 65:2), the Lord said of the Jews. So, when the Lord holds out His hand to the rebellious, how would He not to the obedient? The obedient Prophet David says: *I have set God always before me; for He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall*. (Pss 16:9). To those, then, who are striving for their salvation, the Lord does not deny His presence.

Let us therefore not consider our endeavors to be in vain, as do the godless and those in despair, but let us, while striving

and making the greatest possible efforts, hope in the mercy of the Lord God. Let us especially re-double our efforts during the Great Fast, as the Holy Church recommends. May our path in this be lighted by the example of those four who climbed up onto the roof and tore it open, and let down the fifth, their friend sick of the palsy, before the Lord. If one fifth of our soul is paralyzed or sick, let us hasten with the healthy four-fifths before the Lord, and He will give health to the part within us that is sick. If one of our senses has been scandalized by this world, and been made ill from the shock, let us hasten with the other four senses before the Lord, that He may have pity on our sick sense and heal it. When one part of the body is sick, the doctor recommends two sorts of nursing: care, and the feeding-up of the rest of the body, so that the healthy part may become even stronger and more healthy, and can thus resist the sickness in the part that is ill. So it is with our souls. If we have doubt in our minds, let us strive in heart and soul to strengthen our faith and, with the Lord's help, to heal and strengthen our sick mind. If we have sinned through forgetting prayer, let us hasten, with works of mercy, to restore our lost prayerfulness—and the other way round.

And the Lord will see our faith, and our efforts and striving, and will take pity on us. And He, in His endless mercy, will let us come into His presence, into that immortal and life-giving presence by which the countless angelic hosts and the armies of the saints are given life, receive their strength and are imbued with joy. To our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be glory and praise, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity consubstantial and undivided, now and forever, through all time and all eternity. Amen.



When we reflect on what is promised us in heaven, everything we have on earth comes to appear worthless. When we compare our earthly possessions with the happiness of heaven, they seem a burden and not a help. When we compare our life in time with eternal life, we have to call it death rather than life. What is our daily decline into decomposition and decay but a kind of extension of death? Whose mind can grasp them? There we will take part with the choirs of angels, we will share with the blessed spirits in our Creator's glory, we will see the face of God before us and behold infinite light, we will feel no fear of death but rejoice in the gift of everlasting life!

St. Gregory the Great

## ON REMEMBRANCE OF DEATH

By St. John Climacus, *"The Ladder of Divine Ascent,"* revised edition (2001), Step 6, pp. 66-70.



Every word is preceded by thought. And the remembrance of death and sins precedes weeping and mourning. The remembrance of death is a daily death; and the remembrance of our departure is an hourly sighing or groaning.

Fear of death is a property of nature that comes from disobedience, but trembling at death is a sign of unrepented sins. Christ fears death, but does not tremble, in order to demonstrate clearly the properties of His two natures.

As of all foods, bread is the most essential, so the thought of death is the most necessary of all works. The remembrance of death amongst those in the midst of society gives birth to distress and meditation, and even more, to despondency. But amongst those who are free from noise, it produces the putting aside of cares and constant prayer and guarding of the mind. But these same virtues both produce the remembrance of death, and are also produced by it.

As tin is distinct from silver, although it resembles it in appearance, so for the discerning there is a clear and obvious difference between the natural and contra-natural fear of death. A true sign of those who are mindful of death in the depth of their being is a voluntary detachment from every creature and complete renunciation of their own will. He who with undoubting trust daily expects death is virtuous; but he who hourly yields himself to it is a saint.

Not every desire for death is good. Some, constantly sinning from force of habit, pray for death with humility. And some, who do not want to repent, invoke death out of despair. And some out of self-esteem consider themselves dispassionate, and for a while have no fear of death. And some (if such can now be found), through the action of the Holy Spirit, ask for their departure.

Some inquire and wonder: "Why, when the remembrance of death is so beneficial for us, has God hidden from us the knowledge of the hour of death?"—not knowing that in this way God wonderfully accomplishes our salvation. For no one who foreknew his death would at once proceed to baptism or the monastic life; but everyone would spend all his days in iniquities, and only on the day of his death would he approach baptism and repentance. From long habit, he

would become confirmed in vice, and would remain utterly incorrigible.

Never, when mourning for your sins, accept that cur which suggests to you that God is tender-hearted (this thought is useful only when you see yourself being dragged down to deep despair). For the aim of the enemy is to thrust from you your mourning and fearless fear.

Anyone who wishes to retain within him continually the remembrance of death and God's judgment, and at the same time yields to material cares and distractions, is like a man who is swimming and wants to clap his hands. A vivid remembrance of death cuts down food; and when in humility food is cut, the passions are cut out too. Insensibility of heart dulls the mind, and abundance of food dries the fountains of tears. Thirst and vigil afflict the heart, and when the heart is afflicted the waters flow. The things we have said will seem cruel to epicures and incredible to the indolent; but a man of action will readily test them and he who has found them out by experience will smile at them. But he who is still seeking will become more gloomy.

Just as the Fathers lay down that perfect love is free from falls, so I for my part declare that a perfect sense of death is free from fear.

There are many activities for an active mind. I mean, meditation on the love of God, on the remembrance of God, on the remembrance of the Kingdom, on the remembrance of the zeal of the holy martyrs, on the remembrance of God Himself present according to him who said: *I beheld the Lord ever before me.* (Pss 15:8); on remembrance of the holy and spiritual powers, on remembrance of one's departure, judgment, sentence and punishment. We began with the sublime, but have ended with things that never fail.

An Egyptian monk once told me: "After I had established in my heart the remembrance of death, whenever need arose and I wanted to comfort the clay a little, this remembrance prevented me like a judge. And the wonderful thing was that, even though I wanted to thrust it away, I was quite unable to do so." Another who lived here in the place called Thola, often went into ecstasy at the thought of death; and the brothers who found him would lift him and carry him off scarcely breathing, like one who had fainted or had an epileptic fit.

And I cannot be silent about the story of Hesychius the Horebite. He passed his life in complete negligence, without paying the least attention to his soul. Then he became extremely ill, and for an hour he expired. And when he came to himself, he begged us all to leave him immediately. And he built up the door of his cell, and he stayed in it for twelve years without ever uttering a word to anyone, and without eating anything but bread and water. And, always remaining motionless, he was so rapt in spirit at what he had seen in his ecstasy, that he never changed this manner of life but was always as if out of his mind, and silently shed hot tears. But

when he was about to die, we broke open the door and went in, and after many questions, this alone was all we heard from him: "Forgive me! No one who has acquired the remembrance of death will ever be able to sin." We were amazed to see that one who had before been so negligent was so suddenly transfigured by this blessed change and transformation. We reverently buried him in the cemetery, near the fort<sup>1</sup>, and after some days we looked for his holy relics, but did not find them. So by Flesychius' true and praiseworthy repentance, the Lord showed us that He accepts those who desire to amend, even after long negligence.

Just as some declare that the abyss is infinite, for they call it a bottomless pit, so is the thought of death boundless, laying hold of chastity and activity. The above-mentioned saint confirms the truth of what has been said. For such men, unceasingly adding fear to fear, do not stop until the very strength of their bones is spent.

Let us rest assured that the remembrance of death, like all other blessings, is a gift of God; since how is it that often, when we are at the very tombs, we are left tearless and hard; and frequently when we have no such sight, we are full of compunction?

He who has died to all things remembers death, but whoever is still tied to the world does not cease plotting against himself. Do not wish to assure everyone in words of your love for them, but rather ask God to show them your love without words. Otherwise, time will not suffice you for both intimacies and compunction.

Do not deceive yourself, foolish worker, as if one time can make up for another. For the day is not sufficient to repay in full its own debt to the Lord. It is impossible, someone says, impossible to spend the present day devoutly unless we regard it as the last of our whole life. And it is truly astonishing how even the Greeks have said something of the sort, since they define philosophy as meditation death.

This is the sixth step. He who has mounted it will never sin again. *Remember thy last, and thou shall never sin unto eternity.* (Sir 7:36).

† † †

[1] Justinian built a fort on Mount Sinai as well as a church and monastery (Procopius, *De aedificiis*, V, viii). Today the fort is represented by the Monastery of Mount Sinai; cf. E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (1887), *Kastron*, Clim. P.G., 88, 79A, 812B.



It is truly astounding how the incorporeal mind can be defiled and darkened by the body. Equally astonishing is the fact that the immaterial spirit can be purified and refined by clay.

St. John Climacus



## ORTHODOXY AND FAITH

By Protopresbyter Fr. George D. Metallinos, Professor Emeritus of the Athens University, from his book "Philokalian Distinction between Orthodoxy and Heresy," ch. 8.

It is understood that Orthodoxy is always closely linked to faith. Thus, we speak of the "right and true faith," in order to distinguish it from the "adulterated faith." Orthodoxy is the true glory and glorification of God—the genuine notion of God—while a heresy is a manufactured glory, a morbid glorification of God. Orthodoxy and heresy thus confront each other in the area of Faith, and that is exactly where they diversify. What, therefore, is "faith" and how is it perceived in the life of the Church as the Body of Christ?

First of all, "faith" in the language of theology signifies divine revelation; it is that which is revealed to man, by God—it is the content of the revealed, Divine Truth (*Fides quae creditur*). However, Divine Revelation is not an abstract thing, that is to say, a collection of intellectually conceived truths, ideas and basic positions that man is called upon to accept, in order to be saved. Such is the Scholastic view of faith, which has infiltrated our Dogmatics also. The Truth of the Church is a Person; it is the incarnated Son and Logos of God; it is the incarnate All-Truth. It is the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The unknown and unapproachable God became (and continues to become) known, ever since the beginning of Creation, in Christ. In other words, God discloses Himself; He is self-revealed, *in multilateral and resourceful ways* (Heb 1:1), the culmination being His self-revelation *in the Son*—the incarnation of His Son—which was the prerequisite for the event of Pentecost, for the sake of which Creation (according to the Saints) was "composed." The Pentecost is God's supreme revelation in the Holy Spirit, and man's experience within history.

Christ, as a God-Human, is in a certain way the "objective" faith, which is offered *from above*, so that we may come to know God *in Himself* (see Jn 14:9—*whomsoever has seen Me, has seen the Father*). He is our "hypostatic" (=personal) faith, according to Saint Maximus the Confessor. We become *faithful* by participating in that personal and incarnated Faith (i.e., Christ). Only in Christ can there be a possibility to know the true God. And that is what establishes Orthodoxy's uniqueness and exclusivity, in the event known as *salvation*. (Acts 4:12)

To the revealed Faith, which is "accredited" to man for his salvation, man reciprocates with his own (subjective) Faith (*Fides qua creditur*). Man's faith is absolutely essential, in order for God's power to function inside man; to lead him to salvation. Its significance is stressed by Christ Himself: *Whosoever believes and is baptized shall be saved; whosoever disbelieves shall be reproached*. (Mk 16:16). The "objective" Faith must necessarily be transformed into man's "subjec-

tive" Faith, for his salvation. And that is effected, through the *indwelling* (Rom 8:9 ... *if the Spirit of God dwells within you ...*) of the "objective" Faith; in other words, the *indwelling* of the Uncreated inside the created; of God inside man. Man is invited by Christ to become "faithful", to be receptive of the revealed-in-Christ Truth as a "life in Christ", and to live that Truth, so that he too may become "true," just as Christ is *the true One* (1 Jn 5:20). Man's salvation is when he is rendered "true," and the prerequisite for this, is his union with the true God.

A faith that is Orthodox is the one that acts *soteriologically*. And that is the precise point where heresy differentiates itself from Orthodoxy. "Heresy" is the adulteration of the faith and its retraction at the same time, because it is adulterating the faith in two directions: on the one hand, with regard to the "believed" (Christ) and on the other, with regard to its manner of accepting Christ. In a heresy, Christ is segmented and is accepted, not in whole but segmentally, by a segmented—not whole—person, because He is approached only by man's intellect and his lips, while the heart and man's entire existence is *a long way off* from God (Mt 15:8). A heresy (every heresy) is not only a false teaching; it is literally a non-Orthodoxy and a non-Christianity. By approaching the matter in this way, we disentangle ourselves from the confessional disagreements of the past and their scholastic terminology. After all, what is of primary concern is not how false a teaching might be, but whether it is capable of healing man (as Fr. Romanides used to teach); whether it is capable of saving him.

Thus, one could say in conclusion—with regard to the process of the event called "faith"—that faith begins as a logical-intellectual process, in the sense of an external affirmation by man, progressing as an acceptance of God's offer and a loyalty towards Him, to be fulfilled however, with an internal certainty and cognizance of God, in Christ. These are the exact basic meanings—linguistically—contained in the term "faith" (*pistis*) in the Greek language, the language of the Gospels: *em-pisto-syni* (trust), *pisto-tita* (fidelity, faithfulness), *vevaiotita* (certainty, confidence).



All Truths of Orthodoxy emerge from one truth and converge in one truth, infinite and eternal. That truth is the God-man Christ. If you experience Orthodoxy to its limit, you will inevitably discover that its kernel is the God-man Christ. In fact, all the truths of Orthodoxy are nothing other than different aspects of the one Truth - the God-man Christ.

St. Justin Popovich

## THE HOLY AND GREAT FAST

### THE GREAT FAST'S HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Source: "The Lenten Triodion," St. Tikhon's Seminary Press (2001), pp. 28-34.

Lent, as it exists today in the Orthodox Church, is the result of a long historical development, of which no more than a brief summary is offered in this article. The portion of the Church's Year covered by the Lenten Triodion falls into three periods:

1. *The Pre-Lenten Period*: three preparatory Sundays (the Publican and the Pharisee; the Prodigal Son; the Last Judgment), followed by a preliminary week of partial fasting, ending with the Sunday of Forgiveness.

2. *The Forty Days of the Great Fast*: beginning on Monday in the first week (or, more exactly, at Sunday Vespers on the evening before), and ending with the Ninth Hour on Friday in the sixth week.

3. *Holy and Great Week*, preceded by the Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday.

The third of these three periods, the Paschal fast of Holy Week, is the most ancient, for it was already in existence during the second and third centuries. The fast of forty days is mentioned in sources from the first half of the fourth century onwards. The pre-Lenten period developed latest of all: the earliest references to a preliminary week of partial fasting are in the sixth or seventh century, but the observance of the other three preparatory Sundays did not become universal in the Greek East until the tenth or eleventh century.

#### The Paschal Fast in the Second and Third Centuries

In the second century it was the custom for Christians in both East and West to observe, immediately before Easter Sunday, a short fast of one or two days, either on Saturday only or on Friday and Saturday together. This was specifically a Paschal fast in preparation for the service of Easter night. It was a fast of sorrow at the absence of the Bridegroom, in fulfillment of Christ's own words: *But the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.* (Mk 2:20). The fast, whether of one or two days, was in principle a total one, without any food or drink being taken at all.

By the middle of the third century, this Paschal fast had in many places been extended to embrace the entire week from Monday to Saturday. There was, however, no uniformity of practice, and some Christians fasted for less than the full six days. Only a few managed to keep a total fast throughout the whole period. In some places it was the practice to eat bread and salt, with water, at the ninth hour (3 p.m.) on the four days from Monday until Thursday, and then to keep, if possible, a total fast on Friday and Saturday; but not all the faithful were as strict as this.

In this six-day Paschal fast may be seen the distant origins of Holy Week; but the developed ritual to which we are accustomed, with special commemorations on each day of the week, is not found until the late fourth century. During the pre-Nicene period, there seems to have been a unitary celebration of Christ's death and rising, considered as a single mystery, at the Paschal vigil lasting from Saturday evening until Easter Sunday morning. Friday was kept as a fast in preparation for this vigil, but it had not yet become a distinct and specific commemoration of the Crucifixion; the Cross and the Resurrection were celebrated together during Easter night.

#### The Fast of Forty Days

There is no evidence of a forty-day fast in the pre-Nicene period. The first explicit reference to such a fast is in Canon 5 of the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.), where it is treated as something familiar and established, not as an innovation on the part of the Council. By the end of the fourth century the observance of a forty-day fast seems to have been the standard practice in most parts of Christendom, but in some places—possibly including Rome—a shorter fast may have been kept.

This forty-day fast, found in evidence from the fourth century onwards, differs somewhat in scope and character from the one-week fast of the pre-Nicene period, and the precise relationship between the two is not easy to determine. It has been suggested that the forty-day fast was originally connected with Epiphany rather than Easter; but the evidence for this seems inconclusive. It is, however, clear that whereas the pre-Nicene fast was specifically a Paschal observance in preparation for Easter, the forty-day fast was connected more particularly with the final preparation of the catechumens for the sacrament of Baptism or *illumination*. In the weeks before their baptismal initiation, the candidates underwent a period of intensive training, with daily instruction, special services and fasting. The existing members of the church community were encouraged to share with the catechumens in this prayer and abstinence, thus renewing year by year their baptismal dedication to Christ. Therefore, the forty-day fast came to involve the whole body of the faithful, and not just those preparing for Baptism.

Lent, as we know it, is thus the result of a convergence between these two elements—between the six-day pre-Nicene fast, which was directly in preparation for Easter, and the forty-day post-Nicene fast, which originally formed part of the training of candidates for Baptism. It was natural that these two elements should become fused into a single observance, for they both have the same endpoint—the night of Holy Saturday. The Paschal vigil on this night, in celebration of the death, burial and rising of Christ, was for obvious reasons chosen as the occasion for administering Baptism; for this sacrament is precisely an initiation into the Lord's Cross and His Resurrection. (see Rom 6:3-4).

Today in most parts of the Church there is no organized catechumenate, and it is customary to administer Baptism on many other occasions besides the night of Holy Saturday; yet the baptismal significance of Lent has still a living importance. For every member of the Christian community, Lent is a time of spiritual training and renewed *illumination*. It is a time to realize afresh that, by virtue of our baptismal initiation, we are crucified, buried and risen with Christ; it is a time to reapply to ourselves the words of St. Paul, *I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.* (Gal 2:20). It is a time for us to listen more closely to the voice of the Spirit in whom we were sealed at our Chrismation, immediately after our “burial” in the baptismal waters.

The choice of the number forty for the days of Lent has obvious Biblical precedents. The people of Israel spent forty years in the wilderness (Exod 16:35); Moses remained fasting for forty days on Mount Sinai (Exod 34:28); Elijah abstained from all food for forty days as he journeyed to Mount Horeb. (Kgs 19:8). Most important of all Christ fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. (Mt 4:1).

However, how are the forty days to be computed? In the fourth and fifth centuries, the manner of reckoning varied. Some kept a fast of six weeks, some of seven or even eight. Three points arose:

- (a) Is Holy Week included in the forty days, or treated as a distinct and additional period?
- (b) Is Saturday regarded as a day of fasting?
- (c) Are the forty days reckoned continuously, including Saturdays and Sundays? Or, is Sunday excluded from the calculation, and Saturday also, if this is considered not to be a day of fasting?

Divergent answers to these three questions account for present-day differences between the Western and the Orthodox Lent. At Rome Holy Week was included as part of the forty days, Saturday was regarded as a day of fasting, but in calculating the number forty all Sundays were excluded from the reckoning. This produced a six-week fast of six days in each week, constituting a total of thirty-six days. To make up the full measure of forty days, four further days of fasting were then added at the beginning, with the result that Lent in the West commences on a Wednesday.

At Constantinople, on the other hand, Holy Week—together with the Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday—was not regarded as part of the forty-day fast in the strict sense. At Vespers on Friday evening in the sixth week, immediately

preceding the Saturday of Lazarus, the distinction between the forty days and Holy Week is very clearly marked in the existing text of the Triodion:

*Having completed the forty days that bring profit to our soul,  
We beseech Thee in Thy love for man,  
Grant us to behold the Holy Week of Thy Passion...*

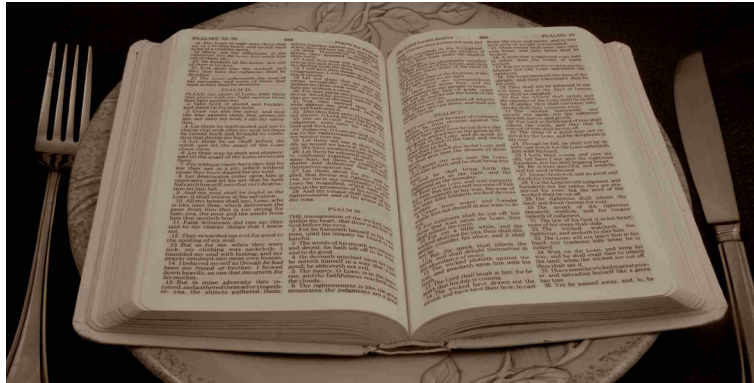
At Constantinople and in the East generally, Saturdays, with the one exception of Holy Saturday, were not considered days of fasting. However, in reckoning the number forty it was the custom to count continuously, including Saturdays and Sundays in the calculation. Thus the forty days began on the first Monday in Lent and ended on Friday in the sixth week; then came Lazarus Saturday, Palm Sunday and Holy Week, which, while distinct from the forty days, were treated as part of the Lenten Fast in the broader sense. In this way the forty days and Holy Week together constituted a fast of seven weeks. Therefore, it is that Lent begins on Ash Wednesday in Western Christendom, while commencing in the East two days earlier on Monday.

Christians in the Greek East, however, while as a rule counting the forty days continuously, have sometimes chosen to exclude Saturday and Sunday from the calculation. With Holy Week included in the reckoning, this resulted in a seven-week

fast of five days in each week, adding up to thirty-five days. But since Holy Saturday is a day of fasting, this also was included, bringing the total number of days to thirty-six. As we have seen, the West before the addition of the four preliminary days likewise had a thirty-six day fast, although computed in a somewhat different manner. In both East and West this number of thirty-six has been given a symbolical meaning. Just as the Israelites dedicated to God a tithe or tenth of their produce, so Christians dedicate the season of Lent to God as a tithe or tenth of the year. The part is offered in token of the whole by rendering back to God a tenth of what He has given to us, we call down His blessing upon the remainder and acknowledge that all material goods and all moments of time are a gift from His hand. This notion of Lent as a *tithe or first-fruits of the year* is not much emphasized in the existing text of the Triodion, but it is mentioned in the *Synaxarion* for the Sunday of Forgiveness.

#### The Completion of the Pattern

In Constantinople from the sixth or seventh century onwards, there arose the practice of adding, before the seven weeks of the fast, an eighth or preliminary week of modified fasting. In our translation of the Triodion, we have termed



this the “Week before Lent”; it is often styled *Cheese Week* or the *Week without Meat*, because during these days meat is forbidden but cheese and other dairy products are permitted. This preliminary week was added, among other reasons, from the same motive as led to the addition of four extra days at the start of Western Lent: so as to make up the full number forty. In the West, a six-week fast of six days in each week left four days missing from the requisite total. At Constantinople, on the other hand, the days of Lent were (as we have seen) reckoned continuously and so there was no need of a further preliminary period to produce the total of forty days. But Christians in Palestine calculated in terms of eight weeks, with five days of fasting in each week (no special account being taken of Holy Saturday for the purposes of this reckoning); and so they needed an additional week at the beginning of Lent. The observance of *Cheese Week* in the existing Triodion represents a compromise between the Constantinopolitan and the Palestinian practice: for *Cheese Week* is to be considered part of the fast, and yet it is not fully within Lent.

During the sixth-eleventh centuries, the season of pre-Lenten preparation was gradually expanded to include three other preliminary Sundays: the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, ten weeks before Easter; following it, the Sunday of the Prodigal Son; and then the Sunday of the Last Judgement immediately before the beginning of *Cheese Week*. Together with the Sunday of Forgiveness at the end of *Cheese Week*, this makes four preliminary Sundays in all. In this way, the full pattern of the Lenten season was completed. The Triodion, as we now have it, opens with the latest Sunday to be added, that of the Publican and the Pharisee.



Special services, special foods, continence, not going to dances and events, all this awakes one to piety and reflection on our present purpose, on the past and on eternity. Seeing in ourselves a falling away from the commandments of God, we try to reconcile ourselves to God through repentance and communion of the most pure and life-giving mysteries of Christ, which burn the thorns of our sins. You, when you have not fulfilled this duty during the year, of course will fulfill it during the Fast. The most merciful Lord loved us so much, that He gave us, through food and drink, His most pure Body and life-giving Blood, as a token of life eternal and the incorrupt future feast. Let us offer Him thanksgiving with pure hearts, lips and acts!

St. Macarius of Optina

## SPIRITUAL COUNSEL

By Archbishop Theophan of Poltava (+1940).

### On How to Keep the Great Lent



The general order and spirit of this time are beautifully expressed in the services and the Lenten *typicon*. You have only to immerse yourself in it and to follow the external discipline as much as your strength allows; in this way you will fulfill all that is necessary. Your main concern should be to concentrate your life on God. In order to do this, you must, as far as possible, withdraw from worldly distractions, worldly occupations.

You must keep in mind that life in God has several stages. It begins with a suffering awareness of one’s sinfulness; this is followed by a striving to rid oneself of this sinful state, until finally, one attains blessed communion with God. It is especially fitting to devote the first week of Great Lent to the realization of one’s sinfulness. The feeling of blessed communion with God comes to us naturally in the days of holy Pascha—we cannot force this ourselves. The strength of this feeling depends on the intensity of the initial experience—that is, our awareness of our sinful state. The rest of Great Lent is a time of gradual ascent from the first stage to the last.

### Concerning Fatigue During Prayer and the Purpose of Epitimia

You ask: “What should I do so that extreme fatigue does not affect my concentration during prayer?” As you do not specify whether you are asking about private or common prayer, I will answer concerning both.

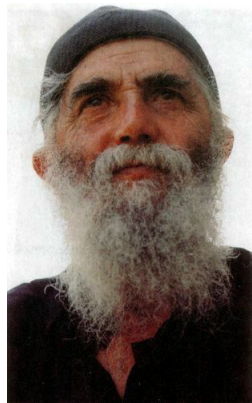
When fatigue begins to overcome you during a church service, you should mentally recite the Jesus Prayer. It will help you concentrate in prayer. If you feel yourself getting tired during prayer at home, then you should force yourself a bit. If the fatigue disappears, then it was a temptation from the evil one. If it remains, then you may shorten your prayer; it is better in such cases to pray a bit less but attentively and with feeling.

“At confession Fr. V. told me to do a few prostrations when I notice that I am sinning or am un-attentive. I wanted to ask you about this previously and now ask for your direction.”

This is beneficial with a proper understanding of the matter. An *epitimia* is not a punishment for a misdemeanor in the legalistic sense of the word. It is a spiritual method of healing, having as its purpose a person’s deliverance from a spiritual ailment.

## Μὴ Φοβηθῆτε, θὰ Βοηθήσῃ ὁ Θεός!

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ νεοκυκλοφορηθέν βιβλίον «Λόγος Γέροντος Παΐσιου, Περί προσευχῆς».



### - Γέροντα θὰ γίνῃ πόλεμος;

- Ἔσεῖς κάνετε προσευχή; Ἐγὼ ἔχω ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνοιξὴ μέχρι τὸ φθινόπωρο ποὺ κάνω ἐπιστράτευση προσευχῆς—ἐντελῶς ἀθόρυβα—γιὰ νὰ μᾶς λυπηθῇ ὁ Θεός, νὰ ἀποφύγουμε τὴν ἐπιστράτευση καὶ τὸν πόλεμο. Εἶχα πληροφορία: «Κάνετε πολλὴ προσευχή, γιὰ νὰ ἐμποδιστοῦν οἱ Τοῦρκοι, διότι τὴν Κυριακὴ 16ῆ Ὀκτωβρίου, ἔχουν σκοπὸ νὰ μᾶς χτυπήσουν». (Αὐτὸ εἰπώθηκε τὸν Νοέμβριο τοῦ 1983. Ἡ πληροφορία δὲν ἦταν ἀνθρώπινη ἀλλὰ Θεϊκὴ.) Δόξα τῷ Θεῷ, μέχρι στιγμῆς μᾶς φύλαξε ἡ Παναγία, ἧς εὐχηθοῦμε νὰ μᾶς προστατεύσει καὶ στὴ συνέχεια.

- Γέροντα, τώρα ποῦ πέρασε ἀπὸ ἐδῶ ὁ κίνδυνος, θὰ συνεχίσουμε νὰ προσευχώμαστε γι' αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα;

- Μήπως ὑπάρχει τόπος χωρὶς πόλεμο; Τί θὰ πῆ «ἐδῶ» καὶ «ἐκεῖ»; Καὶ ἐκεῖ ποὺ τώρα ἔχουν πόλεμο ἀδελφοί μας εἶναι. Ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀδάμ καὶ τὴν Εὐά δὲν εἴμαστε ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι; Μοιράστηκε ὅμως ἡ οἰκογένειά μας, ἄλλοι εἶναι ἐδῶ, ἄλλοι ἐκεῖ. Μὲ τοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους εἴμαστε ἀδελφοὶ καὶ κατὰ σάρκα καὶ κατὰ πνεῦμα, ἐνῶ μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους εἴμαστε ἀδελφοὶ μόνον κατὰ σάρκα. Ἐπομένως, γιὰ ἓναν λόγο παραπάνω, πρέπει νὰ προσευχώμαστε μὲ περισσότερο πόνο γι' αὐτούς, γιατί αὐτοὶ εἶναι πιὸ ταλαιπώροι.

- Γέροντα, αὐτὸ τὸ διάστημα ποὺ τὰ πράγματα εἶναι δύσκολα γιὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, κάνω πολὺ κομποσχοῖνι, ἀλλὰ σκέφτομαι καὶ ὅτι ἡ σωτηρία τῆς Ἑλλάδας δὲν κρέμεται ἀπὸ τὸ κομποσχοῖνι μου.

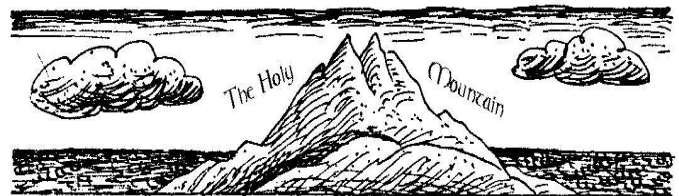
- Δὲν εἶναι ὅτι ἡ σωτηρία τῆς Ἑλλάδας κρεμάστηκε ἀπὸ τὸ κομποσχοῖνι σου, ἀλλὰ τὸ νὰ σκέφτεσαι συνέχεια τὴν δυσκολία ποὺ περνάει ἡ Ἑλλάδα σημαίνει ὅτι πονᾷς τὴν πατρίδα καὶ ζητᾷς τὴν ἐπέμβαση τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Ὅποιος εἶναι ὁ Μόνος ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ βοηθήσει.

Νὰ προσεύχεσθε νὰ ἀναδειξῇ ὁ Θεὸς πνευματικὸς ἀνθρώπους, Μακκαβαίους, γιατί ὑπάρχει μεγάλη ἀνάγκη. Ἦρθε ὁ καιρὸς νὰ πολεμήσῃ τὸ καλὸ μὲ τὸ κακό, γιατί τὴν παρανομία τὴν ἔχουν κάνει νόμο καὶ τὴν ἁμαρτία μόδα. Ὅταν ὅμως δεῖτε συμφορὲς στὴν Ἑλλάδα, τὸ κράτος νὰ βγάξῃ παλαβοὺς νόμους καὶ νὰ ὑπάρχῃ γενικὴ ἀστάθεια, μὴ φοβηθῆτε, θὰ βοηθήσῃ ὁ Θεός.

- Ἔτσι ὅπως τὰ λέτε, Γέροντα, πρέπει νὰ τὰ ἀφήσουμε ὅλα καὶ νὰ δώσουμε τὶς δυνάμεις μας στὴν προσευχή.

- Μά, χωράει συζήτηση γι' αὐτὸ τὸ πράγμα; Ὅλος ὁ κόσμος βράζει σὰν σὲ καζάνι. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ πολιτεία, ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη εἶναι ἄνω-κάτω! Καὶ τί ἐξέλιξη θὰ ἔχουμε κάνεις δὲν τὸ ξέρει. Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ βάλει τὸ χέρι του! Πρέπει οἱ καλόγεροι νὰ κάνουν πολὺ προσευχή. Καὶ ἐπείγουσες δουλειὲς ἂν ἔχουν νὰ τὶς σταματήσουν ὅλες καὶ νὰ στραφοῦν στὴν προσευχή.

Ὅσο μπορεῖτε, νὰ εὐχεσθε ταπεινὰ γιὰ τὸν κόσμο ποὺ ἔδωσε πολλὰ δικαιώματα στὸν πονηρὸ καὶ ταλαιπωρεῖται. Νὰ μὴ ξεχνᾷτε ὅτι γίναμε μοναχοὶ γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς μας καὶ γιὰ νὰ βοηθήσουμε τὸν κόσμο μὲ τὴν προσευχή. Νὰ προσπαθήσουμε νὰ γίνουμε καλοὶ μοναχοί, νὰ κάνουμε κομποσχοῖνι καὶ μετάνοιες γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας καὶ τὸν κόσμο, γιατί ὁ μοναχὸς μὲ αὐτὰ βοηθάει.



Ἀδελφοί μου συναμαρτωλοί! Ἄς τὸ ἐννοήσωμεν, αἱ ἡμέραι μας εἶναι ὡσεὶ αἱ ἡμέραι Νῶε. Δὲν πηγαίνομεν καθόλου καλά. Τὰ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν ηὐξήθησαν, ὁ διεθνὴς ὀρίζων θολοῦται, μαῦρα σύννεφα συμπυκνώνονται, κεραυνοὶ πίπτουν, ἀστραπταὶ φαίνονται, ἐκροαὶ πολέμων ἀκούονται, τὰ ἔθνη ἀνάστατα, νομίζεις ὅτι ἀπὸ στιγμὴν εἰς στιγμὴν θ' ἀνοιξοῦν οἱ καταρράκται τοῦ οὐρανοῦ διὰ νὰ ρίξουν ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς τῶν ἀνόμων, ὄλων μας, ὄχι πλέον ὕδωρ, ἀλλὰ πῦρ ποὺ θὰ καίῃ χιλιάκις τοῦ ἡλίου. Ὅλιγος καιρὸς μᾶς δίδεται ὡς προθεσμία.

Τι πρέπει νὰ κάμωμεν; Νὰ ἀκούσωμεν τὴν φωνὴν τῆς σωτηρίας. Ποία ἡ φωνή; Εἶνε ἡ φωνή, ἡ ὁποία εἶπε εἰς τὸν Νῶε: «**Εἴσελθε σὺ καὶ πᾶς ὁ οἶκος σου εἰς τὴν κιβωτόν**». Ἡ ἰδία φωνὴ λέγει τώρα καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς χριστιανούς Ἑλληνας: **Ἑλληνας! Εἰσελθετε τὸ ταχύτερον εἰς τὴν κιβωτόν**. Ἴδου ἔρχεται παγκόσμιος θύελλα διὰ νὰ σαρώσῃ τὸν κόσμον. **Κιβωτὸς δέ, ὅπως ἀπεδείχθη καὶ εἰς ἄλλας περιστάσεις τῆς φυλῆς μας, εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία**. Αὕτη εἶναι τὸ πλοῖον ποὺ ὅποιος εἰσέλθῃ ἐγκαίρως θὰ σωθῇ. Τὸ πλοῖον αὐτὸ ταξειδεύει εἴκοσι αἰῶνας. Δὲν φοβεῖται τρικυμίας καὶ θύελλας. Κατάρτι εἶναι ὁ Τίμιος Σταυρός. Ἄγκυρα ἡ ἐλπίς. Τιμόνι τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον, οἱ Κανόνες, ἡ διδασκαλία τῶν Πατέρων. Καὶ πλοίαρχος ὁ Χριστός, ποὺ ζεῖ καὶ βασιλεύει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

**Μητρο. Φλωρίνης π. Αὐγουστίνος Καντιώτης**

## Ἡ Ἀθλιότης τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου

Τοῦ μακαριστοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης π. Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010).



Διδάσκει, ἀγαπητοί μου, ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς σὲ μία συναγωγή τῆς Παλαιστίνης. Εἶνε ὁ Διδάσκαλος, ὁ μοναδικὸς διδάσκαλος τοῦ κόσμου. Τὰ λόγια του δροσιά, σταλαζοῦν μύρο, σκορποῦν χαρά. Τὸν ἀκοῦνε, εὐφραίνονται καὶ δοξάζουν τὸ Θεό. «*Οὐδέποτε οὕτως ἐλάλησεν ἄνθρωπος, ὡς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος*». (Ἰω. 7:46).

Ἄλλ' ἐνῶ ὁ Χριστὸς διδάσκει, σὲ μιὰ γωνιὰ τῆς συναγωγῆς κάτι κινεῖται μὲ τὰ τέσσερα. Ζῶο εἶνε; Ὅχι, ἄνθρωπος. Καὶ τί ἔπαθε, ὥστε τὸ σῶμα του ἔγινε καμπύλη πού τὰ δύο ἄκρα τῆς ἀγγίξουν τὴ γῆ; Πῶς πήρε μορφή ζῶου; Ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς Λουκᾶς, πού ἦταν καὶ γιατρός, λέει: «*Καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ ἦν πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας ἔτη δέκα καὶ ὀκτώ, καὶ ἦν συγκύπτουσα καὶ μὴ δυναμένη ἀνακῆσαι εἰς τὸ παντελές*». (Λουκ. 13:11).

Ἡ γυναίκα αὐτὴ θὰ ἦταν κάποτε ὠραία, ὄρθια σὰν κυπαρίσσι. Ἄλλ' ὁ σατανᾶς τὴ φθόνησε. Εἰσχώρησε στὸν ὄργανισμό τῆς δαμονικῶ πνεῦμα, «*πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας*». Ὅπως ἐμεῖς λυγίζουμε ἓνα ἔλασμα, ἔτσι ὁ κακοῦργος τῆς ἔκαμψε τὴ σπονδυλικὴ στήλη, κι ἀπὸ τὴ μέρα ἐκεῖνη δὲν ὕψωσε πλέον τὸ κεφάλι τῆς.

Σπανίως βέβαια παρουσιάζεται τὸ φαινόμενο ἄντρας ἢ γυναίκα νὰ περπατοῦν σὰν τετράποδα. Ἄλλ' ἐὰν τὸ φαινόμενο τέτοιων ἀσθενῶν στὸ σῶμα εἶναι σπάνιο, δὲν εἶναι ὅμως σπάνιοι ἐκεῖνοι πού ἡ ψυχικὴ τους κατάστασι μοιάζει μὲ τὴν κατάστασι τῆς γυναίκας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. Ἄλλοίμονο, πόσοι καὶ πόσες εἶναι μὲν ὄρθιοι στὸ σῶμα, ἀλλ' ἔχουν τὴν ψυχὴ συγκύπτουσα, νὰ σέρνεται πρὸς τὴ γῆ! Οἱ δύστυχοι ἔχουν τσακίσει τὴν ἠθικὴ καὶ θρησκευτικὴ στήλη τους· δὲ ζοῦν σὰν ἄνθρωποι, ζοῦν σὰν ἄλογα ζῶα, πολλὰ φορὲς χειρότερα κι ἀπ' αὐτά.

Γιὰ τὴν ἀθλιότητα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὅπως αὐτὴ εἰκονίζεται στὸ παράδειγμα τῆς συγκυπτούσης γυναίκας, ἄς ποῦμε λίγες λέξεις.

Ἡ λέξι ἀνθρωπος, ἀγαπητοί μου, ἔχει σπουδαία σημασία. Ἡ ἀρχαία Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα, πού διακρίνεται γιὰ τὴν ἀκρίβειά της, ἔδωσε τὸ ὄνομα αὐτὸ στὸ τελειότερο ἀπὸ τὰ δημιουργήματα. Ἀπὸ δύο λέξεις, *ἄνω + θρώσκειν* (=ἄνω τρέχειν), σχηματίσθηκε ἡ λέξι ἀνθρωπος, πού φανερῶνει ἔτσι τὴν εὐγένεια, τὴν ὑψηλὴ καταγωγή καὶ τὸν προορισμὸ του. Ἀνάμεσα στὰ ζῶα, πού περπατοῦν μὲ τὰ τέσσερα

κ' ἔχουν τὸ κεφάλι πρὸς τὴ γῆ ψάχνοντας γιὰ ὑλικὴ τροφή, μόνο ὁ ἄνθρωπος πλάστηκε νὰ στέκη καὶ νὰ περπατᾷ ὄρθιος. Βλέπει ψηλά, στὸν οὐρανό, κι ἀπὸ τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς φύσεως πού ἀπλώνεται ἔμπρὸς του παρακινεῖται νὰ δοξολογῇ τὸν Πλάστη του. Γίνεται ὑπιπέτης.

Ἄλλὰ τί συμφορά! Ἡ εὐγενὴς αὐτὴ ῥοπή ἀνακόπτεται. Μία μυστηριώδης δύναμις σταματᾷ τὴν πορεία πρὸς τὰ ἄνω, λυγίζει τὸ αὐτεξούσιο, τὴ θέλησί του, καὶ ὑποχρεώνει τὶς δυνάμεις τῆς ψυχῆς ν' ἀλλάξουν κατεύθυνσι, νὰ στραφοῦν πρὸς τὰ κάτω. Καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, πού διέγραφε φωτεινοὺς κύκλους γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ θρόνο τοῦ Ὑψίστου καὶ τρεφόταν μὲ ἀμβροσία καὶ νέκταρ καὶ ἔψαλλε τὸ «*ὡσαννὰ*» καὶ τὸ «*ἀλληλουῖα*», δὲν μπορεῖ πιά νὰ σταθῇ στὸ ὕψος, ἀλλὰ γκρεμίζεται· σὰ νὰ τῆς ἔδεσαν μολύβδινη σφαῖρα, πέφτει μὲ ὀρμή, ἀγγίζει τὴ γῆ, τρώει χῶμα, κυλιέται στὸ βόρβορο, γίνεται συγκύπτουσα τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, μὴ «*δυναμένη ἀνακῆσαι εἰς τὸ παντελές*».

Ὅποιος ἔχει ψυχὴ πού ἔρπει πρὸς ὅ,τι ἀμαρτωλὸ καὶ χυδαῖο, δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ λέγεται ἄνθρωπος. Ἀπ' ἔξω βέβαια ἔχει μορφή ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλ' ἐσωτερικὰ μοιάζει μὲ κτῆνος. Ἐάν, ὅπως λέει ὁ ἰατροφιλόσοφος Καρρῆλ, οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ ἔπαιρναν καὶ ἐξωτερικὰ σχῆμα σύμφωνο μὲ τὴν ψυχικὴ τους κατάστασι, θὰ εἴχαμε ἓνα φρικτὸ θέαμα· θὰ παρουσιαζόταν ὁ συκοφάντης σὰν ὄχιά, ὁ ἄρπαγας σὰν γεράκι, ὁ πονηρὸς σὰν ἄλεπού, ὁ μνησίκακος σὰν καμήλα, ὁ αἰμοβόρος σὰν λύκος, ὁ ὀργίλος καὶ ἐπιθετικὸς σὰν τίγρις, ὁ ἄπληστος σὰν χοῖρος, ὁ θηλυμανὴς σὰν ἄλογο πού χρεμετίζει...

Γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους αὐτοὺς ὁ Δαυὶδ λέει: «*ἄνθρωπος ἐν τιμῇ ὦν οὐ συνῆκε, παρασυνεβλήθη τοῖς κτήνεσι τοῖς ἀνοήτοις καὶ ὠμοιώθη αὐτοῖς*». (Ψαλμ. 48:13). Καὶ ὁ προφήτης Ἡσαΐας, ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἔστειλε νὰ κηρύξῃ στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, εἶπε: «*Ἦλθον καὶ οὐκ ἦν ἄνθρωπος, ἐκάλεσα καὶ οὐκ ἦν ὁ ὑπακούων*». (Ἡσ. 50:2). Δηλαδή· Κύριε, ἐξετέλεσα τὴ διαταγὴ σου· πῆγα, κήρυξα, κάλεσα σὲ μετάνοια. Ἄλλὰ ποῦ μ' ἔστειλες; Ἐκεῖ δὲν ὑπάρχει ἄνθρωπος· κανεῖς ἀπ' αὐτοὺς δὲ θέλησε νὰ προσέξῃ στὴ φωνή σου. Ὁ νοῦς, ἡ καρδιά, ἡ θέλησί τους εἶναι ἀλλοῦ... «*Οὐκ ἦν*» ἐκεῖ «*ἄνθρωπος*». Φανταστῆτε· μέσα σὲ μιὰ πρωτεύουσα κράτους, ὁ προφήτης δὲ βρῖσκει ἄνθρωπο νὰ συνομιλήσῃ περὶ ἀρετῆς, δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἐντολῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἄλλὰ μήπως καὶ ὁ ἀρχαῖος φιλόσοφος τῆς πατρίδος μας ὁ Διογένης; Δὲν εὗρισκε κι αὐτὸς ἀνθρώπους εἰλικρινεῖς, τιμίους, δικαίους. Ὅλοι ἔρρεπαν πρὸς τὴν ὕλη, τὸ συμφέρον, τὴν ἰδιοτέλεια. Γι' αὐτὸ ἓνα μεσημέρι, ἐνῶ ὁ ἥλιος ἔκαιγε, ἀναψε τὸ φανάρι του καὶ περιφερόταν λέγοντας «*Ἀνθρωπον ζητῶ*».

Πόσο σπάνιο πράγμα είναι ο άνθρωπος, ο ιδεώδης άνθρωπος! Ἐνώ συγγενεύει με τοὺς ἀγγέλους, αὐτὸς ἐκφυλίζεται, πέφτει πιὸ χαμηλά κι ἀπὸ τὰ κτήνη. Καὶ ἡ γῆ ἀναστενάζει καὶ διαμαρτύρεται. Ἄνθρωπε, μετὰ ἐγκλήματά σου μοῦ ἔγινες βαρὺς, δὲ σὲ σηκώνω πλέον· θ' ἀνοιξω τὰ ἠφαίστεια, θὰ σὲ θάψω στὴ λάβα. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἔγινε βάρος τῆς γῆς, «ἄχθος ἀρούρης», ὅπως ἔλεγαν οἱ πρόγονοί μας. Κι ὅπως κηρύττει ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, «τίποτε ἄλλο δὲν βαραινὲι τὸν ἄνθρωπο ὅπως ἡ ἁμαρτία». Αὐτὴ εἶναι σὰν μολύβδινη σφαῖρα, ὅπως τὴν εἶδε ὁ προφήτης Ζαχαρίας (Ζαχ. 5:7), εἶναι φορτίο, εἶναι βουνὸ πού σηκώνει στοὺς ὤμους του ὁ ταλαίπωρος ἄνθρωπος, καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ βάρος της σκύβει. Καὶ ἂν κάποτε ἔρθῃ σὲ συναισθησι τῆς καταστάσεώς του, λέει στὸ Θεὸ μετὰ τὸ στόμα τοῦ Δαυΐδ: «Αἱ ἀνομίαι μου ὑπερῆραν τὴν κεφαλὴν μου, ὡσεὶ φορτίον βαρὺν ἐβαρύνθησαν ἐπ' ἐμέ. ...ἐταλαιπώρησα καὶ κατεκάμφθην ἕως τέλους...» (Ψαλμ. 37:5-7).

Νὰ γιατί ἡ συγκύπτουσα γυναίκα εἶναι κατὰ τοὺς πατέρας τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἡ εἰκόνα τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ πού ἀναστενάζει κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ βάρος τῆς ἐνοχῆς. Καὶ ἐκείνης μὲν εἶχε καμφθῆ ἡ σπονδυλικὴ στήλη, τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ ὁμως κάμπτεται κάτι πολὺ σπουδαιότερο, ἡ θέλησις, πού τοῦ δόθηκε γιὰ νὰ τὸν κρατᾷ ἠθικῶς ὄρθιο, ὥστε ν' ἀντιστέκεται στὸν ἐχθρὸ καὶ νὰ τοῦ λέῃ: Σατανᾶ, ὄχι! δὲ θὰ σὲ προσκυνήσω, δὲ θὰ σ' ἀφήνω νὰ με ὑποτάσῃς. Αὐτὴ ἡ θέλησις δυστυχῶς κάμπτεται, καταντᾷ ἐλεεινὸ ὑποζύγιο, καὶ δέχεται ἀναβάτη τὴν ἀνομία, πού σέρνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο σὲ κάθε εἶδος διαφθορᾶς. Πίθηκος πού καβαλλικεύει ἄγγελο, αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὑπὸ τὸ κράτος τῆς ἁμαρτίας. «Καὶ ἦν—ὄχι πλέον γυνὴ ἀλλὰ—ψυχὴ συγκύπτουσα καὶ μὴ δυναμένη ἀνακῦσαι εἰς τὸ παντελές».

Ποιὸς λοιπὸν θὰ τινάξῃ μακριὰ τὴν ἀνομία; Ἄς ἀκούσουμε τί ἀπαντᾷ ἡ συγκύπτουσα: Ὑπέφερα 18 ὀλόκληρα χρόνια, περπατοῦσα μετὰ τὰ τέσσερα, δὲν ἔβλεπα παρὰ μόνον χῶμα καὶ πέτρες. Ἄλλ' ἦρθε καὶ γιὰ μένα ἡ στιγμὴ, πού ποτὲ δὲν θὰ τὴν ξεχάσω. Μετὰ εἶδε ὁ Ἰησοῦς, μετὰ σπλαχνίστηκε. Ἄρθρωσε τέσσερις μόνον λέξεις, μετὰ ἄγγιξε μετὰ τὰ πανάχραντα χέρια του, κι ἀμέσως ἡ δύναμις τοῦ πονηροῦ πού με κρατοῦσε δέσμια διώχθηκε· σὰ νὰ δέχθηκα ῥεῦμα νέας ζωῆς, τὸ σῶμα μου ἀνωρθώθηκε, τὸ κεφάλι μου ὑψώθηκε, ἀναστηλώθηκα, ἀνέλαβα τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, καὶ τώρα ὄρθια βαδίζω καὶ φωνάζω, ὅτι τὸ θαῦμα αὐτὸ τὸ ἔκανε ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ!

Ἀκούσατε τὴ μαρτυρία τῆς γυναίκας. Ἀμφιβάλλετε ἀκόμη γιὰ τὴ δύναμι τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Τότε πειραματισθῆτε, δοκιμάστε. Ἀφῆστε τὴ δύναμι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ν' ἀγγίξῃ τὴ θέλησί σας, καὶ τότε θὰ γίνῃ ἡ ἀνόρθωσις, ἡ ἀναστήλωσις τῶν ἀξιῶν ἐκείνων

τῆς ζωῆς πού τώρα κοιτῶνται σὲ ἐρείπια, ὅπως οἱ σπόνδυλοι ἐκείνης τῆς πεσμένης στήλης τοῦ Ὀλυμπίου Διός.

Ὅταν, ἀγαπητοί μου, οἱ σύντροφοι τοῦ Ὀδυσσεῶς ἐμφανίσθησαν ἐμπρὸς στὴ μάγισσα Κίρκη, αὐτὴ τοὺς προσέφερε ἠδύποτα, τοὺς χτύπησε μ' ἓνα ῥαβδί, κι ἀμέσως—οἱ ἦρωες ἐκείνοι πού εἶχαν ἐκπορθῆσει τὴν Τροία—ἔχασαν τὴν ὄψι τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἔγιναν ζῶα, μιὰ ἀγέλη χοίρων, καὶ κλείστηκαν στοὺς σταύλους. Μετὰ καταλάβατε;

Κίρκη δὲν ὑπάρχει. Κίρκη ὁμως πραγματικὴ εἶναι ἡ ἁμαρτία. Αὐτὴ προσφέρει ποτά, κρατᾷ ῥαβδί ἠδονῆς καὶ χτυπάει μαλακά... Ὅποιος πιῇ τὰ ἠδύποτά της καὶ δεχθῇ τὰ ἠδονικὰ χτυπήματά της, ζαλίζεται, χάνει τὴν ἀξιοπρέπεια, ἐξομοιώνεται μετὰ κτήνος, καὶ φορτώνεται φορτίο βαρὺ, δυσβάστακτο. Καὶ δὲν θὰ μπορέσῃ ποτὲ πλέον νὰ τὸ ἀποτινάξῃ παρὰ μόνον ὅταν πιστέψῃ στὸ Θεὸ πού ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος καὶ γεννήθηκε μέσα σὲ σταῦλο, γιὰ ν' ἀνορθώσῃ τὸν ἀποκτηνωμένο ἄνθρωπο, νὰ τὸν ὀδηγήσῃ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀποκτήνωσι στὴ δόξα, καὶ νὰ τὸν ἀναδείξῃ ἔνδοξο κληρονόμο τῆς βασιλείας του, τῆς ὁποίας «οὐκ ἔσται τέλος» (Λουκ. 1:33).

(†) Ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστῖνος



Ἡ Ἐκκλησία λοιπὸν, ὀνομάζεται καθολικὴ, διότι βρίσκεται σὲ ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη, ἀπὸ τὸ ἓνα ἄκρον τῆς γῆς ἕως τὸ ἄλλο. Ἐπίσης λέγεται καθολικὴ καὶ γιὰ τὸ ὅτι διδάσκει ἐξ ὀλοκλήρου καὶ ἀνελλιπῶς ὅλα τὰ δόγματα, πού πρέπει νὰ μάθουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι γιὰ τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατὰ πράγματα, γιὰ τὰ ἐπουράνια καὶ τὰ ἐπίγεια. Ἐπίσης λέγεται καθολικὴ γιὰ τὸ ὅτι ἐπιδιώκει νὰ ὀδηγήσῃ στὴν εὐσέβειαν ὅλον τὸν ἀνθρώπινον γένος, καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων καὶ τῶν ἀρχομένων, καὶ τῶν μορφωμένων καὶ τῶν ἀπλοϊκῶν. Ἐπίσης λέγεται καθολικὴ, καὶ γιὰ τὸ ὅτι δίνει ἀφ' ἑνὸς καὶ ἐξ ὀλοκλήρου τὴν ὑγείαν καὶ θεραπεύει κάθε εἶδος ἁμαρτίας, πού πράττεται μετὰ τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ μετὰ τὸ σῶμα, καὶ ἀφ' ἑτέρου, διότι ἀποκτᾶται μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησίαν κάθε εἶδος ἀναφερομένης ἀρετῆς, πού παρατηρεῖται καὶ στὰ ἔργα καὶ στὰ λόγια καὶ σὲ ὅλατὰ πνευματικὰ χαρίσματα. Ἐκκλησία δὲ ὀνομάζεται σύμφωνα μετὰ τὸ ὄνομά της, διότι καλεῖ ὅλους καὶ τοὺς συναθροίζει μαζί.

«Κατηχήσεις»

Ἁγίου Κυρίλλου Ἱεροσολύμων

## Μαρτυρίες Πίστεως Ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ 1821

*Αρχιμ. Χρυσοστόμου Παπαθανασίου Τεροκλήρυκος Καθηδρικοῦ Ναοῦ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν.*

Ἐν ὄψει τῆς Ἐθνικῆς ἐπετείου ἀξίζει νὰ φέρομε στὸ προσκήνιο μαρτυρίες πίστεως ἀγωνιστῶν καὶ ἡρώων τοῦ 1821. Ἐπικεφαλῆς τῶν ἡρωικῶν κληρικῶν μαρτύρων τοῦ 1821 στέκεται ὁ Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης Γρηγόριος Ε΄.

Τραγικὴ ἦταν ἡ θέση του ὅταν ἐπαναστάτησε ἡ Ἑλλάδα. Ἔβλεπε ὅτι τὸν περιέμενε τὸ μαρτύριο. Πολλοὶ προσπαθοῦν νὰ τὸν πείσουν νὰ φύγει ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολι γιὰ νὰ σωθεῖ. Ἀλλὰ ὁ «καλὸς ποιμὴν» ἀρνῆθηκε, ἀκολουθώντας τὰ ἴχνη τῶν γενναίων προκατόχων του. Τοὺς εἶπε:

—Μὲ προτρέπετε εἰς φυγὴν; Μάχαιρα θὰ διέλθῃ τὰς ρύμας τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ λοιπῶν πόλεων

τῶν Χριστιανικῶν ἐπαρχιῶν. Ὑμεῖς ἐπιθυμεῖτε ὅπως ἐγὼ μεταμφιεζόμενος καταφύγω εἰς πλοῖον ἢ κλεισθῶ ἐν οἰκείᾳ οἰουδήποτε εὐεργετικοῦ ὑμῶν Πρεσβευτοῦ, ν' ἀκούω δὲ ἐκεῖθεν πῶς οἱ δῆμιοι κατακρεουργοῦσι τὸν χηρεύοντα Λαόν. Οὐχί! Καὶ πρὸς ἄλλους πιστοὺς τοῦ ποιμνίου του:

—Ἐγὼ διὰ τοῦτο εἶμαι Πατριάρχης, ὅπως σώσω τὸ Ἔθνος μου, οὐχὶ δὲ ὅπως ἀπολεσθῇ τοῦτο διὰ τῆς χειρὸς τῶν Γενιτσάρων. Ὁ θάνατός μου ἴσως ἐπιφέρῃ μεγαλυτέραν ὠφέλειαν παρὰ ἡ ζωὴ μου. Σήμερον (*Κυριακὴ τῶν Βαΐων*) θὰ φάγωμεν ἰχθῦς, ἀλλὰ μετὰ τινὰς ἡμέρας καὶ ἴσως καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐβδομάδα οἱ ἰχθύες θὰ μᾶς φάγωσιν... Ναί, ἄς μὴ γίνω γλεύασμα τῶν ζώντων. Δὲν θὰ ἀνεχθῶ ὥστε εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς τῆς Ὁδησοῦ, τῆς Κερκύρας καὶ τῆς Ἀγκῶνος διερχόμενον ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἀγνιῶν νὰ μὲ δακτυλοδεικτῶσι λέγοντες: «Ἴδου ἔρχεται ὁ φονεὺς Πατριάρχης». Ἄν τὸ Ἔθνος μου σωθῇ καὶ θριαμβεύσῃ, τότε πέποιθα θὰ μοῦ ἀποδώσῃ θυμίαμα ἐπαίνου καὶ τιμῶν, διότι ἐξέπληρωσα τὸ χρέος μου... Ὑπάγω ὅπου μὲ καλεῖ ὁ μέγας κληρὸς τοῦ Ἔθνους καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ ὁ Οὐράνιος, ὁ μάρτυς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πράξεων.

Τι παράδειγμα διὰ τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς τῶν ἡμερῶν μας...

Ὁ ἀρχιμανδρίτης Γρηγόριος Δικαῖος, ποῦ εἶναι γνωστὸς μὲ τὸ ὄνομα Παπαφλέσσας εἶναι αὐτὸς ποῦ ἀναψε τὴν φλόγα τῆς Ἐπαναστάσεως στὸ Μωρηά.

Φλογερὸς στὴν πίστη, ἔκανε νὰ ὠρμάσῃ ὁ ἄγουρος καρπὸς, ἡ μεγάλη ἀπόφασις τοῦ ἀγῶνος καὶ ἔλεγε:

—Ἕλληνες, ποτὲ μὴν ξεχνάτε τὸ χρέος σὲ Θεὸ καὶ σὲ πατρίδα! Σ' αὐτὰ τὰ δύο σας ἐξορκίζω ἢ νὰ νικήσουμε ἢ νὰ πεθάνουμε κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ σημαία τοῦ Χριστοῦ!

Ἄλλος, ὁ Ναύαρχος Ἀνδρέας Μιαούλης ἔγραφε στὸν Γεώργιον Κουντουριώτην τὶς παρακάτω ὑπέροχες γραμμές:

—Ἄς μὴ λείψῃ, παρακαλῶ, καὶ ἡ Ὑμετέρα Ἐκλαμπρότης ἀπὸ τοῦ νὰ συνεργήσῃ εἰς τὸ νὰ γίνωσιν αἱ ἀνήκουσαι πρὸς Κύριον πρὸς ἐξιλέωσιν τῆς Θείας Αὐτοῦ δικαιοσύνης ἰκεσία διὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας καὶ ἐμοῦ τοῦ ἀναξίου καὶ ὄλου του Χριστεπωνύμου λαοῦ... ὅπως συνοδευούσης τῆς Θείας Αὐτοῦ Ἀγαθότητος, ἐνισχυθῶσιν ἀπὸ τὴν παντοδύναμον χάριν Του οἱ βραχίονες τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ οὕτω κατατροπώσαντες διὰ τοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς σημαίας τιμίου Σταυροῦ

καὶ τοὺς αἰσθητοὺς ἐχθροὺς τούτους, αὐτοὺς μὲν ὑποχρεώσωμεν καὶ ἅπαντας νὰ ὁμολογῶσι καὶ νὰ κηρύττωσι **Μέγας ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν Χριστιανῶν**, ἡμεῖς δὲ οἱ δοξολογοῦντες νὰ ψάλλωμεν τὸ τοῦ προφητάνακτος **ἡ δεξιὰ σου Κύριε δεδόξαται**.

Ὁ δὲ Κωνσταντῖνος Κανάρης μὲ προσευχὴν ξεκίνησε γιὰ τὸ κατόρθωμα στὸ λιμάνι τῆς Χίου. Ὅσο ἔλειπαν ἀπὸ τὸ νησί, ὅλος ὁ κόσμος γονατιστὸς προσευχό-

ταν γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τους. Καὶ ἡ ἐπιστροφή τους στὰ Ψαρὰ μὲ προσευχὴ εὐχαριστήριον κατέληξε. Οἱ ἱερεῖς μὲ τὰ ἐξαπτέρυγα, οἱ προύχοντες καὶ ὅλος ὁ λαὸς τὸν συνόδευσαν στὸν ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἐκεῖνη ἡ πομπὴ πάνω στὸ μικρὸ ἀλλὰ τρισένδοξο νησάκι, μᾶς θυμίζει τὰ χρόνια, ποῦ οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ αὐτοκράτορες καὶ οἱ χιλιотραγουδισμένοι νικηταὶ ἡρωικῶν ἀγῶνων ἀνέβαιναν ταπεινοὶ προσκυνηταὶ στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία, γιὰ νὰ ψάλουν **«Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ τὰ νικητήρια»**. Τότε παρομοίως, ὁ θρυλικὸς μπουρλοτιέρης κατέθεσε στὰ πόδια τῆς εἰκόνος τῆς Θεοτόκου τὸ στεφάνι του καὶ ἔπεσε μὲ τὸ μέτωπο κατὰ γῆς προσκυνώντας προσευχόμενος καὶ εὐχαριστώντας ἀπὸ βάθους καρδιάς τὸ Θεό. Κατόπιν ἐξομολογήθηκε, μετέλαβε τῶν ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων καὶ μὲ ταπεινῶσι καὶ σεμνότητι ἀπεσύρθη στὸ ἥσυχον σπιτάκι του.



ΚΟΛΟΚΟΤΡΩΜΗΣ ΠΡΟΣΕΥΧΟΜΕΝΟΣ



Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ Γέρος τοῦ Μωρηᾶ, ὁ Κολοκοτρώνης εὐλαβεῖτο πολὺ τὴν Παναγία. Στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 1821 ξεκίνησε ἀπὸ τὴν Καλαμάτα γιὰ τὴν Τρίπολι. Στὰ χωριὰ ποὺ περνοῦσε, χτυποῦσαν οἱ καμπάνες, οἱ ἱερεῖς ἔβγαιναν μὲ τὰ ἑξαπτέρυγα, ἄνδρες, γυναῖκες, παιδὰ γονάτιζαν καὶ ἔκαναν δεήσεις. Γρήγορα ὅμως ὁ πρῶτος ἐνθουσιασμὸς ἔσβησε. Ὁ Ἀναγνωσταρᾶς, ὁ Μαυρομιχάλης, ὁ Παπαφλέσσας τράβηξαν γι' ἄλλοῦ. Ὁ Κολοκοτρώνης ἀπέμεινε κατάμονος μὲ τὸ ἄλογό του στὴν Καρύταινα. Τί θὰ ἔκαμνε; Τί θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ κἀνῃ ἕνας μονάχος, ὀλομόναχος; Τὸ πᾶν! Ὅταν φλογίζη τὴν καρδιά του, ἡ φλόγα τῆς πίστεως. Ἄλλ' ἄς ἀφήσουμε τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Γέρο τοῦ Μωρηᾶ νὰ μᾶς διηγηθῇ τί ἔκανε:

—Ἐκατσα ποὺ ἐσκαπέτισαν μὲ τὰ μπαιράκια τους, ἀπὲ ἑκατέβηκα κάτου· ἦτον μία ἐκκλησιὰ εἰς τὸν δρόμον, ἡ Παναγία στὸ Χρυσοβίτσι, καὶ τὸ καθησιό μου ἦτο ὅπου ἔκλαιγα τὴν Ἑλλάς.

Σίμωσε, ἔδεσε τὸ ἄλογό του σ' ἕνα δέντρο, μπῆκε μέσα, γονάτισε:

—Παναγιά μου, εἶπε, ἀπὸ τὰ βάθη τῆς καρδιάς του, καὶ τὰ μάτια τοῦ δάκρυσαν. Παναγιά μου, βοήθησε καὶ τούτη τὴ φορὰ τοὺς Ἕλληνας νὰ ψυχωθοῦν.

Ἐκανε τὸ σταυρό του. Ἀσπᾶσθηκε τὴν εἰκόνα της, βγῆκε ἀπὸ τὸ ἐκκλησιάκι, πήδησε στ' ἄλογό του καὶ ἔφυγε.

Λίγο πρὶν ἀρχίσει τὸν ἀγῶνα στὰ Δερβενάκια εἶπε:

—Ἕλληνας, ἀπόψε ἦλθε ἡ Παναγία καὶ μοῦ εἶπε: **«Ἡ Παναγία, σκέπη, βοηθὸς καὶ προστασία!»** Μακάρι καὶ σήμερα στὴν Παναγία νὰ προσβλέπουμε καὶ τούτη τὴ δέηση νὰ λέμε: **«Παναγιά μου ψύχωσε τοὺς Ἕλληνας!»**.

Ἀκόμη, ἡ Καπετάνισσα Μπουμπουλίνα εἶπε στοὺς Προκρίτους καὶ στοὺς Δημογέροντες:

—Ἐχασα τὸν σύζυγό μου. **Ἐὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεός!** Ὁ πρεσβύτερος υἱός μου ἔπεσε μὲ τὰ ὄπλα ἀνὰ χεῖρας. **Ἐὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεός!** Ὁ δεύτερος καὶ μόνος υἱός μου, 14ετής τὴν ἡλικίαν, μάχεται μετὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ πιθανῶς νὰ εὕρη ἐνδοξὸν θάνατον. **Ἐὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεός!** Ὑπὸ τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ Σταυροῦ θὰ ρεῦση ἐπίσης τὸ αἷμα μου. **Ἐὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεός!** Ἀλλὰ θὰ νικήσωμεν ἢ θὰ παύσωμεν μὲν ζῶντες, ἀλλὰ θὰ ἔχωμεν τὴν παρήγορον ἰδέαν, ὅτι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ δὲν ἀφήσαμεν ὀπισθεν ἡμῶν δούλους τοὺς Ἕλληνας.

Ἴδου καὶ τὰ ἐπιβεβαιωτικὰ λόγια του στρατηγοῦ Μακρυγιάννη:

—Οἱ ἀγωνισταὶ βάστηξαν τὴν θρησκείαν τους τόσοι αἰῶνες μὲ τοὺς Τούρκους, καὶ τοὺς κἀναν τόσα μαρτύρια καὶ τὴν βᾶσταξαν! Καὶ λευτέρωσαν καὶ τὴν Πατρίδα τους, αὐτεῖνοι μὲ τὴν θρησκεία τους, ὅπου ἦταν πεντακόσιοι Τούρκοι εἰς τὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ αὐτεῖνοι ἕνας καὶ χωρὶς τ' ἀναγκαῖα τοῦ πολέμου

καὶ τὴν μάθησιν οἱ περισσότεροι· καὶ τ' ἄρματα τους δεμένα μὲ σκοινιά. Καὶ ἡ πίστι εἰς τὸν Θεὸν—λευτέρωσαν τὴν Πατρίδα τους.

Διήλθον 196 χρόνια ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ οἱ πρόγονοί μας εἶπαν τὸ **Ἐλευθερία ἢ Θάνατος** καὶ θυσιάστηκαν γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία μας. Στὰ ἱερά τους κόκκαλα θεμελιώθηκε τὸ κράτος τοῦ Νέου Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Ἀλήθεια, δύο ἐρωτήματα προβάλλουν ἐπιτακτικά:

(1) Πῶς ἐκδηλώνουμε τὴν εὐγνωμοσύνη καὶ τιμὴ πρὸς τοὺς ἥρωες τοῦ 1821;

(2) Πόσο ἀκλόνητη καὶ δυνατὴ εἶναι ἡ πίστη μας στὴν πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ στὴν προστασία τῆς Παναγίας;

Ὁ καθένας ἄς σκεφθεῖ...



**Ἄ**ς ἔλθωμεν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην, τὴν ὁποῖαν μὲ ἀπερίγραπτον λαχτᾶρα ἐπὶ τέσσερις αἰῶνας ἐπερίμενε τὸ ἔθνος τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Μὲ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τὰς εὐχὰς ἀρχίζει ὁ ἀγὼν. Ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος Παλαιῶν Πατρῶν Γερμανὸς εὐλογεῖ τὸ Λάβαρον εἰς τὴν Ἁγίαν Λαύραν.

Ἐμπροσθέν του γονατίζουν οἱ ὄπλαρχηγοὶ καὶ δακρυσμένοι ὀρκίζονται. Ὁ Παλαιῶν Πατρῶν Γερμανὸς (1771-1826) διεκρίθη εἰς τὸν πολιτικὸν καὶ εἰς τὸν διπλωματικὸν τομέα. Ὁ ἴδιος εἶχε συντάξει τὴν Ἐπαναστατικὴν διακήρυξιν τῶν Ἑλλήνων πρὸς τὰς Εὐρωπαϊκὰς δυνάμεις. Εἰς αὐτὴν μεταξὺ ἄλλων ἐτόνιζε:

*«Ἡμεῖς, τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἔθνος τῶν Χριστιανῶν, βλέποντας ὅτι μᾶς καταφρονεῖ τὸ Ὄθωμανικὸν γένος καὶ σκοπεύει τὸν ὄλεθρον ἐναντίον μας, πότε μὲ ἕνα καὶ πότε μὲ ἄλλον τρόπον, ἀπεφασίσαμεν σταθερῶς ἢ νὰ ἀποθάνωμεν ὅλοι ἢ νὰ ἐλευθερωθῶμεν. Καὶ τούτου ἕνεκα βαστοῦμε τὰ ὄπλα εἰς χεῖρας, ζητοῦντες τὰ δικαιώματά μας. Εἴμεθα λοιπὸν βέβαιοι ὅτι ὅλα τὰ χριστιανικὰ βασίλεια γνωρίζουν τὰ δίκαιά μας καὶ ὄχι μόνον δὲν θέλουν μᾶς ἐναντιωθεῖ, ἀλλὰ καὶ θέλουν μᾶς συνδράμει καὶ ὅτι ἔχουν εἰς μνήμην ὅτι οἱ ἐνδοξοὶ πρόγονοί μας ἐφάνησάν ποτε ὠφέλιμοι εἰς τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα».*

**Διονυσίου Κοκκίνου**  
**«Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐπανάστασις»**  
**Ἔκδοσις Ε' τόμ. Α', σελ. 179.**

## Ὁ Ἀντίχριστος

### Κατὰ τὴν Β΄ Πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς Ἐπιστολὴν τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου

Τοῦ Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Γόρτυνος κ. Τερεμίου.

**Π**ρέπει ἀδελφοί μου Χριστιανοί νὰ μελετοῦμε τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή, γιατί σ' αὐτὴν μιλάει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἀποκαλύπτει τὸ θέλημά Του. Ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ τὴν ἐρμηνεύουμε σωστά, γιατί ἂν τὴν ἐρμηνεύσουμε λαθασμένα, πέφτουμε σὲ αἵρεση καὶ ἡ αἵρεση εἶναι χαμός!

Ἔτσι, ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος ἔγραψε στὴν Ἐκκλησία τῶν Θεσσαλονικέων μία ἐπιστολή, στὴν ὁποία, μαζί μὲ ἄλλα θέματα, τοὺς μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὴν Δεύτερη Παρουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ τοὺς ἔλεγε ὅτι ἡ ἡμέρα αὐτὴ τοῦ Κυρίου θὰ ἔλθει ξαφνικά, «ὅπως ὁ κλέφτης τὴ νύχτα!» Γι' αὐτὸ τοὺς ἔλεγε «νὰ εἶναι γρήγοροι καὶ νηφάλιοι». (Α΄ Θεσ. 5:1-6).

Αὐτὸν ὅμως τὸν λόγο τοῦ Ἀποστόλου μερικοὶ Χριστιανοὶ τὸν παρεξήγησαν καὶ σταμάτησαν τίς δουλειές τους. Γιατὶ σκέπτονταν ὅτι δὲν ἀξίζει νὰ δουλεύουμε, ἀφοῦ καὶ αὐτὴ τὴν στιγμή μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ ἡ Δεύτερη Παρουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ νὰ τελειώσῃ ἔτσι ἡ ζωὴ μας. Τὰ ἔμαθε αὐτὰ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος βρισκόμενος στὴν Κόρινθο καὶ ἡ ἀνάγκη τὸ ἐπέβαλε νὰ γράψῃ καὶ δεύτερο γράμμα στὴν Ἐκκλησία τῶν Θεσσαλονικέων, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ἐξηγήσῃ καλύτερα τὸ θέμα.

Στὴ δεύτερη αὐτὴ ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος τοὺς λέει ὅτι δὲν πρόκειται νὰ ἔρθῃ ἡ Δεύτερη Παρουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἂν δὲν γίνονταν πρῶτα δύο γεγονότα. Τὸ ἓνα εἶναι ἡ «ἀποστασία» καὶ τὸ ἄλλο εἶναι ὁ ἐρχομὸς τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου (2:3).

«Ἀποστασία» σημαίνει τὸ νὰ ἀποστατοῦν, τὸ νὰ φεύγουν δηλαδὴ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ νὰ ζητοῦν τὴν εὐτυχία τους σὲ ἁμαρτωλές ἡδονές καὶ σὲ παράνομα ἔργα. Πραγματικά, ὅπως τὸ εἶπε καὶ ὁ Ἰδιὸς ὁ Κύριός μας, πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν Δεύτερη Παρουσία Του οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ εἶναι ἀσεβεῖς καὶ ἀνίητικοι, ὅπως ἦταν οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν κατακλισμὸ τοῦ Νῶε. (βλ. Ματθ. 24:37-39). Λίγοι θὰ μείνουν στερεοὶ καὶ σταθεροὶ στὸ βράχο τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ, ἐκεῖ ὅπου μᾶς θέλει ὁ Χριστὸς νὰ στεκόμαστε. Ἀλλὰ καὶ γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς λίγους θὰ ἔλθῃ ὁ ἀντίχριστος, γιὰ νὰ παραπλανήσῃ καὶ αὐτούς.

Τι εἶναι ὁ ἀντίχριστος Χριστιανοί μου; Ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στὴν Β΄ πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς ἐπιστολὴ του μᾶς δίνει μερικὰ χαρακτηριστικά, γιὰ τὰ ὁποῖα θέλω νὰ σᾶς μιλήσω σήμερα:

(α) Κατὰ πρῶτον μᾶς λέει ὅτι ὁ ἀντίχριστος θὰ εἶναι «ἄνθρωπος» (2:3). Ἄνθρωπος κανονικὸς, γεννημένος ἀπὸ μάνα καὶ πατέρα. Δὲν θὰ εἶναι ὁ ἀντίχριστος διάβολος ποὺ θὰ σαρκωθεῖ, γιατί αὐτὸ τὸ θαῦμα τῆς σαρκώσεως μόνο ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ μποροῦσε νὰ τὸ κάνει. Τέτοια δύναμη δὲν τὴν ἔχει ὁ διάβολος. Ὁ ἀντίχριστος θὰ εἶναι ἄνθρωπος. Σ' αὐτὸν ὅμως τὸν ἄνθρωπο θὰ μπεῖ μέσα τὸν ὁ διάβολος, ὁ ὁποῖος καὶ θὰ τὸν κυριεύει καὶ θὰ τὸν παρακινεῖ νὰ κάνει πολλές ἁμαρτίες, γιὰ νὰ παρακινεῖ ἔπειτα καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ἀντίχριστος τὸν κόσμον σὲ ἁμαρτίες. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στὴν ἐπιστολὴ του ἐδῶ ποὺ μελετᾶμε τὸν λέει «ἄνθρωπο τῆς ἁμαρτίας» (2:3). Καὶ ἐπειδὴ ὁ ἀντίχριστος, μὲ τὸ νὰ παρακινεῖ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους στὴν ἁμαρτία θὰ φέρει

μεγάλῃ καταστροφῇ στὸν κόσμον, ὁ Ἀπόστολος τὸν λέει παρακάτω καὶ «υἱὸ τῆς ἀπωλείας» (2:3).

(β) Ὁ ἀντίχριστος θὰ μοιάζῃ πολὺ μὲ τὸν διάβολο. Ὁ διάβολος, ὅπως ξέρετε, πρῶτα ἦταν ἄγγελος, ἀλλὰ ὑπερηφανεύθηκε, εἶπε ὅτι θὰ στήσει τὸ θρόνον του παραπάνω ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ (βλ. Ἦσ. 14:13), καὶ ἔτσι ἔπεσε ἀπὸ τὴν

ὑψηλὴ του θέση καὶ ἔγινε διάβολος. Ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια λοιπὸν χαρακτηρίζει τὸν διάβολο. Καὶ ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια θὰ εἶναι τὸ κύριο χαρακτηριστικὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου. Γιατὶ λέει ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος ἐδῶ στὴν Β΄ πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς ἐπιστολὴ του, ὅτι ὁ ἀντίχριστος «θὰ ἐναντιωθεῖ καὶ θὰ σηκώσῃ τὸ κεφάλι του ἐναντίον κάθε ἄλλου ποὺ ὀνομάζεται Θεός, ὥστε ὁ ἴδιος νὰ ἐνθρονισθεῖ στὸ ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὡς Θεός, προσπαθώντας νὰ ἀποδείξῃ γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του ὅτι εἶναι Θεός». (2:4).

(γ) Ὁ ἀντίχριστος, λέγεται ἀντίχριστος ἐπειδὴ θὰ θέλῃ νὰ μιμηθεῖ τὸν Χριστό, γιὰ νὰ παραπλανήσει ἔτσι εὐκολώτερα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ ὅπως ὁ Χριστὸς ἔκανε θαύματα, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος θὰ κάνει καὶ αὐτὸς θαύματα, ψευδοθαύματα, «σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ψεύδους», ὅπως τὰ λέει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στὴν ἐπιστολὴ ποὺ μελετᾶμε. (2:9). Καὶ ὅπως ὁ Χριστὸς ἔχει τὸ «μυστήριό» Του, τὸ ὁποῖο γευόμαστε μὲ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία καὶ ὑποσχόμαστε ὅτι δὲν θὰ τὸ προδώσουμε στοὺς ἐχθροὺς τῆς πίστεως—«οὐ μὴ γάρ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς σου



Καθολικὸ Ἱεράς Μητρίας Ἀγίων Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἰππώνος & Σεραφεῖμ τοῦ Σαρώφ Τρικέρφου Φωκίος

τὸ μυστήριον εἶπω», λέμε—ἔτσι καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος ἔχει τὸ δικό του μυστήριο.

Ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στὴν Β΄ πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς Ἐπιστολή του ὀμιλεῖ γιὰ «μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας», γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο μάλιστα λέγει ὅτι «ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται». (2:7). Ἡ διαφορὰ εἶναι ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς μᾶς ἀποκαλύφθηκε στὴν ἀρχὴ τοῦ δικοῦ Του μυστηρίου, ἐνῶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος θὰ ἀποκαλυφθεῖ στὸ τέλος τοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς ἀνομίας του. Καὶ ὅταν ἔλθει ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ἀδελφοί μου, τότε θὰ ἔλθει ὁ Χριστὸς μετὰ τὴν Δεύτερή Του Παρουσία, γιὰ νὰ τὸν συντρίψει καὶ γιὰ νὰ παραλάβει τὰ τέκνα Του στὴ Βασιλεία Του τὴν ἐπουράνιο. Ὡστε λοιπὸν ἔχει χαροποὶδὸ χαρακτήρα ἡ Δεύτερη τοῦ Χριστοῦ Παρουσία, ὅπως χαροποὶδὸς πάλι εἶναι καὶ ἡ πρώτη Του Παρουσία. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ λέμε στὸ τροπάριο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία «...ἵνα τὰς δύο σκιρτῶν μεγαλύνω Ἀγαθὴ Παρουσίας Σου»!

Μὲ τὸν ἐρχομὸ Του λοιπὸν ὁ Χριστὸς θὰ συντρίψει τὸν ἀντίχριστο, αὐτόν, ποὺ μετὰ τὰ ψευδοθαύματά του παρίστανε τὸν Θεὸ καὶ παραπλανοῦσε πολλοὺς. Καὶ πῶς θὰ τὸν συντρίψει; Μὲ ἓνα «φύσημα τοῦ στόματός Του», μᾶς λέγει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος (Β΄ Θεσ. 2:8)! Ἐνα τίποτα λοιπὸν ἦταν ἡ δύναμή του.

Ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ἀγαπητοί μου Χριστιανοί; Δὲν ξέρω νὰ σᾶς πῶ. Ξέρω μόνο νὰ πῶ ὅτι κάθε ἐποχὴ ἔχει τὸν δικό της ἀντίχριστο, πρόδρομο τοῦ μεγάλου ἀντιχρίστου. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ λέγει ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ του ἀκόμη ὅτι «ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασι» (Α΄ Ἰωαν. 2:18). Τὸ ἐρώτημα, ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ ἀντίχριστος, τὸ ἔκαναν στὸν ἅγιο Κοσμᾶ τὸν Αἰτωλό. Καὶ ἐκεῖνος, φωτισμένος ἅγιος ὅπως ἦταν, ἀπάντησε: «Ἀντίχριστος εἶναι ὁ πάπας»!

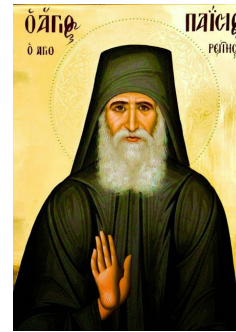
Δεχόμαστε καὶ παραδεχόμαστε τὴν ἐρμηνεία αὐτή, γιὰ τὴν εἶπε ἅγιος καὶ γιὰ τὴν βλέπουμε κοινὰ γνωρίσματα τοῦ πάπα καὶ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου, ὅπως μᾶς τὸν παρέστησε σήμερα ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: Ὁ ἀντίχριστος μάθαμε σήμερα ὅτι θὰ εἶναι λίαν ὑπερήφανος, θὰ «υπεραίρεται» καὶ θὰ παριστάνει τὸν ἑαυτό του γιὰ Θεό. Τέτοιος εἶναι καὶ ὁ πάπας: «Υπεραίρεται» καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ ἀνακήρυξε τὸν ἑαυτό του γιὰ «θεό», γιὰ ἀλάθητο. Οἱ ὑπήκοοί του ἔχουν ὡς δόγμα πίστεως τους τὸ ἀλάθητο τοῦ πάπα!

Ὁ ἀντίχριστος πάλι, μᾶς εἶπε σήμερα ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, θὰ κάνει ἀπόπειρα νὰ μπεῖ στὸν Ἱερὸ Ναὸ καὶ νὰ λάβει σ' αὐτὸν λατρευτικὴ τιμὴ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ πάπας θέλει νὰ ἐνωθεῖ μαζί μας, γιὰ νὰ ἔρχεται στοὺς Ναοὺς μας καὶ νὰ τὸν προσκυνᾶμε ὡς ἀλάθητο.

Ὅχι, δὲν θέλουμε τὴν ἔνωση μαζί του. Ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε μαθητὲς τοῦ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔλεγε στοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ὄχι μόνον νὰ μὴν ἐνωθοῦν μετὰ τὸν πάπα, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ τὸν καταριῶνται. «**Τὸν πάπα νὰ καταρᾶσθε**», ἔλεγε στὸ κήρυγμά του...

## Ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος γιὰ τὸν Ἀγῶνα τῆς Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο τοῦ Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀγορείτου, Λόγοι ΣΤ΄, «Περὶ Προσευχῆς», ἐκδόσεις Ἱερὸν Ἠσυχαστήριον «Εὐαγγελιστῆς Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος», Σουρωτὴ Θεσσαλονίκης 2012, σελ. 199-200.



**Γέροντα, πῶς θὰ μπορέσω τὴν Σαρακοστὴ νὰ ἀγωνισθῶ περισσότερο στὴν ἐγκράτεια;**

-Οἱ κοσμικοὶ τώρα τὴν Σαρακοστὴ προσέχουν κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο τὴν ἐγκράτεια, ἐνῶ ἐμεῖς οἱ μοναχοὶ πάντα πρέπει νὰ προσέχουμε. Τὸ κυριώτερο ὅμως ποὺ πρέπει νὰ προσέξει κανεὶς εἶναι τὰ ψυχικὰ πάθη καὶ μετὰ τὰ σωματικά. Γιατί, ἂν δώσει προτεραιότητα στὴ σωματικὴ ἄσκηση καὶ δὲν κάνει ἀγῶνα, γιὰ νὰ ξεριζωθοῦν τὰ ψυχικὰ πάθη, τίποτε δὲν κάνει. Πῆγε μία φορὰ σὲ ἓνα μοναστήρι ἓνας λαϊκὸς στὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς Σαρακοστῆς καὶ κάποιος μοναχὸς τοῦ φέρθηκε ἀπότομα, σκληρά. Ἐκεῖνος ὅμως ὁ καημένος εἶχε καλὸ λογισμὸ καὶ τὸν δικαιολόγησε. ἤρθε μετὰ καὶ μοῦ εἶπε: «Δὲν τὸν παρεξηγῶ, πάτερ. Ἦταν βλέπεις ἀπὸ τὸ τριήμερι!». Ἄν τὸ τριήμερι ποὺ ἔκανε ἦταν πνευματικὸ θὰ εἶχε μία γλυκύτητα πνευματικὴ καὶ θὰ μιλοῦσε στὸν ἄλλο μετὰ λίγη καλοσύνη. Ἀλλὰ αὐτὸς ζόριζε ἐγωϊστικὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του νὰ κάνει Τριήμερο, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ὅλα τοῦ ἔφταιγαν.

**Γέροντα, τί νὰ σκέφτομαι τὴν Σαρακοστή;**

-Τὸ Πάθος, τὴν θυσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ σκέφτεσαι. Ἄν καὶ ἐμεῖς οἱ μοναχοὶ πρέπει συνέχεια νὰ ζοῦμε τὸ Πάθος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γιὰ τὸ μᾶς βοηθοῦν σ' αὐτὸ κάθε μέρα τὰ διάφορα τροπάρια, ὅλες οἱ Ἀκολουθίες.

Τὴν Μεγάλη Σαρακοστὴ μᾶς δίνεται ἡ μεγαλύτερη εὐκαιρία γιὰ νὰ ἀγωνισθοῦμε καὶ νὰ συμμετέχουμε ἐντονότερα στὸ σωτήριο Πάθος τοῦ Κυρίου μας, μετάνοια καὶ μετάνοιες, μετ' ἐκκοπὴ τῶν παθῶν καὶ μετ' ἐλάττωση τῶν τροφῶν, ἀπὸ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Χριστό.

Ἄν ἀξιοποιήσουμε, ὅσο μπορούμε, τὸ πνευματικὸ αὐτὸ στάδιο μετὰ τὴν πολλὴν προϋποθέσεις καὶ δυνατότητες ποὺ μᾶς δίνονται, γιὰ νὰ πλησιάσουμε περισσότερο στὸν Ἐσταυρωμένον Χριστό, γιὰ νὰ βοηθηθοῦμε ἀπὸ Αὐτὸν καὶ νὰ χαροῦμε τὴν Ἁγία Ἀνάσταση ἀλλοιωμένοι πνευματικά, ἀφοῦ θὰ ἔχουμε ζήσει πνευματικότερα τὴν Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή.

Εὔχομαι καλὴ δύναμη τὴν Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστὴ, γιὰ νὰ ἀνεβεῖτε στὸν Γολγοθᾶν κοντὰ στὸν Χριστό, μαζί μετὰ τὴν Παναγία καὶ τὸν Προστάτη σας Ἅγιο Ἰωάννη τὸν Θεολόγο, γιὰ νὰ συμμετάσχετε στὸ φρικτὸ Πάθος τοῦ Κυρίου μας. Ἀμήν.

## Οἱ Παρακαταθήκες τῶν Ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ '21

Τοῦ Γιώργου Ν. Παπαθανασόπουλου.

**Ο**ἱ Ἕλληνες ἔχουμε πάθει ἓνα γερὸ στραπάτσο τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια. Αὐτὸ ἔχει ἐπηρεάσει κυρίως τὶς εὐαίσθητες ψυχὲς τῶν νέων μας, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὑφίστανται τὶς βαρύτερες συνέπειες ἀπὸ τὰ λάθη τῶν μεγαλύτερων τους. Τὰ παιδιά καὶ τοὺς νέους μας χωρὶς νὰ τὸ θέλουν καὶ χωρὶς νὰ τὸ ξέρουν, τοὺς κάναμε σὰν ἓνα ζαλισμένο κοπάδι, ποὺ δὲν ξέρει ἀπὸ ποῦ ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ πηγαίνει... Δὲν μαθαίνουν νὰ ἐκτιμῶν αὐτὸ ποὺ ἔχουν, δὲν βοηθοῦνται νὰ ἔχουν ταυτότητα, ἰδιοπροσωπία, ὄραμα ζωῆς.

Ἡ μεγάλη εὐθύνη μας εἶναι ὅτι ἔχουμε ξεχάσει κι ἐπομένως δὲν μεταδίδουμε τὶς ὑποθήκες τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ 1821, ποὺ μᾶς ἔδωσαν ὄχι μόνον τὴν ἐλευθερία ποὺ ἀπολαμβάνουμε, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἦθος, ἀρχές, ἰδανικά. Νὰ θυμίσουμε κάποιες ἀπὸ τὶς ὑποθήκες τους. Ὁ Γέρος τοῦ Μωριά, ὁ ἀρχιστράτηγος τῆς ἀπελευθέρωσής μας ἀπὸ τὸν τουρκικὸ ζυγὸ, ὁ Θεόδωρος Κολοκοτρώνης, μιλώντας στοὺς νέους τοῦ Α΄ Γυμνασίου Ἀθηνῶν, στὴν Πνύκα, εἶπε, μεταξύ των ἄλλων:

—Ἐγὼ παιδιά μου... σὰς εἶπα ὅσα ὁ ἴδιος εἶδα, ἤκουσα, καὶ ἐγνώρισα, διὰ νὰ ὠφεληθῆτε ἀπὸ τὰ ἀπερασμένα, καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ κακὰ ἀποτελέσματα τῆς διχονοίας, τὴν ὁποία νὰ ἀποστρέφεσθε, καὶ νὰ ἔχετε ὁμόνοια. Ἐμᾶς μὴ μᾶς τηράτε πλέον. Τὸ ἔργο μας καὶ ὁ καιρὸς μας ἐπέρασε. Καὶ αἱ ἡμέραι τῆς γενεᾶς, ἡ ὁποία σὰς ἀνοιξε τὸ δρόμο, θέλουν μετ' ὀλίγον περάσει. Τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς ζωῆς μας θέλει διαδεχθῆ ἡ νύκτα τοῦ θανάτου μας, καθὼς τὴν ἡμέραν τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀσωμάτων θέλει διαδεχθῆ ἡ νύκτα καὶ ἡ αὐριανὴ ἡμέρα. Εἰς ἐσᾶς μένει νὰ ἰσάσετε καὶ νὰ στολίσετε τὸν τόπο, ὁποῦ ἡμεῖς ἐλευθερώσαμε· καὶ γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ τοῦτο, **πρέπει νὰ ἔχετε ὡς θεμέλια τῆς πολιτείας τὴν ὁμόνοια, τὴν θρησκεία... καὶ τὴν φρόνιμον ἐλευθερία.**

Ὁ ἄλλος μέγας ἀγωνιστῆς τοῦ 1821, ὁ Γιάννης Μακρυγιάννης, γράφει στὰ Ἀπομνημονεύματά του:

—Κι ἀφοῦ ὁ Θεὸς θέλησε νὰ κάμει νεκρανάστασιν εἰς τὴν πατρίδα μου, νὰ τὴν λευτερώσει ἀπὸ τὴν τυραγνίαν τῶν Τούρκων, ἀξίωσε κι ἐμένα νὰ δουλέψω κατὰ δύναμη λιγότερον ἀπὸ τὸν χειρότερον πατριώτη μου Ἕλληνα... Τὸ λοιπὸν δουλέψαμεν ὅλοι μαζί, νὰ τὴν φυλάμε... Καὶ εἰς τὸ ἐξῆς νὰ μάθομεν γνῶση, ἂν θέλομεν νὰ φκιάσομεν χωριόν, νὰ ζήσομε ὅλοι μαζί. Ἐγραψα γυμνὴ τὴν ἀλήθεια, νὰ ἰδοῦνε ὅλοι οἱ Ἕλληνες νὰ

ἀγωνίζονται διὰ τὴν πατρίδα τους, διὰ τὴν θρησκεία τους, νὰ ἰδοῦνε καὶ τὰ παιδιά μου καὶ νὰ λένε: «Ἐχομεν ἀγῶνες πατρικούς, ἔχομεν θυσίες», ἂν εἶναι ἀγῶνες καὶ θυσίες. Καὶ νὰ μπαίνουν σὲ φιλοτιμίαν καὶ **νὰ ἐργάζονται εἰς τὸ καλὸ τῆς πατρίδας τους, τῆς θρησκείας τους καὶ τῆς κοινωνίας...**

Τὶς ὑπηρεσίες ποὺ πρόσφεραν στὸ Ἑλληνικὸ Ἔθνος οἱ ἀγωνιστῆς τοῦ 1821 ἐκτίμησε ὁ σπουδαῖος ἄνθρωπος καὶ δικαστῆς Γεώργιος Τερτσέτης, ποὺ ἀρνήθηκε νὰ καταδικάσει σὲ θάνατο τὸν Θεόδωρο Κολοκοτρώνη, ἐκτίμησε τὸ ἦθος καὶ τὴ γενναϊότητά του, τὸν ἀγάπησε σὰν πατέρα του καὶ τὸν ἔπεισε νὰ τοῦ ὑπαγορεύσει τὰ Ἀπομνημονεύματά του. Ὁ Τερτσέτης σὲ λόγῳ του γιὰ τὴν 25<sup>ην</sup> Μαρτίου, τὸ 1869, τονίζει:

—Ἐγὼ, κύριοι ἀκροαταί, σκεπτόμενος καὶ ἀναλογιζόμενος τοὺς καιροὺς καὶ τὰ πράγματα τί πρέπει καὶ οἱ νέες γενεές τῆς Ἑλλάδος νὰ προσφέρουν στὴν οἰκουμένην, εὐρίσκω καὶ λέγω, νὰ προσφέρουν πρέπει παραδείγματα ἀθάνατα ἀρετῆς. Μὴν κλείσωμεν, φίλοι καὶ ἀδελφοί, τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς μας εἰς τὴν λάμπιν τοῦ καθήκοντος καὶ τῆς ἀποστολῆς μας.

Σήμερα καὶ μετὰ τὴν εὐκαιρία τῆς πανηγύρεως τῆς 25<sup>ης</sup> Μαρτίου καὶ μπρὸς στὸν γκερεμὸ ποὺ βρισκόμαστε ὀφείλομε νὰ ἀφυπνιστοῦμε καὶ νὰ δώσουμε τὸ παράδειγμα στὴ νεολαία ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ Ἔθνος δὲν ὑπάρχουν χωρὶς ἐλευθερία. Καὶ ἐλευθερία δὲν εἶναι μόνον νὰ ἀποτινάξουμε τὸ ζυγὸ μας ἀπὸ τοὺς ὁποίους τυράννους, εἶναι κυρίως νὰ ἀπαλλαγοῦμε ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη μας, νὰ ζήσομε ὡς ὄντα μετὰ ῥίζες καὶ βάθος καὶ νὰ δεῖξουμε τὴν ἐμπρακτὴ εὐγνωμοσύνη μας πρὸς ὅσους μᾶς ἔδωσαν τὴν ἐλευθερία καὶ μᾶς δίδαξαν ἀξιοπρέπεια καὶ ἦθος.



**Ο**ἱ φτωχοὶ εἶναι γιατροὶ τῶν ψυχῶν μας, εὐεργέτες καὶ προστάτες μας. Διότι δὲν δίνεις τόσα, ὅσα παίρνεις. Δίνεις χρήματα καὶ παίρνεις τὴν Βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν. Ἀνακουφίζεις τὴν φτώχεια καὶ συμφιλιώνεις τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου μετὰ τὸν Κύριον. Βλέπεις ὅτι δὲν εἶναι ἴση ἡ ἀνταπόδοση μετὰ ὅσα δίνεις. Γιατὶ τὰ δικά σου μένουν στὴν γῆ, ἐνῶ τὰ κέρδη σου στὸν οὐρανὸν. Αὐτὰ, ποὺ δίνεις χάνονται, ἐνῶ αὐτὰ ποὺ παίρνεις παραμένουν αἰώνια. Τὰ πρῶτα καταστρέφονται, τὰ δευτέρα δένφθειρονται.

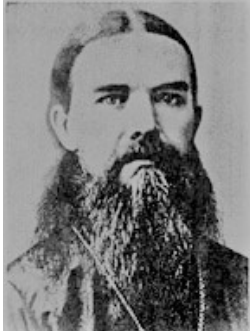
**Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος**



## RAISING CHILDREN

Source: "The Path to Salvation," by St. Theophan the Recluse, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, published by St. Paisius Monastery, Safford, AZ (2016), pp. 37-42.

### Christian Upbringing



The aim towards which everything in this process should be directed is this: that this new man, when he comes to awareness, might recognize himself not only as a rational and free man, but at the same time as a person who has entered into an obligation with the Lord, with Whom his eternal lot is joined inseparably; and that he might not only

acknowledge himself to be such, but might also find himself capable of acting according to this obligation and might see that his preeminent attraction is to this.

The question arises, how can this be attained? How should one act with regard to a baptized child so that when he comes to age he might not desire anything else than to be a true Christian? In other words, how does one raise him in a Christian way?

To answer this we will not undertake to examine everything in detail. We will limit ourselves to a general survey of the whole topic of Christian upbringing, having in mind to show how, in every circumstance, to support and strengthen the good side in children, and how to make powerless and crush what is bad.

Here, first of all, our attention should be directed to the infant in the cradle, before any kind of capabilities have awakened in him. The child is alive; consequently one can influence his life. Here we should think of the influence of the Holy Mysteries, and with them the whole churchly way of life, and at the same time the faith and piety of the parents. All this together constitutes a saving atmosphere around the infant. By all of this the life of grace which has been conceived in the infant is instilled mystically.

The frequent communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ (one should add, as frequently as possible) joins His new member to the Lord in the most lively and active way through His most pure Body and Blood. It sanctifies him, gives him peace within himself, and makes him inaccessible to the dark powers. People who follow this advice notice that on the day when a child is given Communion, he is immersed in a deep calm without the powerful movements of all his natural needs, even those which are most powerfully felt in children. Sometimes the child is filled with joy and a playfulness of spirit in which he is ready to embrace everyone as his own.

Often Holy Communion is accompanied also by miracles. St. Andrew of Crete in his childhood did not speak for a long time, but when his grieved parents turned to prayer

and the reception of grace, during the time of Communion the Lord by His grace loosed the bonds of his tongue, which afterwards gave the Church to drink of torrents of eloquence and wisdom. One doctor, from his own observation, testifies that for the most part when there are illnesses in children, the children should be taken to Holy Communion, and very rarely does he have need to use later any kind of medical help.

A great influence is exercised on the child by frequently taking him to church, by having him kiss the Holy Cross, the Gospel, the icons, and by covering him with the veils. Likewise, at home frequently placing him under the icons, frequently signing him with the sign of the Cross, sprinkling him with holy water, the burning of incense, making the sign of the Cross over his cradle, his food, and everything connected with him, the blessing of a priest, the bringing into the house of icons from church—the service of *molebens*—and in general everything from the church, in a wondrous way warms and nourishes the life of grace in the child and is always the most safe and impenetrable protection against the attacks of the invisible dark powers who everywhere are ready to penetrate into the developing soul so as to infect it by their activity.

Behind this visible protection there is an invisible one: the guardian angel placed by the Lord to protect the child from the very minute of his baptism. He watches over him and by his presence invisibly influences him, and when necessary inspires the parents to know what they should for a child who is in danger.

But all these strong protections and these powerful and active inspirations can be dissolved and made fruitless by unbelief, carelessness, impiety, and the bad life of the parents. This is because the means mentioned here are either not used, or are used not in the proper way; here the inward influence of the parents on the child is especially important. It is true that the Lord is merciful to the innocent; but there is a tie which we cannot understand between the souls of the parents and the soul of the child, and we cannot define the extent of the influence of the former on the latter. At the same time, when the parents exert a bad influence, to some extent the mercy and condescension of God are still given to the child. But it sometimes happens that this divine aid ceases, and then the causes which have been prepared bring forth their fruit. Therefore, the spirit of faith and piety of the parents should be regarded as the most powerful means for the preservation, upbringing and strengthening of the life of grace in children.

### The Influence of the Parents upon the Child

The spirit of the infant has, as it were, no movement as yet in the first days, months, and even years. It is impossible to communicate anything for him to assimilate by the usual means of communication, but one may influence him in another way. There is a certain special way of communica-

tion between souls through the heart. One spirit influences another by means of the feelings. The ease of exerting such an influence upon the soul of an infant is in direct proportion to the fullness and depth of the parents' feeling for the child. The father and mother, as it were, disappear into the child and put their whole soul into his welfare. And if their spirit is penetrated with piety, it cannot be that in some way this will not influence the soul of the child.

The best outward conductor in this respect is the eyes. Whereas in the other senses the soul remains hidden, the eyes open their gaze to others. This is the meeting place of one soul with another. Let the openings be used for the passage of holy feelings from the souls of the mother and father to the soul of the child. Their souls cannot help but anoint the soul of the child with this holy oil. It is necessary that in the gaze of the parents there should be not only love, which is so natural, but also the faith that in their arms there is something more than a simple child. The parents must have the hope that He Who gave them this treasure under their watch as a vessel of grace might furnish them also with sufficient means to preserve him. And finally, there should be ceaseless prayer performed in the Spirit, aroused by hope according to faith.

When in this way the parents protect the cradle of their child with this spirit of sincere piety, and when at the same time, on the one hand the guardian angel, and on the other the Holy Mysteries and all of Church life, act upon him from without and from within—by this there is formed around the newly begun life a spiritual atmosphere akin to it which will pour into it its own character, just as blood, the principle of animal life, derives many of its characteristics from the surrounding atmosphere. It is said that a newly made vessel will preserve for a long time, perhaps permanently, the odor of whatever was poured into it at that time. This can also be said about the atmosphere surrounding children. It penetrates in a grace-giving and saving way into the forms of life just being established in the child and places its seal upon him. Here also there is a protection that cannot be penetrated by the influence of evil spirits.

Having begun in such a way from the cradle, one must continue it later, and during the whole time of upbringing: in childhood, in adolescence, and in young manhood. The Church, its life, and the Holy Mysteries are like a tabernacle (tent) for the children, and they should be under it without leaving it. Examples indicate how saving and fruitful this is (such as the life of the Prophet Samuel; the life of St. Theodore Sykeote (April 22), and others). These alone can even replace all the means of upbringing, as indeed has been done in many cases successfully. The ancient method of upbringing consisted primarily in precisely this.

When a child's powers begin to awaken, one after another, parents and those who are raising children should double

their attention. For when, under the influence of the means which have been indicated, the longing for God will grow and increase in them and draw the powers of the child after it, at this same time the sin which dwells in them also does not sleep, but strives to take possession of these same powers. The inevitable consequence of this is inward warfare. Since children are incapable of conducting it themselves, their place is understandably taken by the parents. But since this warfare must be conducted through the powers of the children, the parents must strictly watch over the first beginnings of their awakening, so that from the first minute they may give these powers a direction in harmony with the chief aim towards which they must be directed.

Thus begins the warfare of the parents with the sin that dwells in the child. Although this sin is deprived of points of support, still it acts, and so as to find a good resting place for itself it tries to take possession of the powers of the body and soul. One must not allow it to do this, but must, as it were, uproot these powers from the hand of sin and give them over to God.

But so that this might be done with a good foundation and with a rational knowledge of the reliability of the means that have been chosen, one must make clear for oneself what it is that sin desires, what nourishes it, and precisely how it takes possession of us. The fundamental things which arouse and draw one towards sin are: arbitrariness of mind (or curiosity) in the mental faculty, self-will in the faculty of will, and pleasures in the faculty of feeling.

Therefore one must so conduct and direct the developing powers of the soul and body so as not to give them over into captivity to enjoyments of the flesh, to curiosity, to self-will and self-centered pleasures—for this would be a sinful captivity—but on the contrary, one must train the child how to separate himself from them and master them, and thus as much as possible to render them powerless and harmless. This is the chief thing in the beginning. The whole of the upbringing can later be brought into harmony with this beginning. Let us look again, with this aim, at the chief activities of the body, soul, and spirit.



Concern for spiritual things will unite the family. Do you want your child to be obedient? Then from the beginning bring him up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Don't think that it isn't necessary for a child to listen to the Scriptures; the first thing he will hear from them will be *Honor your father and mother*, and immediately you will begin to reap your reward.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## ON SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

By the Righteous Elder Cleopa, from "The Counsels of Elder Cleopa."



Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ said: *For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not, might see; and that they which see might be made blind.* (Jn 9:39). There is much that we can learn from these words if we examine them attentively. One aspect that we can observe is the spiritual blindness of a person enslaved to sin.

The Scribes and Pharisees were spiritually blind. They not only did not believe in the miracles wrought by the Lord Christ, but they blasphemed against Him, saying *He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils he casteth out devils.* (Mk 3:22). They were so blind that they had eyes but did not see; they had ears but would not hear. That is why the Lord called them *blind Pharisees*.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the prophet David spoke about this spiritual blindness of the scribes and Pharisees, the Judaic priests and lawgivers and the punishment which awaited them, saying: *Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake* (Pss 68:23). The great prophet Isaiah also prophesied about the spiritual blindness of the Israelite people, saying: *The Lord hath poured upon you the spirit of deep sleep and hath closed your eyes* (Isa 29:10), adding that neither could their ears hear until that day. Then he said: *Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.* (Isa 6:10).

How is spiritual blindness born in man's mind? It comes from numerous sources. First, it follows on the heels of sin. The Savior attested to that saying: *Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.* (Jn 3:19-20).

Spiritual blindness also comes from lack of faith and hard-heartedness regarding God. The Prophet Isaiah referred to this, saying, *I have spread out my hands all the day toward rebellious people ... that have provoked me.* (Isa 65:2). That is why God hardened their hearts so they would not see with their eyes nor hear with their ears; until this present day. (cf Deut 29:4). Spiritual blindness comes from lack of faith and a hardened heart, as Holy Scripture says: *The Lord said to me, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat,*

*and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.* (Isa 6:9-10).

I said that one of the sources of spiritual blindness is sin. Now let us see why sin brings such spiritual blindness and darkens the mind of man. According to Holy Scripture, sin is called the *work of darkness*, (Isa 29:15; Rom 11:12; Eph 5:11). As a work of darkness, every kind of sin darkens the mind of man and brings confusion as well as spiritual sickness and blindness. How can we drive the darkness of sin from our minds? Only through abandoning sin. This is accomplished by obeying the words of God, through fasting, prayer, tearful repentance, sincere confession to one's spiritual father, and fulfilling the commandments of God. In these good deeds, everyone—regardless of how sinful he is—comes to the light of knowledge and draws near to God, thus leaving behind a man darkened by sin and becoming a chosen vessel of God and son of the Kingdom of heaven.

At times spiritual blindness comes to a person through the consent of God. This has happened to many who were truly chosen by God. One very clear example of this is seen in the calling of the great Apostle Paul who had formerly been called Saul and who had been a fierce persecutor of the Church.

Now let us take a look at spiritual blindness in our own times. We have all seen people who are physically blind, either from their birth, or as the result of an accident or sickness. Whenever we see a blind person we are filled with mercy for him, sometimes even being moved to tears. He cannot walk about independently. He cannot see the sky, the sun, or the beauty of flowers. He cannot see icons or the cross that he venerates, nor even the face of his mother or children or friends. The blind man cannot read a holy book, he is limited in the work he can do and often feels like a burden to his family and society<sup>1</sup>. Such a person suffering from blindness is deserving of our compassion.

God comforts a person who cannot see with other gifts: deeper wisdom, greater expression of speech, humility, the gift of tears, and often a beautiful singing voice. The Creator of all, in His divine care, has mercy on His creation. That is why the Holy Spirit says, through the mouth of the Psalmist: *The Lord maketh wise the blind.* (Pss 145:8).

Blindness of the mind, the heart, the will and the conscience is much more serious and deserving of pity, for the soul is of such greater value than the body. That is why the Savior says, *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Mk 8:36-37). God created the soul to be eternal, and thus blindness of soul is one of the most serious sickness, which leads to the soul's loss and eternal condemnation. That is why healing such an illness is so much more difficult and so much more important than healing physical blindness.

What do we mean by spiritual blindness or blindness of the soul? This is a darkening and enslavement of the soul to all kinds of spiritual and physical sins: arrogant attitudes, hard-heartedness, a weak will and conscience, disbelief, doubting the Faith, sectarianism, hopelessness, pride, suicide, physical and spiritual murder, abortion, hatred and anger toward others, fornication, lying, avarice, miserliness, gluttony, drunkenness, laziness, and so on. Every kind of sin is a sickness of the soul which hurls a person into noetic blindness and numbness and brings physical sickness to the body. If we do not turn to repentance, confession and spiritual rejuvenation to abandon the sins which enslave us, then spiritual blindness—like any other sickness—leads to spiritual death and the condemnation of the soul to the torments of hell.

How is an Orthodox Christian anything but spiritually blind when he abandons his faith in God and leaves the Church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles, going rather to every other kind of religious sect? How is one not spiritually blind and ill when he does not come to church for years, does not pray, does not read holy books, and puts off repentance and confession until the hour of his death? How is a person not spiritually blind and wretched when he calls himself a Christian but spends his time, resources and health in passing cares and sins that lead to death? How is a Christian not wretched and lacking the light of knowledge and spiritual joy when he hasn't read Holy Scriptures especially the New Testament—at least once, as well as other Orthodox books that illumine and guide the mind and soul toward Christ? What is the Christian who wastes his life in drunkenness, fornication, arguing, judging, full of hate but a man who is weak in faith and deceived by the devil? He is blind and spiritually sick, walking along a path of perdition and unable to raise himself up from sin so that he can repent and save his soul.

How blind and lacking in faith are those husbands and wives who marry only for physical pleasure and who avoid giving birth to children; or if they do bear children, they scandalize them by their sinful lives and do not give them a healthy Christian education. How many disputes, needless divorces, abortions, drunkenness, lack of religious education, destroy family unity which is the very vine of life and society. All of these sins enslave us because of our spiritual blindness. They come upon us through lack of compassion, lack of faith in God, lack of Christian education and knowledge of the Gospel, lack of life in the Church, postponing confession, not having a good spiritual father and through lack of remembrance of death and the judgment that awaits us.

Now you see what spiritual blindness is and how it enslaves so many. Some through physical sins and others through spiritual sins and hardness of heart, lack of prayer, ignoring God and through worldly cares. In the eyes of the Savior who

will judge us, no one is good, no one is righteous, pure and worthy of the life to come.

So what are we to do? How can we be healed of this terrifying hardness of heart, enslavement to the passions and blindness in our souls? Such healing can only be wrought through abandoning the sins which enslave us, through returning again to Christ, to the Church, to prayer, to humility and repentance. We have to do what the blind man in the Gospel did when Christ asked him *Dost thou believe in the Son of God?* He answered with his entire heart, “*Lord, I believe.*” *And he worshipped Him.* (Jn. 9:35, 38).

The Lord likewise asks us: *Christians, do you firmly believe in Christ, the Savior of the world? Do you obey His commandments? Do you believe the words of the Holy Gospel that you will have eternal life? Do you believe that God created the world, that He is merciful toward it and that He alone can save it from destruction and death?*

The answer that each of us will give to these questions will determine either our salvation or condemnation.

If we firmly believe in the Son of God, then we will fulfill His commandments and do as the blind man in the Gospel. After the Lord placed the earth mixed with spittle on eyes of the blind man and sent him to wash in the nearby pool of Siloam, the man immediately was healed and able to see. The mud that covers our spiritual eyes is the filth of our sins which we can cleanse away through the laver of tears and confession. Let us listen to Christ and do as He commands us. Let us wash the eyes of our souls, of our minds, of our hearts and of our will through constant prayer, true repentance and acts of mercy. Only then we will be healed spiritually, like the blind man in the Holy Gospel account.

Beloved faithful, our earthly life is short, full of sufferings, and often deceptive. The heavenly life is so blessed and full of eternal joy. Let us abandon the sins which blind us and bring death to the soul for only then can we return to Christ. It is not enough to simply make the sign of the cross and say, *Lord, Lord!* What we need is a complete spiritual change of life. We are called to cast from the eyes of our souls the stain and mire of the passions from this day forth. We must wash them with the water of Siloam—the laver of confession—and then submit in complete obedience to Christ, to the Church which He established upon on this earth. We must humble ourselves, pray constantly, be at peace with all, attend church services regularly, offer alms as much as possible. Raise your children in the True Faith and in the love for God so that they will become good Christians, true sons of the Orthodox Church and heirs of the Kingdom of heaven.

Amen!



[1] Handicapped people in Romania during Fr. Cleopa's time did not have the advantages, training and help that are available to people in western countries.



## LONGING FOR PARADISE

Source: "The Veil," a publication by the Protection of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Monastery, Lake George, CO, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 16-18.

God created us to be eternal. He placed our forefathers Adam and Eve in a most glorious garden—the Garden of Eden—Paradise. This was meant to be our eternal home where we were provided with all things needful and where we were to be in constant communion with God.

We know what happened. Adam and Eve did not keep their eyes on God. They listened to the serpent and transgressed the one commandment they had been given, even though the Lord had told them that the consequence of such an action would be death.

We must understand that God is not the God of death, but the God of eternal life. It is our sinfulness that brought death into the world. We cannot simply blame this on Adam and Eve who sinned, for we continue to sin every day. God's love for us is so great that He still wants us to dwell in Paradise. The fathers tell us that after the fall of Adam and Eve, that beautiful garden was lifted up from the earth and still awaits us.

Why do we not long for it?

Actually, we do, but we seek it in all the wrong places. We go through our lives seeking fulfillment, contentment, joy, beauty, peace. Often we find bits of those things, but they are transitory, passing with our earthly life. We are seeking that Paradise which we have lost, but we are very misguided.

The holy fathers tell us that when Adam fell, his nous was darkened. It is the nous that beholds paradise. Now, with that nous darkened, we tend to see only with our physical eyes, to experience everything with only our physical senses. That cloud which covers our spiritual senses has been lifted from time to time for some people so that they can behold what exists outside of our physical realm. These individuals have had brief glimpses of Paradise. Most notable of those who have had such experiences is St. Paul. He tells us this when he speaks of himself in the third person: *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.* (2 Cor 12:2-4).

The fathers of the Church later described what happened to St. Paul as a striking form of *purification*, *illumination*, and *theosis*. There have been volumes of books on this topic. Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos is a modern day theologian/writer who examines this in nearly every one of the many books he has written and which are readily available in English and many other languages.

Briefly, our lives must be purified through constant repentance. Some, having attained such *purification* will experience *illumination*. The scales covering the eyes of his soul will fall away. Only then can such a person return to the original state of Adam in Paradise of being not only the image, but also the "likeness" of God—*theosis*.

St. Paul was not alone in having had such an experience. There are quite a number of saints who also had glimpses, visions of Paradise and also of the torments awaiting sinners. When faced with the threat or nearness of death, we have countless accounts of saints. Some were made aware of their overwhelming sinfulness and asked the Lord to grant them more time so that they could repent, fast and pray for forgiveness. This was granted to them and they indeed changed their lives and even became an example for many others seeking salvation. There are also numerous accounts of saints who, on seeing others confessing their faith, enduring torments and martyrdom rather than deny Christ, ran forward to the scaffold and torments themselves, proclaiming, "I am a Christian." They did not fear death, but rather saw such a death as a path to life with Christ. They hastened toward it and embraced it.

Many, in our own times, who have sat at the bed of a loved one who is dying have seen the dying person suddenly have a change of countenance, even converse with a departed family member. They have not necessarily attained theosis, but they are seeing what our physical eyes do not behold.

Over the past few decades there has been no lack of recorded experiences of people who have had out-of-body "death experiences." Several of them speak of peace, light, colors never seen before, sweet singing, and beautiful gardens. In addition, they usually say that they did not want to come back to this life.

So why, when the Lord indicates that He will take us soon, usually through the onset of a disease, do we insist on fighting to remain in this life? It is rarely for the sake of repentance, the only real purpose of our life and only valid reason to remain in it. We pray that we do not die, and often the Lord grants that request. Or, we should say, he grants it for a time. Eventually, no matter what, we will all die. It seems that when He wants to take us to Himself and we ask Him not to, we later come down with an even more devastating disease.

Yes, we want to remain in this life to be with our loved ones, to enjoy life's sweetness—passing as they are. When we are ill we are more cognizant of our mortality and the fact that we have spent the majority of our lives in vain, chasing after things that are transitory instead of repenting of our sins and drawing closer to God. Unlike the very vocal Evangelicals, Pentecostals and others that surround us in a non-Orthodox country, we do not claim to be "saved." We are aware that the Lord Jesus Christ has this precious gift

of salvation which He wants to give us. We know that He has prepared a glorious wedding banquet for us, but we are also aware that we lack the proper *wedding garment*. (Mt 22:11). That garment is repentance and longing for God.

There is a longing for the beauty of Paradise, for being bathed in the light of Christ, and there is that awareness that we are unworthy. Still, the Lord, in His love for mankind, desires to bestow this upon us. He calls us to this eternal life. So why do we want to cling to this one?

The soul has only known life in the body and it is fearful to leave. While the soul glimpses the eternal beauty that exists and is waiting for it in Paradise, and even knows that it will be re-united with the body at the Second Coming of Christ, it is often still fearful. However, for the person who has repented and longs to be with the Lord, this separation can be peaceful. The soul of such a person can often cry out in the words of St. John the Evangelist, *Come, Lord Jesus!* (Rev. 22:20).

We do not know when we will die. That is something that the Lord does not reveal to most until the time is very near. Sometimes, He does not reveal it at all and death comes suddenly—something that we pray will not happen to us. While we prepare for so many things in this life: education, career, family, vacations, retirement, even the distribution of our belongings after death, we still postpone preparing for our meeting with the Lord. We put off praying until “tomorrow.” We put off fasting until the next fasting period. We put off simply being quiet and near the Lord until another day. We put off truly repenting until we have done all the things we want to do—and perhaps should not be doing at all!

However, without fail, our earthly lives will end. For some it may be in old age, for others it could be suddenly, at a much younger age when worldly wisdom would be saying “he/she had so much to live for...”

The Lord is patient. He wants us to be “ripe” for the beauty He has prepared for us in Paradise. Let us long for it and not fight against it.



The immaterial Word of God saw that corruption held us because it was the penalty for the Transgression...He saw how unseemly it was that the very things of which He Himself was the Artificer should be disappearing. He saw how the unsurpassing wickedness of men was mounting up against them; He saw their universal liability to death. Moved with compassion ...He took to Himself a body, a human body even as our own...He took *our* body.

St. Athanasios the Great

## THE MIRACLE AT THE PROPHET ELIJAH CHURCH IN CHERNOBYL THE ONLY CHURCH OPEN IN THE CHERNOBYL ZONE SHOWS THE MINIMUM RADIATION LEVEL

*Interfax, April 20, 2011.*



Over the entire twenty-five years since the Chernobyl nuclear plant accident, radiation levels in the area of St. Elijah Church, the only church operating in the exclusion zone, were well below levels across the zone, Chernobyl disaster liquidators state.

“Even during the most difficult days of 1986, the area around the St. Elijah Church was clean from radiation, not to mention that the church itself was also clean,” president

of the Ukrainian Chernobyl Union Yury Andreyev said in a Kiev-Moscow video conference on Wednesday.

Now, the territory adjacent to the church has a background level of 6 microroentgen per hour compared with 18 in Kiev. Andreyev also said many disaster liquidators are former atheists. “We came to believe later, after observing such developments which could be explained only by God’s will,” he says. In particular, according to him, a few seconds after the explosion in the fourth unit of the Chernobyl Power Plant, the cloud containing uranium particles started moving in the direction of Pripjat, a city located about 1,800 meters from the plant. There was a pine-tree on its way (it is featured on a well-known icon, Chernobyl’s Savior.)

“The cloud stopped short of this pine, divided into two parts by some unknown cause, and continued moving to the left and right sides of the city, instead of covering its residential areas. The radiation level in contamination areas was four or five roentgen per hour, and the city showed only half a miliroentgen,” Andreyev said.



The icon above was painted in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in remembrance of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986. It depicts Jesus Christ the Savior in Heaven, surrounded by a *mandorla* (a pointed oval figure, *Ed.*), with His hand raised in a blessing. Flanking Christ is the Mother of God to His right, supplicating her Son, and the Archangel Michael to His left. A star falls on Chernobyl, reminiscent of the Book of Revelation’s reference to “wormwood”, which in Ukrainian is translated as “chernobyl.” The pine tree that saved the city is depicted in the middle.

## THE THREE STAGES OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos (edited for length).

### The First Coming of Grace

In the texts of the Old and the New Testament we see clearly that God manifests Himself to the prophets in various ways. *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.* (Heb 1:1).

God contracts with each person a personal covenant. He does not want us to have knowledge about Him through the testimonies of others; He Himself appears and gives His knowledge, and man acquires his own personal testimony about God. This first personal contact with God occurs at a time unanticipated by man or even after a painful search. It might also happen to a man fighting against Him. This is the case of St. Paul to whom Christ Himself appears and contracts a personal covenant with him, as he was traveling to fight against Him. This personal coming of the Grace is a holy state. Man's soul gets to know God as a "person," albeit dimly. He understands with his heart, his *nous* as the Fathers say, that God is not an abstract state nor an impersonal power or a great value, but a Person.

This first coming of God's Grace, which is tasted differently by each one, is a life full of inner experiences of the heart and of mystical spree. St. Diadochos of Fotiki writes: *In the beginning Grace is accustomed to illuminate the mind in much [spiritual] perception in Grace's own light.* At another point he writes: *In the beginning of our progress, if indeed we warmly and ardently desire the virtue of God, the Holy Spirit makes the nous taste in every [spiritual] perception and inner spiritual assurance the sweetness of God, so that the nous be able to know in exact knowledge the perfect reward of the God-loving ascetical practices.*

With this first period of the coming of God we receive one chapter of a new life, one chapter of Grace. God attracts us to Him, so that after a lot of struggle and sacrifices we become acquainted with Him. This new period of God's calling is a period of sweetness, spiritual joy, of inner experiences of the heart. A lot of people live this paschal atmosphere. It suffices to mention a written testimony about the state in which St. Silouan lived after Christ's appearance to him:

*At the moment of God's Epiphany his whole existence was informed that his sins had been absolved. The flames of Hades that roared around him disappeared, the hell he experienced for half a year stopped. He was now granted to live the special joy and great rest of appeasement with God. In his soul a new sweet feeling of love for God and people, each one person, dominated. The prayer of repentance ceased, that unbearable fiery search for absolution which did not allow sleep to come to his eyelids*

*went away. Did this mean that he could now quietly give over to sleeping? Of course not.*

*The first period after Epiphany, Symeon's soul (Symeon was St. Silouan's worldly name, Ed.), who got to know its resurrection and saw the light of true and eternal existence, lived in a paschal feast. Everything was beautiful: the world was magnificent, people were congenial, nature was unspeakably beautiful, the body changed and became lighter, strength was added, God's words gave joy to the soul, all-night vigils in the church and, above all, prayers in the cell became sweet. Overflowing by joy the soul felt compassion for people and prayed for the whole world.*

It is impossible to describe this state in words. The experience of uncreated Grace cannot be contained in created words. Only a reborn person, a person initiated by experience, is able to perceive this reality. Everything is new during this period. He feels the presence of God as a personal experience, he views the essence of beings in all creation. Everything is clear. Birds, trees acquire a new dimension. He sees everything in the perspective of eternity, under the energy of uncreated Grace and uncreated Light. Mankind's common problems no longer occupy him. He does not care for others' opinion about him. He is indifferent to any hardship. His sole preoccupation is prayer and communion with God. It is a life centered on love. Passions are not activated. Man "suffers" *deification*.

The first coming of Grace to man's heart is a shocking experience. Man feels a whole life inside him. When St. Symeon was asked how one can know that he has the holy Grace in him, he said that this is most natural. He realizes that he has become a temple of the Holy Spirit and that the Grace of God camps in him the same way a pregnant woman realizes the existence of an embryo in her womb. It is not a sentimental excitement and elation, but rather a sense of life.

In this state, man finds what the Holy Scripture and the holy Fathers call *deep heart*. The *nous*, returning to the heart from its previous dispersion through the senses in the surrounding world, initially locates the bodily organ of the heart and then enters the so-called spiritual heart, that is, the center of man's existence. We can say, according to the teaching of the so-called neptic fathers, that the heart is the place which is discovered by asceticism in Grace, and where God Himself is revealed. In reality, when we speak about the person in the Church we mean this place of the heart. A person's *heart*, *in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.* (1 Pet 3:4). Finding this blessed place is essential, because this constitutes man's salvation. When asked on this, Abbot Pambo replied: *If you have heart, you can be saved.* Inside the heart, which in patristic theology is identified with the *nous*, man is united with God, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, *God united with gods and becoming known in the heart.* Then the heart becomes a temple where an unceasing Divine Liturgy is celebrated, and in this

case man becomes a true priest of the holy Grace, *spiritual clergy*, according to St. Gregory the Sinaite.

The union of the *nous* with the heart is evident, that is, man has proofs of this union. There are three such proofs:

The **first** is that there is a pain in the bodily organ of the heart. A pain which seems like a wound, but causes a spiritual pleasure, tranquility and inner peace. This pain holds the *nous* to the prayer done in the heart and brings together man's existence on this point. In this state, man thinks and acts through the heart. A faith is developed which, according to St. Gregory Palamas, is a *comprehension of the heart*.

A **second** indication is that tears of compunction start flowing. The holy Fathers teach that when there is a sweetest state of compunction, this is a clear indication that the *nous* has been united with the heart. This compunction is associated with joyful tears.

A **third** indication is that prayer is done by itself. This unceasing prayer is not simply a movement of reason, it is something deeper. Man hears clearly the bodily heartbeat, and simultaneously under this beat at a long distance, as he feels it, another beat is heard, faster than the natural heartbeat. This is the beat of spiritual heart, a fact which means that the spiritual heart has been discovered and then man becomes a person. For the person is revealed from above, it is the coming of the Rule of God in the heart. The Jesus prayer is said unceasingly with this spiritual beat. Man does not try to pray, prayer is done by itself. It is self-activated, both during the work of daytime and even during sleep-time. That is, while he sleeps a few hours so that the body gets a rest, during that state he feels very well that the heart is sleepless and prays, in accordance with the saying of St. John of the Ladder who comments on a passage in the Song of Songs *I am asleep and my heart is awake. I sleep due to the need of nature and my heart is alert due to the multitude of love. When he wakes up he senses very well that the body has slept, but he also senses very clearly that the heart has not stopped praying.*

A few more states experienced by man, when he becomes a temple of the All-Holy Spirit and the holy Grace dwells in his heart, are worthy of further discussion:

A communion of love with God is established. It is not simply a psychological state or even simply a spiritual experience of the element of physical love. It is a purely spiritual experience. Then man comprehends St. Maximus' words that God *is love and beloved* or what St. Ignatius the God-bearer's term for Christ as love ("eros"): *my love has been crucified*. This is not physical eros, because it has been preceded by the purification of the heart. In fact, **when this spiritual eros operates, the passions become inoperative** and man lives in a state of impassion, experiencing God in the desert as well as in the crowds.

The spiritual senses are also developed, namely, *noetic sense, noetic vision and noetic hearing*. The whole *nous* is concen-

trated inside the heart. This way it achieves the unification of man's entire existence. He realizes very well that he is reborn. He senses warmth in the heart, both the physical and the spiritual one. This warmth rejuvenates man's entire existence. It feeds him and gives life to him.

This causes a deep peace of thoughts. In the process of purification, the *nous* discards continuously all foreign elements which like scales covered it before. It thus becomes lighter and always finds shelter in the heart. There it hears the voice of God several times. God speaks to him and reveals His will inside the heart. There is a personal acquaintance with God and thus he acquires the spiritual knowledge of God.

However, this is not a course of emotional joy. Spiritual joy is closely associated with spiritual mourning. The holy Fathers use a word to express this well. It is the word *harmolype* (joy-sadness). Despite the certainty of God's existence, despite the feeling of God's presence and of His love, he feels simultaneously deep repentance. This is how we realize that this joy is genuine and true. The *nous*, entering the heart, sees on the one hand God's love and on the other his own impurity. Therefore, he often immerses in lamentation. This may be expressed physically, but, mostly, it is done inside the heart. He feels his heart shedding tears, weeping, and these tears cleanse the heart from sin and the passions.

At that point the passions no longer act. Man experiences his rebirth. At the same time other people around him have an irrepressible thirst for contempt. He is not saddened by this contempt, in fact he loves it and seeks it even more.

St. Basil the Great analyzing this severe and unbearable desire felt by those who have the Grace of God says characteristically: *Blessed are those who love to see the true beauty; having attached themselves to it through love, and being in love with the heavenly and blessed love, they neglect their family and friends and their houses and all their possessions; and neglecting even their physical need for food and water they cling only to the divine and pure love.*

### The Lifting of the Grace

**H**owever, this state is not going to last for long. The duration of the Grace after the first coming is different for each person. It depends on various factors. On his zeal, on God's economy, on his way of life, etc. Nevertheless, after a certain period Grace is lowered.

In the works of the holy Fathers this state is well known. There are differences in the terminology. Lowering, lifting, abandonment, abandonment by God, etc. Nevertheless, it refers to the same thing which is due to various reasons.

What is the lifting of the Grace? Is it a real lifting and abandonment? How is it possible for God to completely abandon man? The Fathers are expressive on this point: *Of course it is not an objective full withdrawal of Grace, rather the soul subjectively experiences the reduction of the power of Grace as abandonment by God.* The "vision" of God is reduced by

various degrees and man experiences this reduction as abandonment by God.

St. Diadochos of Fotiki refers to an educational concession and a concession by aversion. The first occurs for reasons God knows, they contribute to our salvation and our education, the second for our sins.

These show clearly that the Grace is not completely removed from man, but rather hides itself, or better, lowers itself, to give man the opportunity to grapple with sin, to fight against passions, and to seek fiercely its new return. This fight, as will be shown below, is painful and has a different duration for each person. Nevertheless, man is in a desert for several years... He feels as if walking in a spiritual desert, in a land without the life-giving breath of the holy Grace.

What is the purpose of the lowering of the holy Grace? St. Diadochos writes: *Being true infants of the Grace of God, we believe that we are nurtured by it by small concessions and abundant invocation, so that by its goodness we manage to become a perfect man, to attain to the whole measure.* This way we grow up spiritually and from "breast-fed" infants we attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, that is, we reach communion with Christ. This communion is man's salvation.

Besides, we are impassioned men, and thus we are unable to hold the Grace of God. Grace indicates the road and the goal to us and then leaves us to cleanse ourselves in order to achieve this "goal." Several times in our spiritual life we feel that the body is unable to follow the soul's progression to Deification. *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak* (Mt 26:41). Through education in God the body acquires a certain ability to follow the course of the soul.

St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite referring to the journey of the Magi, to the adoration of Christ, and specifically to the fact that they lost the star guiding them, writes: *Like the bright star that guided and consoled the Magi in their journey hid itself, in order to test their patience and their bravery and then reappeared and caused them greater joy than before; when they saw the star, they were overjoyed* (Mt 2:10), *the grace of God usually does the same to its servants and friends, as the so-called neptic Fathers say, and especially St. Diadochos. Sometimes, like a child-loving mother, she consoles and gladdens her children with her noetic illumination and divine energy and gifts, illuminating their nous, bringing contrition most sweetly to their heart and warming it and stimulating it towards the love of God; and sometimes it hides itself from them and allows temptations to go to them, like a mother often hides from her children to test their patience and brave heart, so that through temptations and grief they become grown-ups and not remain infants forever, to cry and ask strongly for the holy grace they have lost. And thus, after they enjoy it again, they rejoice even more, like a child who loses his mother and searches for her weeping and crying, and when he sees her somewhere runs in unspeakable joy and crying and laughing at the same time falls into her lap.*

This period is a period of assimilation of the Grace which man had tasted in his first contact with it. Doctrinal consciousness is born out of this assimilation. And this assimilation lasts many years for an ascetic and athlete of this spiritual course. However, this par excellence blessed period is not so easy. Man goes through pain and great sorrow. The Holy Fathers stress this side as well in their works, speaking out of personal experience.

St. Isaac the Syrian describes part of this pain: *And at some point our soul is drowned and becomes like being in the waves. Even if one reads the scripture, or celebrates the Liturgy, or does anything, whatever he approaches he receives darkness upon darkness. And he goes out and often is not even allowed to approach. And he does not believe that he undergoes a transformation and this is done in peace. That hour is full of despair and fear, and the hope in God and consolation by his faith have been completely ejected out of his soul; and it is throughout filled with hesitation and fear.*

The pain is great. The soul has known God and now has lost this communion. Before it got to know God, everything was agreeable. Human life with its details and its pleasant moments gladdened it. Now they no longer do. At the same time it has lost God's Grace and is inconsolable. It falls to a despair in God. Crying becomes a way of life and repentance is insatiable. God's Grace, which lies secretly in man's heart, helps him not despair. Thus he starts concentrated prayer, undeterred sigh, an inexhaustible source of tears. He cries out for God and his life is imbued in pain.

Thus we attain the ability to speak about Adam's lament within the confines of our personal life and are able to understand Adam's grief after he committed the sin. This is how Elder Silouan felt it. He felt the loss of Grace or the lowering of Grace as Forefather Adam did. This is why he writes in a doleful and supplicatory way: *The silence of the desert does not delight me. The mountaintops do not attract me. The beauty of forests and meadows does not bring me rest. The singing of the birds does not sooth my pain. Nothing, nothing gives me joy now. My soul has cracked of too much sorrow. I have insulted my beloved God. Even if the Lord would take me to paradise again I would lament there sadly, sorely; for I have embittered my beloved God.*

Expelled from Paradise springs of tears gushed out of Adam's wounded heart. Similarly, every soul that has known the Lord laments for Him and says: *Where are you Lord? Why do you hide Your face? My soul has not seen your Light for long and seeks You full of sorrow. Where is my Lord? Why don't I see Him in my soul? What hinders Him from dwelling in me? So, Christ-like humility and love for my enemies are not in me. For God is love infinite, love impossible to explain.*

Then, the athlete experiences death existentially. Because man's separation from God is true death. God is life. Departure from life inevitably brings death. During this period man

may experience the memory of death as a gift. We repeat, this is not human despair, it is in-God despair. It is not a human fear of God, it is a fear of God by Grace. We realize this because in the second case there is inspiration, prayer! According to the Fathers, the memory of death is not a remembrance of death, because this is something anyone can have by viewing the corruptibility of the world. It is that too, but mostly the memory of death is a gift.

God has died for him. Essentially he himself has died for God. The athlete of this spiritual life sees death in his depths, throughout his existence. And, as he lives a Paschal experience and everything outside is bright when he feels the Grace inside him, the opposite happens with the feeling of death dominating his existence. Everything is dead. Nothing satisfies him. He sees death everywhere. He sees that all humans are mortal. For this reason he does not ask for power from mortals.

This is man's self-emptying in the model of Christ's self-emptying. The saints definitely pass through this state. It is Hades, an experience of hell. The flames of hell burn everything. Inner disposition, desire, even the body itself.

It is important to mention and try to explain this period of spiritual life, because there are many who go through it but do not know what exactly it is. They reach complete despair, ignoring the character of spiritual life, ignoring education in God. Thus, they feel lost, they despair. There are cases where monks abandoned monastic life and went to the world violating the promises they gave to God during their tonsure. Others run to psychiatrists to obtain an explanation of these states, and others still go mad.

To all these we say that this is a natural state. All those fighting the good fight pass through this temptation. This way they acquire spiritual experience. For this reason there is need for a lot of patience, intense and concentrated prayer. St. Paul the Apostle writes: *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?* (Heb 12:7-9)

It must be said that even a little prayer during this period is equivalent with many hours of prayer of the previous period. Man learns to pray noetically during this period. He learns many ways of noetic prayer. Because of severe pain, of great repentance, the athlete's *nous* concentrates on the heart. He cries. Like a ship throwing an anchor to the bottom of the sea, similarly the *nous* is thrown to the heart. It stays there and this constitutes noetic prayer.

After learning that this is a natural state, we have to learn the ways of dealing with it. Patristic teaching recommends patience, prayer, and resorting to teachers who know these truly blessed states by experience. Obviously we need persons

who have passed through these stages. These are true and proper spiritual fathers who can guide the people of God. This is the great value of the monks for our times. They comfort, they guide, they inspire and calm people.

St. Diadochos stresses that it is impossible to acquire the perfection of divine Grace. This is why the soul aches, this is why it has to struggle, so that it receives Grace bit by bit, until man acquires life, and the resulting immortality devours mortality.

### The New Coming of the Grace

After many years of struggle, the Grace comes again to man and fills him with inner joy. It also brings the knowledge of God and everything divine to him. St. Symeon the New Theologian is a bearer of this tradition and life. He writes in a poem:

*But when I begin to weep, as desperate, then He shows Himself and He looks at me, He who contemplates all creatures.*

*In amazement, I admire the splendor of His beauty. And how, having opened the heavens, the Creator inclined and showed me His glory, indescribable, marvellous. And so who could draw nearer to Him? Or how would he be carried away towards measureless heights? While I reflect on this, He Himself is discovered within myself, resplendent in the interior of my miserable heart, illuminating me on all sides with His immortal splendor, shining upon all my members with His rays, completely intertwined with me, He embraces me totally.*

*He gives Himself to me, the unworthy one, and I am filled with His love and His beauty, and I am sated with divine delight and sweetness. I share in the light, I participate also in the glory, and my face shines like my Beloved's, and all my members become bearers of light.*

*Then I finally become more beautiful than those who are beautiful, wealthier than those who are wealthy and more than all the mighty. I am mighty and greater than kings, and much more precious than all that is visible. Not only more than the world or the men of the world, but also more than Heaven and all the angels of Heaven, for I possess the Creator of the whole universe. To whom is due glory and honour, now and forever. Amen.*

And in another poem the same Father writes:

*Again the light illumines me, again it is distinctly seen, again it opens the heavens, again it cuts through the night, again it brings all things into being, again it alone is seen, again it takes me out of all visible things.*

The new coming of God's Grace takes man out of the spiritual desert in which he lived before and moreover liberates him from the spiritual Hades in which he was. The Hades is a place where the rays of uncreated Grace do not enter or rather where they are experienced as fire. Hades of personal life is filled with light with the coming of Christ's Grace. Christ liberated the just ones of the Old Testament with His descent to Hades and likewise He Himself takes man out of the peculiar spiritual mortification. The fire of hell and

despair, which burned him before, is now transformed to the light of eternal life. He comprehends very well the distinction between cerebral knowledge and empirical knowledge of God, because the knowledge of God is offered through the illumination of the *nous* and the vision of God.

He then acquires an inner tranquility which is not shaken, not affected by anything external. Everything psychological is transformed to spiritual experience. The Grace of God is united with man's nature and makes it light.

In his previous states man experienced intense fluctuations and changes, sometimes fire sometimes light, but now he lives a spiritual balance. Man's existence has been cured. The struggle with God has ceased. The soul knows God well. Although he feels that he is the biggest sinner, he also feels that he is reborn and is certain that some other body sinned, some other person committed sins. And, indeed, he is another person, because now there is a new, reborn man. The body is transformed and is able to withstand the new life. In general, he feels a deep tranquility and spiritual balance. Christ becomes his life and his delight. Despite his unworthiness he feels a member of the risen body of Christ.

In this state, man becomes a theologian or rather a spring of theology. Theology springs, emanates from all his existence. St. John of the Ladder writes: *The growth of fear is the beginning of love, but a complete state of purity is the foundation of theology. He who has perfectly united his feeling to God is mystically led by Him to an understanding of His words. But without this union it is difficult to speak about God. The engrafted Word perfects purity, and slays death by His presence; and after the slaying of death, the disciple of theology is illumined. The Word of the Lord which is from God the Father is pure, and remains so eternally. But he who has not come to know God merely speculates. Purity makes its disciple a theologian, who of himself grasps the dogmas of the Trinity.*

He who has passed through this course becomes a *God-inspired book for others* according to the words of St. Symeon the New Theologian.

As previously mentioned and according to the words of St. Makarios, if man does not go through these stages, he cannot be considered a Christian. It is only then that he *becomes a Christian*. Moreover, one cannot be considered to be a priest, a spiritual father, if he has not known the coming, the hiding and the new coming of the divine Grace. Because then he will have a mutilated spiritual experience. Of course, it is possible for man to leave this world while being in the desert of spiritual life, that is, during the period of the lifting of Grace. This is what happens with most Christians. Nevertheless, if he has patience and if he perseveres, he will also enter the Rule of God, as happened with Moses. He did not enter the land of promise, but he is Moses the Great who has so much glory that he appeared during Christ's Transfiguration.

This is education in God. It is neither a rational knowledge nor a memorization of scriptural and patristic passages; it is a personal knowledge of the coming and lifting of Grace. This education has no relation with Schools and books; it is related to our staying within the whole atmosphere of Orthodox Tradition.

We must pray to God to open for us the way of His knowledge, to acquire this education, even if we pass through a lot of spiritual pain. At the same time, we must ask him not to abandon us completely, but give us consolation and comfort during that period, so that we manage to withstand the great burden of sorrows.

The road to the Rule of God passes through mysterious paths. Education in God is incomprehensible to human reason and to the criteria of this world, but is the only secure way to attain communion with God.

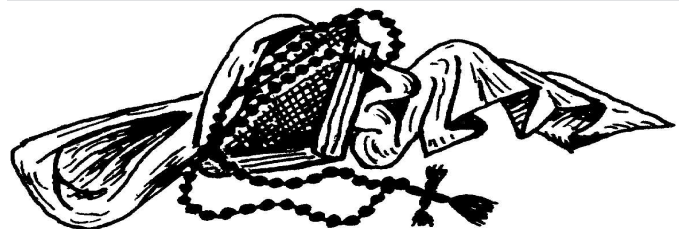


Repentance does not consist only of kneeling, like a divining rod that indicates water by going up and down, but is like a wise goldsmith who wishes to craft a chain; with a link of gold and a link of silver, even with iron and lead, he lengthens the chain until he completes his work. This too is the form that repentance takes. All the virtues depend on it.

St. Macarios of Egypt

The depths of life in Christ are bottomless, to be assimilated by a long process demanding all our strength. The content and meaning of the Divine Name are revealed only gradually. Occasional repetition of it may also rejoice and be dear to the heart. But we must not stop halfway. Our time here is brief and every hour must be made use of that our knowledge of God may grow.

Elder Sophrony of Essex



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## ON PASSIONS

*By Elder Ephraim of Philotheou and Arizona, from "Counsels from the Holy Mountain—Selected from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim."*



Struggle, my child, for God's road is narrow and thorny; not inherently, but because of our passions. Since we want to eradicate from our heart the passions, which are like thorny roots, so that we may plant useful plants, naturally we shall toil greatly and our hands will bleed and our face will sweat. Sometimes even despair will overcome us, seeing roots and passions everywhere!

But with our hope in Christ, the Repairer of our souls, let us diligently work at clearing the earth of our heart. Patience, mourning, humility, obedience, cutting off one's will—all these virtues help cultivate it. We must apply all our strength, and then God, seeing our labor, comes and blesses it, and thus we make progress.

Take courage, for the toil is temporary and ephemeral, whereas the reward is great in heaven. Struggle and be vigilant with your thoughts. Keep a firm hold on hope, for this

shows that your house is founded on the rock and the rock is our Christ.

Do not feed your passions by yielding to them, so that you do not suffer pain and affliction later! Labor now, as much as you can, because otherwise, if the passions are not tended to, in time they become second nature, and then try and deal with them! Whereas now, if you fight against them lawfully, as we advise you, you will be freed and will have happiness by the grace of God.

The thing that should preoccupy us above all is how to cleanse our heart from the passions and how to abate some passion or vice! The visitations of grace that God sends us from time to time for consolation do not play an important role, because they come and go. Ah, those passions! They are like roots with thorns. How much toil, how much pain, what tears, what prayers are necessary for a person to find slight relief—it is a real martyrdom!

I pray to the merciful God that He will show you the path of salvation and guide you as a hart to the springs of the living water of refreshment. Man is full of passions, shortcomings, etc., and in order to be freed of them, he must engage in a bloody battle. Once he wins, with God's help, he will receive here in this life the promise of the future marriage with the Lamb, Who was ruthlessly slaughtered by cruel hands accursed by God.





# Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

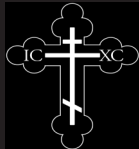
Vol. 15, Issue 05-06

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## In This Issue:

- Our Lord's Descent into Hades (p. 4)
- The Path We Take in Life is Our Choice (p. 5)
- We Are Born Three Times (p. 7)
- Behold, the Crucified One! (p. 8)
- On Carnal Warfare (p. 10)
- On Toll-Houses (p. 12)
- The Final Goal of Man: A Living Unity w/ God (p. 21)
- A Good Disbelief (p. 24)
- Advice to Husbands (p. 26)
- Christ's Prayer in the Garden (p. 28)



- Ἐπὶ Λόγοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπὸ τὸν Σταυρὸ (σελ. 14)
- Τὸ Ἅγιον Φῶς Μαρτυρεῖ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία (σελ. 16)
- Πῶς νὰ Μιλᾶμε στὰ Παιδιά μας... (σελ. 18)
- Κουτσουμπολιὸ (σελ. 19)
- Ψευδοφάνεια (σελ. 20)



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## GREAT FRIDAY

### THE GOSPEL ON GOD AMONG THE CRIMINALS

*By St. Nikolai Velimirovic, from "HOMILIES: A Commentary on the Gospel Readings for Great Feasts and Sundays throughout the Year," vol. one, Great Feasts, Lent, Eastertide and Pentecost (1996), pp. 195-198.*

Christ on Golgotha! The Saviour on the Cross! The Righteous One in torment! The Lover of Mankind killed by men! Let him who has a conscience be ashamed! Let him who has a heart weep! Let him who has a mind understand!

With what can we compare this event—mysterious as infinity, hard as earth and terrible as hell? Of millions of happenings every day throughout the universe, that our eyes can see and our ears hear, with what event can we compare this unmentionable act of wickedness on Golgotha? With a lamb among ravening wolves? Or an innocent child in the jaws of a snake-like king? Or a mother surrounded by insane sons and daughters? Or with a skillful man's fall into a machine that he had himself assembled, to be cut to pieces by the machine's wheels? With Abel, whom his brother killed? But then the greater sinner killed the lesser, while here wicked men fall on the sinless. With Joseph, whose brothers sold him in Egypt? But that was a sin against their brother, not against a benefactor, while here the sin is against the Benefactor. With righteous Job, whose flesh Satan turned to corruption and a stench, a meal for worms? But then Satan rose up against God's creature, while here the creature rises up against the Creator. With wondrous David, against whom his son Absalom raised a rebellion? But that was a small punishment for David's great sin, while here the

innocent One, the Most Righteous, suffers so terribly!

The merciful Samaritan, who had saved humanity from injury by thieves, has Himself fallen into the hands of thieves. Seven sorts of criminal surround Him. The first is represented by Satan, the second by the elders and leaders of the Jewish people, the third by Judas, the fourth by Pilate, the fifth by Barabbas, the sixth by the unrepentant thief on the cross and the seventh by the penitent thief. Let us pause a moment, and look at this company of criminals in the midst of whom the Son of God hangs crucified, bloody and wounded.

In the first place comes Satan, the one who wishes the greatest harm to the human race. He is *the father of lies*, and the criminal of criminals. The temptations by which he tempts the human race, to bring it to ruin, are twofold: he tempts by ease and by suffering. At the beginning, he tempted the Lord on the Mount of Temptation with ease, power and riches; now, at the end, he tempts Him through suffering. When he had been overcome and shamed at the first temptation, he left the Lord and fled from Him. He did not, though, abandon Him completely, but only for a time. As the Gospel records: *he departed from Him for a season.* (Lk 4:13). Now this season has passed, and he shows himself again. This time he does not need to appear openly and visibly; this time he works through men, through the sons of darkness, who have been blinded by Christ's great light, and in their blindness have put themselves into Satan's hands and serve him as a weapon against Christ the Lord. But he is there, close to every tongue that blasphemes against Christ, to every mouth that spits upon Christ's most pure face, to every hand that flogs Him

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and pierces Him with the crown of thorns, to every heart that burns with the fire of jealousy and hatred for Him.

The second criminal, or group of criminals, is the leaders and elders of the Jewish people: political, religious and intellectual. These are the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and priests, with King Herod at their head. Jealousy and fear have turned them to crime against the Lord—jealousy of One mightier, wiser and better than themselves; and fear for their position, authority, honor and wealth if the people support Christ. *Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after Him* (Jn 12:19), was the cry from their weakness, envy and fear. What is the worst of their banditry against the Lord? It is their having, with no legal trial or condemnation, arrested and killed Him. It is written in the Gospel: *Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill Him.* (Mt 26:3-4). They do not, then, take counsel together how to accuse Him and bring Him to court, but to take Jesus ... and kill Him and this by subtlety! When law-abiding Nicodemus suggests that the Lord first be given a hearing by the court, *to know what He doeth*, they reject this suggestion with displeasure and mocking smiles. (Jn 7:50-52).

The third criminal is Judas, the seeming, shameful apostle. Satan took part in the shedding of Christ’s blood out of hatred for God and man; the elders and leaders of the people took part out of envy and fear; Judas joins the company of Satan and the elders of the people out of covetousness. His crime consists in betraying his Teacher and Benefactor for thirty pieces of silver. He himself later acknowledges his crime to these same elders, who had hired him for the act

of betrayal: *I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood ... and he cast down the pieces of silver in the Temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.* (Mt 27:4-5). And his horrible death itself testifies against him, for it is written of him: *and falling head-long, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.* (Acts 1:18).

The fourth criminal is Pilate, Caesar’s representative in Jerusalem, and in some mysterious way the representative of the pagan, godless world in the condemnation of the Son of God. He scorns the Jews, as the Jews do him. At first, he has no intention of becoming involved in Christ’s condemnation: *Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law* (Jn 18:31) are his words to Christ’s accusers. Later, he is on Christ’s side and, after a form of trial, tells the Jews: *I find in Him no fault at all* (Jn 18:38). Finally, cowed by threats: *If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend* (Jn 19:12), Pilate gives sentence that *it should be as they required* (Lk 23:24), and orders that Christ be flogged and crucified. Pilate’s crime consists in his being able to protect the Righteous One, and in not doing so. He himself says to the Lord: *Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee?* (Jn 19:10) With this statement, Pilate takes upon himself for all time the responsibility for Christ’s death. What drives Pilate to commit this crime, and what places him in the company of the other criminals? Weak-mindedness and fear; weak-mindedness in defense of justice and fear for his position and Caesar’s mercy.

The fifth criminal is Barabbas. He is in prison at this time *for sedition ... and for murder.* (Lk 23:19). For such crimes, he is, under both Jewish and Roman law, deserving of death. He has not personally or consciously sinned against Christ

in any way. It is those who put him above Christ who sin. Pilate has thought to use Barabbas as a means of saving Christ from death; the Jews, however, use the innocent Christ to save Barabbas, Pilate having placed before the Jews the free choice: Christ, or Barabbas—and like calls to like. God or a criminal? And the criminals choose the criminal.

The sixth and seventh criminals are those who hang, each on his cross, on Golgotha, one at Christ's right hand and one at His left, as Isaiah the prophet foresaw and foretold: *He was numbered with the transgressors.* (Isa 53:12). One of these criminals, even in his death-throes, is blaspheming, but the other is praying. Here are two men in the same predicament: both of them nailed to a cross, both at the point of leaving this world and looking for nothing more from it. But what a great difference! Here is the answer to all who say: place

people in the same material circumstances, give them all the same honor and possessions, and they will all have the same spirit. One criminal, near his last breath, mocks the Son of God: *If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us!* (Lk 23:39), but the other begs the Lord: *Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.* (Lk 23:42). The pain of crucifixion kills the one in both body

and soul, but although it kills the other's body, it saves his soul. **Christ's Cross is a scandal to the one, but salvation to the other.**

These were the types of criminal around Christ. But, O gracious Lord, help us to look at our own lives before we condemn these criminals who nailed the Lord of love to the Cross, and ask ourselves if we do not also belong to their company. Oh, that we could be even like the seventh of them, who repented on the cross and, in the midst of his physical pain, sought and found salvation for his sinful soul.

*If a man* breathes out hatred for God and man, the same is Satan's closest friend and his sharpest weapon.

*If a man* is filled with envy towards God-pleasing men and servants of Christ, this man is a criminal and a God-killer like Annas and Caiaphas, and the rest of the leaders and elders of the Jews.

*If a man* is covetous, he is not far from betraying God, and his closest friend in the criminal company of this world is Judas.

*If a man* is weak-minded in defense of the righteous, and so fearful for his position and comfort that he would even agree to the killing of the righteous, he is a criminal as Pilate was.

*If a man* raises a rebellion and sheds men's blood, and another suffers in his place, either through miscarriage of justice or human wickedness, he is a criminal as Barabbas was.

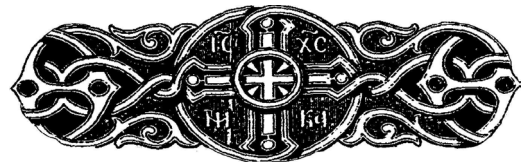
*If a man* blasphemes against God his whole life long, either in word or deed, and this blasphemy is on his lips even at the moment of death—he is indeed a spiritual brother of the blaspheming criminal on the cross.

Blessed, though, is he who, suffering for his sins, neither blasphemes against any man nor condemns any, but calls his sin to mind and cries to God for forgiveness and salvation. **Blessed is this seventh criminal**, who understood that his pains on the cross were deserved because of his sins, and understood the pains of the innocent Saviour as being undeserved suffering for the sins of others, and who repented, begged for God's

mercy and found himself first in the Paradise of eternal life together with the Saviour! These revelations come to us through him: saving repentance, even at the moment of death, the saving nature of prayer to God and the swiftness of God's compassion.

He has left us all a wonderful example, whatever sort of sin we have committed, in whatever way we have separated our-

selves from God and numbered ourselves among the criminals. Every sin is a crime against God, and he who commits a single sin is numbered among the criminals: that is, the servants of Satan. Let no one, therefore, grumble that his suffering is to his peril rather than to his salvation, but may the darkness of his suffering be illumined by reflecting on his sin, and by repentance and prayer. Only thus will suffering be, for him, not to his peril but to his salvation.



**F**ather, forgive them; they know not what they do. That is not only a good wish, but a good work, the greatest good work that sinful men can ask of God. On the Cross, under death's hand, all twisted with pain, the Lord is filled with concern for man's salvation. He, at the time of His Crucifixion, fulfilled the great commandments that He had given to men: commandments on constant prayer, on compassions, on forgiveness, on love.

St. Nikolai Velimirovic

## OUR LORD'S DESCENT INTO HADES

By St. Epiphanius of Cyprus (+403).

St. Epiphanius was born in the village of Besanduk in Palestine probably in 310. Of Jewish descent, he was well educated and became a Christian after seeing how a monk named Lucian gave away his clothing to a poor person. Struck by the monk's compassion, Epiphanius asked him to instruct him in Christianity.

After his baptism, he became a member of a monastery in Egypt under the guidance of the elder St. Hilarion the Great. As he progressed as an ascetic in the monastic life, he occupied himself copying Greek books. In his quest to avoid human glory, Epiphanius set out to the Spanidrion desert where robbers fell upon him and held him for three months. By his talk about repentance, Epiphanius brought one of the gang of robbers to the faith in the True God. When he was set free, the robber joined him. Epiphanius took him to his monastery and baptized him with the name John. From that time John became a faithful disciple of Epiphanius and carefully recorded in writing about the life and miracles of his spiritual guide.

Returning to the wilderness of Palestine about 333, St. Epiphanius again sought the ascetic life with his disciple John. As the reputation of Epiphanius spread, more disciples came to him leading to his founding a monastery in Ad. There he was ordained a priest and became the abbot. He led the monastery for some thirty years during which he further gained in knowledge and faith as well as gaining the ability to speak many languages including Hebrew, Syriac, Egyptian, Greek, and Latin.

In 367, St. Epiphanius was chosen by a council in Salamis on Cyprus as their bishop. In 368, he was elected to the cathedra of Cyprus, a position he held until his repose. During the following year, Bp. Epiphanius traveled throughout the area to participate in events that protected the Orthodox faith. He participated in the synod of 376 in Antioch where questions about the Trinity were debated against the heresy of Apollinarianism. In 382, he was present at a Council of Rome that attempted to reconcile the Meletian schism.

In 402, at the urging of Abp. Theophilus of Alexandria, Epiphanius traveled to Constantinople to support Theophilus in his campaign against Abp. John Chrysostom of Constantinople, and the four "Tall Brothers" monks. When he realized he was being used as a tool by Theophilus against St. John Chrysostom, who had given refuge to the monks persecuted by Theophilus and

had appealed to the emperor, Epiphanius returned to Salamis, only to die on the way home in 403.

† † †

Something strange is happening—there is a great silence on Earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began.

God has died in the flesh and Hell trembles with fear. He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, He who is both God and the Son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the Cross, the weapon that had won him the victory.

At the sight of him, Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone, *My Lord be with you all.* Christ answered him: *And with your spirit.* He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: *Awake,*

*O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.*

I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise.

I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in Hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in Me and I in you; together we form one person and cannot be separated.

For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, Whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth. For your sake, for the sake of man, I became like a man without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden.

See on My Face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in my image. On My back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back. See My hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree.



I slept on the Cross and a sword pierced My side for you who slept in Paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side has healed the pain in yours. My sleep will rouse you from your sleep in Hell. The sword that pierced Me has sheathed the sword that was turned against you.

Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly Paradise. I will not restore you to that Paradise, but will enthrone you in heaven. I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am life itself am now one with you. I appointed cherubim to guard you as slaves are guarded, but now I make them worship you as God. The throne formed by cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager. The Bridal Chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open. The Kingdom of Heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.



There is another necessary reason as far as those on earth are concerned why the Word of God took flesh or became man. If He had not been born like us according to the flesh, if He had not partaken of the same elements as we do, He would not have delivered human nature from the fault we incurred in Adam, nor would He have warded off the decay from our bodies, nor would He have brought to an end the power of the curse which we say came upon the first woman. For it was said to her, *in pain you shall bring forth children*. (Gen 3:16). But human nature, which fell sick through the disobedience of Adam, now became glorious in Christ through His utter obedience. For it is written that *as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous*. (Rom 5:19). In Adam it suffered the penalty: *You are earth and to earth you shall return*. (Gen 3:19). In Christ it was enriched by being able to overcome the snares of death and, as it were, exult in triumph over decay, repeating the prophetic text, *O death, where is your victory? O Hades, where is your sting?* (1 Cor 15:55). It came under a curse, as I have said, but this too was abolished in Christ. And indeed it has been said somewhere to the Holy Virgin, when Elizabeth prophesied in the Spirit, *Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb*. (Lk 1:42). Sin has reigned over us and the inventor and father of sin has lorded it over all who dwell under the sky, provoking the transgression of the divine laws. But in Christ we see human nature, as if experiencing a new beginning of the human race, enjoying freedom of access to God. For He said clearly, *the ruler of this world is coming and he has no power over Me*. (Jn 14:30).

St. Cyril of Alexandria

## THE PATH WE TAKE IN LIFE IS OUR CHOICE

*A Gerontikon story from "The Evergentinos: A Complete Text," vol. II of the first book (1991), pp. 22-27.*

An ascetic Elder related the following: There once lived an aged nun who excelled in virtue and piety. When I asked her why she fled from the world, she told me this. "When I was still a young girl, reverend Father," she began, "I remember that my father was a very tender and good man. He was thin and sickly in body, so that the majority of his time he passed confined to his bed. He was marked by such simplicity that he spoke only when compelled. When he was well, he dedicated himself to tilling the land, thereby occupying himself and bringing to our home the produce that he cultivated. However, he was so reticent to speak that those who did not know him thought him to be mute.

"Wholly the opposite of my father was my mother. She was such a busybody and so idle that she was anxious to learn about things even outside our village. She talked so much that nobody ever saw her silent, even for a little: rather, one time she would be seen arguing and quarrelling, and another time saying obscene and indecent words in jest. Most of the years of her life she wasted in drunkenness and in the company of profligate men. She was often away and was immoral, and, like a prostitute, badly looked after our household, so that we could no longer get by—despite the fact that our assets were not few—since it was to her that my father had entrusted the administration of the household. However, she lived in this way, yet she nonetheless never became sick and never felt the slightest pain; for all of the wretched life that she lived, she maintained her bodily health.

"It happened, anyway, that my father died, ravaged by many years of illness. Now, what happened at his death? Immediately a fearful wind came up and almost razed the area. There was continual thunder, and the rain poured so violently that no one dared poke his nose out of his house even for a moment. This foul weather lasted three days, and out of necessity, we kept my father inside the house, unburied.

"Our fellow villagers, seeing all of these obstacles, greatly condemned my dead father, saying: 'My, my, what evil was living in our midst, and we did not know it! It seems that this dead man must have been an enemy of God, and for this reason God has not even allowed him to be buried yet.'

"We however, so that the corpse would not start decomposing in the house and make it uninhabitable because of the stench, risked, despite the violent rain, transporting the body to the cemetery, and buried it.

"From that time on my mother had even greater freedom to devote herself with great brazenness to orgies and debauchery. Indeed, she became so audacious that she transformed our home into a house of immorality and, indulging her unceas-

ing sensual pleasures, squandered away all of our holdings; so, in a short time we had nothing left. Some years after the death of my father, my mother died. She had such a splendid and magnificent funeral that one could say that nature itself cooperated in conducting it.

Since my mother had died and I had passed the age of childhood, the flames of youth being kindled and tempting me, one evening the thought came to me: Which path shall I follow in my life? Occupied with this thought, I said off the top of my head; talking to myself: 'Should I choose; I wonder, my father's way of life, and live with kindness, modesty, and judiciousness?'

"'But my father, even if he did live virtuously, nonetheless never enjoyed even one good thing, but was always devoured by illness and misfortunes. He was so unfortunate that he was not even allowed in his torments to be buried like other people. If my father's conduct and behavior were pleasing to God, why was he tested by so many disasters? And what was my mother's life like? Did she not live a healthy life, even though she was plunged into a life of pleasures and desires? I will also, therefore, live the life that my mother did, for I prefer to believe in what I can see than in promises about what is to come.'

"By the time that I had decided to follow in the steps of my mother, night had fallen. And when I went to sleep, there appeared before me a man of enormous dimensions and with a savage face. Staring at me with rage and a wild look, he asked me in a dreadful voice: 'Tell me what is in your heart.' I was so frightened that I dared not even look at his face.

"This fearful man, with the same sternness, asked me again:

"'Tell me, then. What have you decided?'

"When he saw that I was paralyzed by fear and was in danger of losing my senses, he himself reminded me in detail of all that I had just been thinking of myself.

"Recovering from my fear and astonishment and being unable to deny anything that the man had said, I began begging and imploring him to forgive me.

"Then, as though he had become calmer, he took me by the hand and said: 'Come and see where your father and mother are. On the basis of this you can choose which way of life you want for yourself.'

"Taking me from where I was, he guided me to a vast garden, which was planted with various beautiful trees, beyond description in their charm and filled with different kinds of fruits. And there, as I was walking, with this fearful man, my father came up to me, embracing me and covering me with tender kisses, saying, 'My beloved child.'

"I embraced my father with joy, asking if I might remain with him. My father sweetly replied:

"'Now, my child, this is not possible; if, however, you will follow my own way of life, not much time will pass and you will be here, too.'

"Just as I was about to continue in my requests to remain with my father, the Angel who was accompanying me pulled me by the hand and said:

"'Come, now, to see your mother, too, so that you can determine first-hand which way of life you want to lead.'

"Then, taking me to a place that was all dark, in which one could hear great disorder and groans, he showed me a furnace, the fires of which would spill over every time it surged up. And outside the furnace a number of ghastly and frightening individuals gazed on the sight.

"As I was looking at this frightening and terrible place of torture, I saw my mother, submerged to her neck in the flaming furnace, numberless worms gnawing on her all over. From my pain and fear, I was trembling, while my teeth began to chatter and to gnash.

"When my mother raised her eyes to look at me, she began to cry harrowingly and said to me:

"'Alas, my child. My pains are unbearable. My torments are unceasing. For a few years of delight and sinful pleasure, I brought all of this terrible punishment on myself: Woe to me, such an unfortunate one. Woe to me, wretch that I am! Because of the ephemeral pleasures of temporary life, I am now tormented eternally. But, my child, take pity on your mother, who, as you see, is in flames and is being devoured by fire. Remember, my child, how I gave you suckle and reared you, and take pity on me. Give me your hand and pull me out of here.'

"I, however, did nothing, and could not even approach my mother, who, out of shame before those who were around her, cried out even more strongly and with tears:

"'My child, help me and do not scorn your mother and her lamentations. Do not close your eyes to this unfortunate mother, who is tortured in the Gehenna of fire and continually consumed by unsleeping worms.'

"Moved by sympathy for my mother, I stretched out my hand, so that I could pull her out of that frightful Hell. No sooner had the flames of the fire only slightly touched my hand, than I felt great pain and began to cry in moans. From my lamentations and moans, I awoke everyone in the house. They got up, turned on the lights, and ran to my bed, asking with incessant questions to learn why I was crying in my sleep and groaning.

"So, having come to a bit, I began to relate to them everything that I saw in my vision.

"From that day I most decisively resolved to live as did my father, whose way of life I longed for. I pray that God will deem me worthy to succeed therein and to see my father again and live with him, for, by the Grace of God, with my own eyes I saw the glory and honor which awaits those who ready themselves by living reverently and virtuously; and, on the other hand, again, what fearful punishment and Hell awaits those who squander their lives on pleasures and passions."

## WE ARE BORN THREE TIMES! FROM THE LIFE OF ST. SYNKLETIKE

Source: "The Evergentinos: A Complete Text," vol. I of the first book (1988), pp. 82-83.

*The joy of Heaven is inexpressible, as is the glory which awaits the Saints; therefore, we must remember with our whole souls the joy of Heaven and the glory of the Saints. In all that we accomplish, nothing is equal to that joy and glory.*

† † †



The Blessed Synkletike said that in this world we find ourselves as though in a second maternal womb. When we were in our mother's womb, we did not live as we now live after our birth from the womb, nor did we eat, in that embryonic period, the solid foods which we now enjoy; neither, too, were we able in our mother's womb to work as we now do. And this because, as we know,

inside the mother's womb we were far from the light of the sun and not a single ray reached us; and in general we were deprived of many other earthly enjoyments. For this reason precisely, we cannot enjoy, while living in the present world, the particular magnificent and wondrous delights which are found exclusively in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Since we have come to know the present life in detail, let us in addition remember the things of Heaven, too; having tasted of earthly foods, let us have an appetite now for the divine; having been satisfied by the ephemeral material light, let us yearn for the Sun of Righteousness. Let us be moved by powerful nostalgia for the Jerusalem on high and let us strive to see it as our mother and homeland. Let us spend the rest of the years of our lives guided by the hope for heavenly blessedness, that we might, therefore, be able to enjoy also the eternal good things.

Just as babies develop slowly inside the mother with limited nutrition and life and then, as more mature organisms, come into full life and enjoy diets of wide variety, so the righteous, since they have been made perfect by the way that they conducted themselves in the world, depart for the heavenly state—*going forth*, as it is written, *from strength to strength*. (Pss 83:7).

The opposite happens to sinners. They resemble embryos which, though formed normally in the mother, die before they are born, passing, therefore, from one dark place to another. Precisely so are those sinners who pass their life

on earth in the care-worn labors of worldly things, literally enslaved by the darkness of worldly concerns. And when they die, unescorted by the treasures of good works and repentance, they are led forcibly to the darkest Tartarean haunts of Hell.

From the foregoing, then, we can conclude that we are born three times during the period of our lives: One time only from our mother, in which instance we come forth from the earthly and proceed into the earthly. In the other two births we move from the earthly to the heavenly. Of these two births, one is that of Grace, which is realized in Holy Baptism, and we rightly call this "rebirth." And the other birth is occasioned by repentance and the labors of good and virtuous deeds, in which we are now being proved.



When you pray either aloud or to yourself for others—for instance, for the members of your household or for strangers, even though they may not have asked you to do so—pray for them with the same ardor and zeal as you would pray for yourself. Remember the commandment of the law: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. Observe this rule upon all occasions.

The Christian has no reason to have in his heart any ill-feelings whatever against anyone—such ill-feeling, like every other evil, is the work of the devil; the Christian must only have love in his heart; and as love cannot think of evil, he cannot have any ill-feeling against others. For instance, I must not think that anyone else is evil or proud without having positive reasons to think so, or I must not think that it will make him proud if I show him respect, or that if I forgive him he will again offend me and will mock at me. We must not let evil in any form nestle in our heart; but evil generally appears in too many forms.

Besides loving each other, we must bear with each other and pardon—*forgive them that trespass against us*—in order that our heavenly Father may *forgive us our trespasses*. Thus, with all your soul honor and love in every man the image of God, not regarding his sins, for God alone is Holy and without sin; and see how He loves us, how much He has created and still creates for us, punishing us mercifully and forgiving us bounteously and graciously. Honor the man also, in spite of his sins, for he can always amend.

Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him; because evil is but a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.

St. John of Kronstadt

## BEHOLD, THE CRUCIFIED ONE!

By Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980), from the book *“Autobiography, Homilies and Miracles (2006), pp. 89-93.*

Do you see His incorrupt feet, which are nailed to the Cross? They are nailed for us, to direct our own feet upon the way of truth, faith and virtue. Do you see His open arms? They symbolize the warm love, which He has for us; to embrace us, and present us to His Heavenly Father; and to make us His children and His sons, and gods by grace. Do you see that pierced side which pours forth blood and water? The water represents the baptism by which we were cleansed of original sin. The blood represents the bloodless Sacrifice which is celebrated on the Holy Altars: by partaking of it, we are sanctified and unified with Him, becoming one Body. Just as a loving mother nourishes her children with her milk, in the same manner, our sweetest Jesus nourishes us as His beloved children; however, not with milk, but with His very Body and Blood.

Behold, kings; the King of all from Whom you received the scepter and diadem! Behold, hierarchs and priests; your first Hierarch and Priest from Whom you received your office! Behold lay-people, men and women, young and old; your Loving Father Who nourishes you; He Who made the fields, the valleys, the rivers, the mountains, the ravines and the forests! All of you, Behold Him! See how He is hung upon the cross crucified, covered with bruises, and bleeding. Run, everyone, cover His incorrupt feet with kisses; shower them with tears of compunction and wash them; love Him with all your soul as He loves you and prefer to die before falling into a deadly sin and saddening such a Master and loving Father.

Every sin a Christian commits is a nail thrust into Christ's body. Christ's sadness for the Jews having crucified Him is less than His sadness that we, Christians, for whom He has shed His blood (and sheds it every day upon the Holy Altars), crucify Him every day with our sins. The divine Paul reminds of this: *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, ... if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.* (Heb 6:4,6).

Listen Christians, and come to your senses! Whoever runs on the road of prodigality, lewdness, corruption, drunkenness, and dissoluteness is like the Jews who had put the nails in Jesus' feet! Whoever seizes the belongings of others, whoever steals and treats others unjustly puts nails in Jesus' hands!

Whoever is prideful and haughty places the crown of thorns on His head. Whoever has jealousy in his heart and envies his neighbor pierces His side! Whoever blasphemes and curses God spits in His face! Be careful, Christians! As many that sin among you must consider carefully that with your sins you are crucifying Christ as the Jews did!

Consider that He Whom you now see crucified upon the wood of the Cross and Whom you scorn with your works shall one day come upon the clouds of Heaven in great power and glory as a dreadful and impartial Judge of both the living and the dead. Woe to you then! Woe to all who die unrepentant!

O Crucified Jesus! Even if the Jews and many of the contemporary pseudo-philosophers do not believe in Thee, even if some of the Christians scorn and blaspheme Thee, Thou art still the King of all; Thou art worshipped by the angels and praised by all creation! We Christians, Thy beloved children (even if we are sinful), believe in Thee, confess Thee and preach that Thou art the King of Heaven and Earth and of all

things visible and invisible. Thou art He who Is, Who Was, and Who Remains unto the ages of ages. We see the great and glorious Kings of the earth—Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon and the other Emperors—their kingdoms lasted until their death; the kingdom of others fell even before their deaths. However, Thy Kingdom remains even after Thy death.

Some nineteen centuries ago, at this spot, Thou didst die as a human being on the Cross, but still Thou art the King of all Christian nations and Thou art worshipped by all. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and Thy reign is from generation unto to generation. We see that no one goes to worship at the tombs of other kings, but they come from the ends of the earth to Thy life-giving Tomb—kings and rulers and people from every walk of life.

We unworthy ones present at this dreadful and terrifying Holy Place offer Thee glorification with compunction. Accept our hymns and praise as incense, accept our tears as myrrh and give us Thy Grace and Thy Blessing as well as Thy peace, enlightenment and repentance.

Our God-Man Jesus is not grieved so much that we scorn Him with our unlawful deeds, sins and transgressions against His Divine Commandments, as He is that we remain unrepentant, hardhearted and insensitive, despite the fact that He gave us repentance and confession as the means to wash our sins away. *We do not become sinners by committing sin, but rather when we do not hate sin and repent of it,* says Abba





Isaac. And the divine Chrysostom says: *It is not grievous for one to fall, but it is for him who has fallen to stay as he is being neglectful and lazy, hiding the sickness of his disposition because of thoughts of hopelessness—and not to rise again. It is human for one to sin, however to continue in this sin is not human but completely satanic.* And St. John the Theologian tells us: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 Jn 1:9).

So long as there is time, let us repent, for the Lord loves mankind and is slow to anger and very merciful. He is long-suffering, full of great mercy and overlooks our sins. *He has not dealt with us according to our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.* (Pss 102:10). Just as He petitioned His Father for the Jews—His crucifiers, saying *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*, likewise, He petitions for Christians who curse Him. He is loving unto mankind, but He is also just. As a lover of mankind, He is merciful; but being just, He punishes—not the offenders who repent—but rather unrepentant sinners. *If he repent not, He will whet His sword; He hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; He ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors.* (Pss 7:12-13).

As a forbearing lover of mankind He forbore the Jews, that they might repent. However, when He saw that they persisted in their evil He gave them up to annihilation and destruction, and they were slaughtered by the Roman armies. They were enslaved, scattered, deprived of the Kingdom and the Priesthood, and accursed and enraged, wandering back and forth. He likewise forbears Christians when they curse, blaspheme and scorn Him, awaiting their repentance. However, when they persist in their evil and do not repent, He then gives them up to wrath and destruction. The wars which take place in our day, along with the famines, plagues, many afflictions, many sadnesses, and the great deprivation are a result of sin.

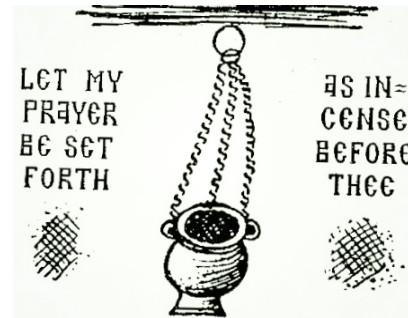
Beloved, let us repent before the hour of death arrives; for there is no repentance after death. Let us repent before the dreadful Day of Judgment, when we shall give account for all our deeds. Let us repent, that we may receive remission of sins and be granted presentation on the right hand side, and enjoy the eternal and unending bounties. May we all attain this through the Grace and compassion of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who was crucified for our sake; and by the prayers of our Most-blessed father and Patriarch: Amen.

† † †

All of you who were blessed to come from far away places and venerate the dreadful Golgotha—the All-holy Tomb—and other sacred shrines in Jerusalem and Palestine, when with God's help you return to your homes, do not forget what the Lord has allowed you to see. Remember them, and tell your brothers, your relatives and your countrymen all about the All-holy Tomb, and encourage and exhort them to come and venerate here; for a Christian receives the greatest spiritual benefit when he comes piously to venerate the Holy Land. It

is sad to see so many fellow countrymen travel to Europe and spend an incredible amount of money on excursions, theatres and amusements, yet they will not come to venerate the Holy Land. This sacred and holy place upon which the Lord's feet stood and where the mysteries (i.e., Christ's birth, miracles, passion, etc.) were performed is guarded and cared for by the presiding Brethren of the Holy Tomb like vigilant guards and soldiers; today, they suffer materially and sigh. They should be congratulated for the manner in which they guard the sacred shrines. Many times they have even placed their lives in danger in order to guard this citadel of Orthodoxy.

It is necessary and fitting that we assist the All-holy Tomb as well as the Fathers and brothers of this monastery as much as possible. Whoever cannot be of material assistance, let him encourage his brethren to be of assistance. Thou, O Crucified Jesus, most sweet, most benevolent, most beautiful, Thou who bore the dreadful Passion and a most painful death on the Cross for us; Thou treasure of bounties and giver of life, preserve our Most-blessed Patriarch in safety, health and with long life for the good of the Church. Preserve the fathers and brothers of this monastery in peace, and calm the agitations. Send the longed for peace by all nations. Return everyone to the True Faith and piety so that we may all become one flock having Thee as our Shepherd, Deliverer and Ruler. Grant us to venerate Thy holy burial place with compunction so that we may joyfully and gladly celebrate Thy glorious and venerable Resurrection. Amen.



As the Eldress Eupraxia would relate to us, many nights it happened that she passed by outside his cell; and heard him praying with sighs, sobs, and contrition of heart ... In this way, he recovered that necessary spiritual strength, which one is only able to draw from God, in order to continue, on the following day, the same laborious work, with new experiences, new visitors, and always with the same kindness and love.

Because of this heart-centered prayer, he had managed to combine the life of a hesychast with that of one who works for the good of society. The great flame of his love for God flooded him also with love for his brethren. His life had become one continuous sacrifice. It was an inexhaustible fountain, from which welled up unending goodness and love.

On "Elder Ieronymos of Aegina" (+1966)

## ON CARNAL WARFARE

Source: "Counsels from the Holy Mountain, Selected from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim," *St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery* (1999), pp. 165-169.

**Y**ou wrote to me, my child, about your carnal warfare. Be patient—with the grace of God everything will pass. Nothing will be left of it, as long as you struggle. Whatever fights against you will be short-lived if you oppose it valiantly.

Carnal warfare will accompany you throughout your youth. But according to your struggle it will subside and become tolerable. The passion of pride, however, will continue for a long time, beyond your youth. But you will find some rest from this passion for a while according to the struggle and spiritual knowledge with which you resist. These two passions are the strongest of all. Upon these two passions the entire edifice of sin stands; each one is a component of the other. Both are formidable lions. But our Jesus with a single cheerful glance is able to render them carrion for the vultures.

The terrible passion of fornication is difficult to fight against, especially when it is strengthened by former predispositions. But God knows how to deliver those who take refuge in Him with humility, for He knows how easily our nature slips.

Carnal warfare stems from pride—so that you may humble yourself and learn that if grace leaves us, we fall and become a piteous spectacle. So humble yourself; blame yourself; ask our Panagia to grant you a spirit of humility so that you may come to know and feel that you are nothing, a zero. For our Jesus says, *Without me you can do nothing.* (Jn 15:5). From the temptation that came upon you, learn how man falls—and how low he can fall. There are even worse falls for those who have more pride. Do not be distressed; it is a temptation and it will pass. God permits such things to happen for our benefit so that we may become wise through temptations. Be patient and brave! Take courage; it will pass. It is a storm, and in this way will the sea throw out all the rubbish that the preceding peace accumulated!

Do not grieve more than necessary, for this is from the devil, and this grief will lead you to negligence and laxity. Persist in your struggle and do not be afraid. Disregard satan and show that you do not attach any importance to him.

Then, since he is proud, he will leave, but as long as you pay attention to his attacks, he will not.

When you have carnal warfare, be very careful with filthy fantasies, which produce dirty thoughts. Stop and expel fantasies as soon as they come. Immediately say the prayer with pain of soul and at once you will be delivered from the warfare.

Do not lose heart, my child. It is a battle and it will pass. All the saints were fought against. They had such great warfare that they took poisonous snakes in despair and put them on their bodies so that they would be bitten and die. But since we are weak, God does not allow us to be fought beyond our strength, but instead He will help us. However, since we have pride, He permits this warfare so that we may humble ourselves. Do not grieve more than necessary, but with great humility throw yourself before God and blame yourself. Immediately drive away every evil thought as soon as it comes, and I hope that the grace of God will relieve you.

Do not fear; you will suffer no harm. Drive away cowardice; have courage. Everything will pass, as you will see, while this warfare will leave behind much benefit for you, and God will give you much grace. Just do not lose heart, because this is how we lose the contest.

My beloved brother in Christ, I saw the mental warfare you are going through with the evil spirit of sin, of fornication.

My brother, listen to a pauper in knowledge with a soul bereft of any good. When one struggles against sin with humility and the fear of God, with fervent spiritual work and with the guidance of an experienced spiritual father, God will never let him be lost. Only when he neglects his spiritual duties, and especially when he becomes proud, thinking that he is something, then it is possible for him to slip. But even then, if he seeks forgiveness with humility, he gets up again and is healed again. For the Lord's mercy is near to those of a contrite heart.

However, many trials occur for one to gain experience and spiritual wisdom, for without temptations it is impossible to obtain experience. Experience is not a skill derived from learning, but it is to have practical knowledge of the benefit and harm of temptations. If God does not let a person fall into temptations a little, it is impossible for him to become conscientious. When someone does something with good intentions, yet later it turns out that what he did was not right, God—since He observes the heart and tries the pur-



pose for every deed—will bring things back to normal and will enlighten him to realize what he should have done. Infallibility belongs to God alone. No matter how perfect the saints were, they still had some blemishes. Therefore, they would go through temptations to obtain greater humility and caution, and to grow patient with their weak nature. A touch of anger, laughter, or idle talk does not take away a saint's holiness.

Only one must keep in mind not to despair. Even if one slips and sins ten thousand times a day, it is not justifiable in God's eyes for him to despair, but rather he should be hopeful and prepare for a fight, until God's mercy comes and delivers him.

There was once a monk who happened to slip and sin by himself continually, yet he would always arise at once and do his prayer rule. The demon that kept throwing him into sin lost his patience seeing the courage and hopefulness of this brother. So he visibly appeared to him, and said to him with vexation:

—Don't you fear God, you defiled wretch? You have just sinned, so with what face can you now stand before God? Aren't you afraid that God will burn you?

But since this brother had a valiant soul, he said to the demon:

—This cell is a forge: you hit and get hit. As God is my witness, Who came to save the world, I will not stop fighting you, falling and getting up, beating and being beaten, until my final breath—and let's see who will win: you or Christ!

When the demon heard this unexpected reply, he said:

—I won't fight you anymore, because if I do, I'll make you win crowns.

Thenceforth, this brother was delivered from the warfare, and he sat in his cell weeping for his sins.

When God enlightens a person and he repents for his sins and walks with humility and caution, God does not let him be lost. Of course, his predispositions for his previous sins will become thorns and hindrances to him, but when he sees the waves rising menacingly, he should not despair, thinking that he will fall and be lost. On the contrary, he should hope in God with faith and struggle with humility under the spiritual guidance and training of his spiritual father, without fearing the violent storm that arose.

The devil, of course, will not remain inactive; he also has his own weapons. Which ones? For instance, he whispers to us:

—You can't do anything. I will throw you down again. Don't you see the magnitude of this passion, the bulk of that weakness? Bear in mind that I'm not defeated so easily and that I'm not about to retreat. Besides, what have you achieved until now? Nothing! Nor will I ever let you do anything in the future. All your efforts are going to waste. I am invincible. Don't you see my might?

And at once he displays filthy fantasies with intensely powerful carnal pleasure. He seems armed like a scorpion. And then he makes the struggler think that it is impossible for him to escape and that he should put up his hands and surrender!

These and countless other things does the insidious instigator craftily display. So, onward! Let us expose the lie of his traps, and let us reveal the rustiness of his weapons. The warrior of the mighty God, trusting in Christ's invincible power and actually feeling it, begins the serious battle courageously, raising the banner of the awesome cross and armed with the name of Jesus which is dreadful to the demons. He calls upon it constantly and vigorously, and thus keeps the imagination from giving in to the insidious and silly assaults of the devil, while always reflecting on death, judgment, hell, the delight of paradise and eternal glory beside Jesus, the feats of the saints, and so on—and all this is like ammunition supplying power to prayer! Then despair, negligence, egotism, and depravity are put to flight, the struggler is filled with zeal, and satan's exaggerations collapse and burst like a thin balloon.



**D**o not grieve for me, my child, but struggle ardently. Struggle in silence, prayer, and mourning, and you will find the elements of eternal life. Compel yourself: close your mouth both in joy and in mourning. This is a mark of experience, so that both states are kept safely. For the mouth does not know how to guard riches.

Silence is the greatest and most fruitful virtue; for this reason the God-bearing Fathers call it sinlessness. Silence and stillness, one and the same thing.

The first divine fruit of silence is mourning—godly sorrow, joyful sadness. Afterwards come luminous thoughts, which bring the holy flow of life-streaming tears, through which the second baptism occurs and by which the soul is purified, shines, and becomes like the angels.

Where shall I place, child of Jesus, the spiritual visions springing forth from silence? How the eyes of the intellect are opened and see Jesus with sweetness greater than that of honey! What a novel wonder is worked from lawful silence and an attentive intellect! You know these things, so struggle. I have revealed a little to you; compel yourself and you will find yet greater. I keep you in my prayers just as I promised you. I wonder, are you ready?

Elder Ephraim of Arizona

## THE COURTROOM AND THE TOLL-HOUSES

### PATRISTIC EXPRESSIONS OF THE REVELATION

Source: From the introduction to *"The Departure of the Soul According to the Teaching of the Orthodox Church,"* by St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, first edition (2017), pp. 39-45 ([www.thedepartureofthesoul.org](http://www.thedepartureofthesoul.org)).

In the sacred works of the Fathers of the Church, it is clearly recorded that the departing soul is met by both holy powers and evil spirits. The soul's entire life is laid bare: all its thoughts and desires, words and deeds are scrutinized, according to Christ's word that we shall have to give an account even for every idle word (cf. Matt. 12:36). Accordingly, many of the Fathers described the particular judgment as a court of law with God presiding while His angels act as the defense and the demons act as prosecutors bringing charges against the soul standing in trial. The good and the sinful deeds committed throughout the defendant's lifetime are the exhibits brought forward as evidence and weighed in the balance held in the hand of the Lord Who proclaims the verdict.

Alongside the image of the courtroom trial, the Holy Fathers also use the terms "tax-collectors" and "toll-houses" as a way of representing the frenzied activity of the demons in their obstructive aerial stations. Tax collecting in the ancient world, which for the most part was violent and deceitful, provided a fitting simile depicting the demons' raging malice. The saints write about the debt accrued through sin and the demons' demand of a tax, as it were, upon the departing soul attempting to pass through. Man places himself under the demons' terrible oppression by casting off the easy yoke and light burden of God's salvific commandments (cf. Mt 11:30). We therefore willingly enter into a kind of devastating contract with these evil advisors: we consent to continue in the sins which they provoke through the passions, while they produce a record of them to use as evidence against us at our last breath.

#### A Brief Historical Overview of the Teaching

The chronologically arranged excerpts in *The Departure of the Soul* allow the reader to perceive the unbroken continuity of the doctrine of the trial of the soul at the hour of death throughout the entire history of the Church.

Beginning from the holy prophets and continuing to Christ's spoken word to His disciples, the teaching then appeared in several epistles of the apostles. It is present in the writings and prayers of the holy martyrs of the second and third centuries, and also flourished in the great theological works of the holy hierarchs and Fathers of the Church of the earliest eras. The revelation poured out upon the holy ascetics of the Egyptian desert was then generously imparted to the desert-dwelling monastic saints of the Orthodox British Isles. Continuing through the middle Byzantine period, the doctrine is found in the works of the greatest theologians of the Church, such as St. Maximos the Confessor, St. John of Damascus, and St. Symeon the

New Theologian. The detailed revelation of the tollhouses contained in the Constantinopolitan tenth-century *Life of St. Basil the New* reached the heights of vivid description. Within mere decades of the baptism of Kievan Rus' the doctrine is found in the Russian Orthodox Church in the eleventh-century hagiographies (*Lives of the Saints*) of the holy passion-bearer Gleb, the first saint canonized by the Russian Church, and St. Theodosios of the Kiev Caves, the first monastic saint canonized by the Russian Church. It is also found in the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church and the Nemanja Dynasty from their foundation beginning with St. Symeon the Myrrh-streamer's twelfth-century epistle to his son, St. Simon the First-crowned.

The teaching has continued in all quarters of the Holy Orthodox Church to the present day. The holy God-bearing Fathers of recent times—St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Herman of Alaska, St. Ignatios Brianchaninov, St. Theophan the Recluse, Sts. Ambrose, Anthony, Anatolios, Barsanuphios, and Sebastian of Optina, Sts. Makarios and Iliodor of Glinsk, St. John of Kronstadt, St. Silouan the Athonite, St. Nikolai Velimirović, St. John of San Francisco, St. George of Drama, St. Justin Popović, St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia, and St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain—all taught about the toll-houses.

Thus, the ancient and sacred doctrine of the trial has been incorporated into the Holy Scriptures, the liturgical services, the writings and lives of the saints, and the iconography of the Orthodox Church.

*Demons, the tax-collectors of our souls. All a myth to the wicked....*  
[St. Gregory the Theologian]



This article's source is the newly published book depicted above, a unique treasure for all Orthodox to possess and study.

*"The Departure of the Soul is an outstanding achievement ... There is immense value spiritually to this volume."*

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### The “Controversy” over the Teaching and the Discovery of Deception

In 1978, a lone author, Deacon Lev Puhalo (later Fr. Lazar Puhalo in tonsure), launched a campaign against the Orthodox Church’s 2,000-year-old teaching on the trial of the soul at death. Within two years, his theories were condemned by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, which officially ordered him to cease issuing public statements on the subject. Banning his erroneous publications from being distributed among members of the Orthodox Church, the Synod warned that his writings “can cause great harm to the souls of the faithful.” Nevertheless, Deacon Lev and several subsequent writers who reiterated his un-Orthodox views continued to issue their publications.

These writings have fueled a controversy for nearly forty years, even to this present day. Until now, a systematic investigation into the claims of these authors has never been conducted. Additionally, there has never been a comprehensive study compiling the teachings of the Orthodox saints on this significant subject in a single encyclopedic edition.

In 2011, the editors of *The Departure of the Soul* began a meticulous analysis of both the Orthodox doctrine of the toll-houses and the newly-emergent theories contradicting the Church’s teaching. The results proved positive.

The fullness of the witness to the Orthodox teaching encountered in the writings and lives of over 120 saints is presented in this volume juxtaposed with the startling discovery of over 100 falsifications, misrepresentations, and errors contained in the publications of authors who oppose the doctrine of the saints.

The majority of the errors and falsehoods in the writings of these authors stem from an erroneous tripartite thesis:

1. Their first misconception is that the Orthodox Church’s doctrine on the trial of the soul at the hour of death claims that the demons—instead of God—judge souls. This crucial misunderstanding of the saints’ teaching on the toll-houses, which unambiguously states that God alone is the Judge of every human being, forms the foundation of their incorrect theories.

2. Their second misconception, which is perhaps the most strikingly false, is that the saints’ teachings regarding the trials derive from non-Orthodox writings (specifically from heretical Gnostic and/or Bogomil sects) rather than from revelation given by God.

3. Their third misconception is that there are two separate teachings concerning the path the soul travels at the hour of death. This imaginary separation divides the unified teaching of the Church into two categories: an “acceptable teaching” of “the accounting by demons” (accepted, however, by only some of the opponents to the Church’s teaching) and an “unacceptable teaching” of “the toll-houses.”

This incorrect three-part thesis is refuted throughout the book, while light is shone on the many fabrications attempting to support it. Having amassed over 600 pages of primary source material in the first six chapters of this anthology, chapters seven and eight contain over 250 pages devoted to the identification and a refutation of the erroneous opinions of those who reject the Orthodox Church’s teaching on the departure of the soul.

#### “What Can We Do to Pass Safely through?”

Many have expressed concern over their loved ones, asking what can be done for those who are about to repose as well as for those who have already gone on ahead. As an answer to this most essential question, chapter six, “On Commemoration and Prayer for the Departed,” points to the indispensable elements established by the Church for the successful completion of our passage to eternal life. In describing what help can be given to those who departed from this life in a state of soul other than perfect readiness, this crucial chapter emphasizes the Orthodox Church’s offering of great hope. The Church’s ultimate goal is to prepare the innumerable faithful souls, rendering them worthy of anchoring in the safe haven of our God and Father’s heavenly harbor, and thus uniting them in the unfathomable depths of His love for all eternity.

This book’s historical–educational objective of providing comprehensive confirmation of the Orthodox Church’s salvific teaching on the trials is closely connected with its higher spiritual objective: to help *as many as are of the faithful* (Litany of the Faithful in the Divine Liturgy) to approach the mystery of the departure of the soul with the greatest possible readiness. Then, standing before our Savior Jesus Christ, the King of kings and just Judge of all, we shall have the best hopes of gazing upon His joyous countenance while hearing those most desired words:

*Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!* [Mt 25:21]



Two Nuns, who had both been Abbesses, died. The Lord revealed to me how their souls had been subjected to the aerial tests, how they had been tried and then condemned. For three days and nights I prayed, wretched as I am, entreating the Mother of God for them, and the Lord in His goodness pardoned them through the prayers of the Mother of God; they passed all the aerial tests and received forgiveness through God’s mercy.

St. Seraphim of Sarov (+1833)

## Ἐπτὰ Λόγοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπὸ τὸν Σταυρὸ Ὁ Μοναχὸς Μωυσῆς Ἀγιορείτης μᾶς μεταφέρει ἑπτὰ λόγους τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πάνω ἀπὸ τὸν Σταυρὸ τοῦ μαρτυρίου Του.

Μοναχὸν Μωυσέως Ἀγιορείτου, «Ἡ Εὐλαλή Σιωπή», ἐκδ. Ἐν Πλῶ, σελ. 213-219.

Ὁδηγεῖται ὁ Χριστὸς στὸν Γολγοθᾶ καὶ καρφώνεται στὸν Σταυρὸ. Ἀπὸ τὸν Σταυρὸ ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε ἑπτὰ λόγους μεγάλης σημασίας καὶ ἀξίας:

(α) «**Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς οὐ γὰρ οἶδασι τι ποιοῦσι.**»

Δικαιολογεῖ ὁ Σταυρωμένος τοὺς σταυρωτές Του. Δὲν κακιώνει μαζὶ τους οὔτε αὐτὴ τὴν ὥρα τοῦ φρικτοῦ μαρτυρίου Του. Ὁ πόνος ἦταν βαθὺς καὶ μέγας. Πρόκειται γιὰ λόγο ἄφθαστου μεγαλείου. Μόνο ἓνας Θεὸς μπορούσε νὰ τὸν πεῖ. Ἡ μεγαλειώδης ἀνεξικακία ἀπέναντι στὴν ἀδικαιολόγητη ἀνθρώπινη θρασύτητα, αὐθάδεια, κακία καὶ μοχθηρία. Ἡ μεγαλόστομη καὶ ἀνυπερβλήτη ἀγάπη τῆς συγχωρητικότητας μπροστὰ στὴ βαρβαρότητα τῆς πώρωσης. Ἡ σταυρωμένη ἀγάπη ἀντίκρου στὸν ἐπιρριμμένο φθόνο. Λόγια μὲ πνεῦμα καὶ αἷμα μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν ἄφατη ὀδύνη, ποὺ τὰ ἔλεγε πρὶν, ἀλλὰ τὰ λέγει καὶ τώρα ἀπὸ τὸ ὕψος τοῦ Σταυροῦ ἀγάπη πρὸς δόλους καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἐχθρούς, ἀκόμη καὶ τοὺς σταυρωτές, ὀρισμένοι ἀπὸ τοὺς ὁποίους ἀργότερα θὰ μετανοήσουν.

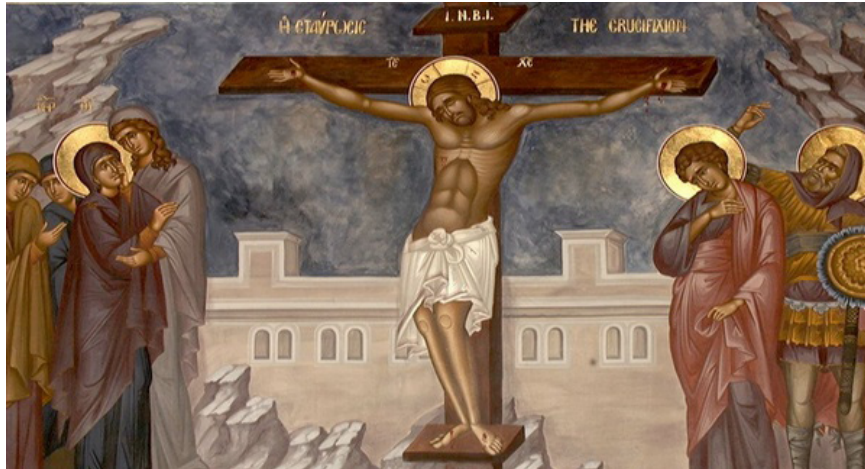
(β) «**Ἀμήν, λέγω σοί, σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ Παραδείσῳ.**»

Ὁ ἀναμάρτητος Χριστὸς σταυρώθηκε ἀνάμεσα σὲ δύο ἁμαρτωλοὺς, σὲ δύο ληστές. Ὅτι ἔβλεπε καὶ ἄκουγε ὁ ἓνας, ἔβλεπε καὶ ἄκουγε καὶ ὁ ἄλλος. Ληστές καὶ οἱ δύο, σταυρωμένοι καὶ οἱ δύο. Ὁ ἓνας προκαλεῖ, βλασφημεῖ, εἰρωνεύεται, αὐθαδιάζει. Ὁ ἄλλος κάμπτεται, λυγίζει, ἐπανορθώνει, παρακαλεῖ, μετανοεῖ. Σὰν νὰ ἐκπροσωποῦν οἱ δύο συσταυρούμενοι τὴ σύμπασα ἀνθρωπότητα, τοὺς ἀμετανόητους καὶ τοὺς μετανοημένους. Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὸν ἐκ δεξιῶν Του ληστὴ εἶναι λιαν παραμυθητικὸς γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς. Ἄς μὴν ἀπογοητεύεται κανένας πιά. Ἡ φράση αὐτὴ χαρίζει φτερά, κουράγια, ἐλπίδες σὲ ὅλους τοὺς πολλοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς. Μὲ πολὺ λίγα λόγια αὐτὸς ὁ ληστὴς φανέρωσε τὴν εἰλικρινή του μετάνοια, παραδέχθηκε τὴν ἁμαρτωλότητά του ἀπροφάσιστα,

θέλησε νὰ διορθώσει ταπεινὰ καὶ τὸν συναμαρτωλὸ του, ἔστω τὴν τελευταία αὐτὴ ὥρα, ὁμολόγησε τὸν Χριστὸ ἀναμάρτητο, Τὸν παρακάλεσε νὰ τὸν δεχθεῖ στὴν οὐράνια βασιλεία Του. Μὲ τὴ γεύση τοῦ καρποῦ τοῦ δένδρου τῆς γνώσεως καλοῦ καὶ κακοῦ, τοῦ ξύλου ἐκεῖνου, ἔκλεισε ὁ Παράδεισος γιὰ τὸν πρῶτο Ἀδάμ. Μὲ τὸ ξύλο τοῦ Σταυροῦ ἄνοιξε ὁ Παράδεισος καὶ πρῶτος του οἰκίτορας ἔγινε ἓνας μετανοημένος ληστής. Πόση ἐνίσχυση λαβαίνουν τώρα ὅλοι οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ.

(γ) Πρὸς τὴν Παναγία: «**Γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου.**» Καὶ πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννη: «**Ἴδοὺ ἡ μήτηρ σου.**»

Καταπληκτικὴ, κατανυκτικὴ καὶ συγκινητικὴ ἡ στιγμή. Τὴν ὥρα τοῦ ἄφατου πόνου, παραμένει ἀτάραχος, δὲν λησιμονεῖ τὴ μητέρα Του, τὴν Παναγία, τὴν πάνω ἀπ' ὅλες τὶς ἁγίες, τὴ σεμνότερη, καθαρότερη, ταπεινότερη γυναῖκα ὅλου του κόσμου, ὅλων των ἐποχῶν. Ἐκεῖνη ποῦ Του δάνεισε τὴ σάρκα καὶ τὸ αἷμα της, Τὸν μεγάλωσε καὶ Τὸν φρόντισε. Δὲν τὴν ἀφήνει μόνη



της, ἀπροστάτευτη, ἔρημη. Τῆς δίνει νέο υἱό. Ἐναν ἐξαίρετο καὶ πολυ-ἀγαπημένο μαθητὴ Του, ποῦ τοῦ λέει καὶ αὐτοῦ πὼς ἀπὸ τώρα ἔχει νέα μάνα, ποῦ τὴ συνοδεύει καὶ τὴ φροντίζει ἕως τῆς μακάριος κοιμήσεως καὶ μεταστάσεώς της. Γίνεται ἀδελφό-

θεος. Ἀδελφότεοι γινόμεσθε καὶ μεῖς παραμένοντας στὴ σκιά τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου.

(δ) «**Ἥλι ἤλι λεμὰ σαβαχθάνι; τοῦτ' ἔστιν: Θεέ μου, ἵνατί με ἐγκατέλιπες.**»

Μερικοὶ θεώρησαν τὸν ἐκ βαθέων αὐτὸ λόγο ὡς πικρὸ γογγυσμὸ καὶ ὡς ἀπελπιστικὴ ἱκεσία. Πρόκειται γιὰ λόγο ποῦ περιέχει ἄμετρο βάθος θεολογίας. Ὁ σταυρωμένος Χριστὸς γίνεται τὴν ὥρα ἐκεῖνη ὁ «ἐπικατάρατος κρεμᾶμενος ἐπὶ ξύλου», ἢ «κατάρρα» γιὰ μᾶς κατὰ τὸν θεῖο Παῦλο. Ὁ Σταυρωθεὶς σηκώνει τὶς ἁμαρτίες ὅλου του κόσμου, τοῦ τότε, τοῦ πρὶν καὶ τοῦ μετά, ὅλων τῶν αἰώνων, ὅλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Γρηγόριο τὸν Θεολόγο, μιᾶ γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς ἐγκαταλελειμμένους καὶ παραθεωρημένους, ποῦ ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς προσέλαβε. Ὁ ὄσιος Σιλουανὸς ὁ Ἄθωνίτης, κατὰ τὸν ἄριστο βιογράφο του Γέροντα Σωφρόνιο, ὅταν ἔχασε τὴ χάρη, αἰσθάνθηκε τὴ θεοεγκατάλειψη, τὸν πόνου τοῦ Ἀδάμ ἔξω του Παραδείσου, τὸν πόνου τοῦ Σταυροῦ, τὴν ἀπουσία τῆς θεοκοινωνίας.

(ε) «**Διψῶ.**»

Τὰ προηγηθέντα μαρτύρια, ἡ ἄρση τοῦ Σταυροῦ, ἡ κοπιώδης ἀνάβαση στὸν Γολγοθά, ἡ ἀγωνία τοῦ θανάτου, ἡ ὀδύνη τῆς σταυρώσεως, ἔφερε τὴ δίψα. Τὸν ξεδιψοῦν μὲ ξύδι καὶ χολή, πικρὸ κι ἀπαίσιον κρᾶμα. Πρόκειται γιὰ τὴν ὑψιστὴ ἔξαρση τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ἀναξιοπρέπειας, ἀχαριστίας, ἀναισχυντίας κι ἀσέβειας. Ζητᾶ νερὸ καὶ τοῦ δίνουν ξύδι. Ὅρισμένοι ὥραϊα θέλησαν νὰ ἐρμηνεύσουν μεταφορικὰ τὸ ρῆμα αὐτὸ λέγοντας πὼς διψοῦσε γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῶν σταυρωτῶν Του, τὸ εἶδαμε στὸν πρῶτο Του λόγο νὰ τοὺς δικαιολογεῖ καὶ νὰ ζητᾶ ἀπὸ τὸν οὐράνιο πατέρα Του νὰ τοὺς συγχωρέσει. Λέγουν πὼς διψοῦσε γιὰ τὴν ἐξάπλωση τοῦ εὐαγγελίου σὲ ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη, γιὰ τὴν ἐπικράτηση τῆς εἰρήνης, τῆς ἀγάπης, τῆς ἀλήθειας καὶ τῆς ἐλευθερίας.

(στ) «**Τετέλεσται.**»

Μία εὐκόλη ἐρμηνεία τῆς λέξης αὐτῆς θὰ σήμαινε ὅτι ὅλα πιά τελείωσαν. Στέρεψαν ἐπιτέλους τὰ μαρτύριά Του. Τὶ ἄλλο μαρτύριο θὰ μπορούσαν ἀκόμη νὰ σκεφθοῦν; Λέγοντας αὐτὸ δὲν αἰσθανόταν ἀνθρώπινη ἀνακούφιση, Τὸ «τετέλεσται» σημαίνει τὴν ὀλοκλήρωση τοῦ ἀπολυτρωτικοῦ ἔργου Του. Ὁ δαίμονας εἶχε κατατροπωθεῖ. Τὸ πανάχραντο αἷμα Του μᾶς εἶχε ἐξαγοράσει ἀπὸ τὴν κατάρα τοῦ νόμου. Τὸ προφητικὸ κήρυγμα εἶχε πλήρως ἐκπληρωθεῖ. Οἱ πύλες τοῦ Παραδείσου ἦταν ὀρθάνοιχτες γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς μετανοημένους, μὲ πρῶτο οἶκητορα τὸν μετανοημένο ληστή.

(ζ) «**Πάτερ, εἰς χεῖρας Σου παρατίθεμαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου.**»

Παραδίδει τὸν ἑαυτό Του στὸν Θεὸ Πατέρα. Πεθαίνει σωματικὰ ὡς ἄνθρωπος, ὄχι μοναχὰ γιὰ τὸ θέλησαν οἱ ἐχθροὶ Του, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὸ ἠθελε ὁ ἴδιος.

Ἀναμφισβήτητὰ τὸ μεγαλύτερο ἔγκλημα τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὅλων των αἰώνων εἶναι ἡ σταύρωση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, **ποὺ ἔγινε ὅμως πηγὴ ἀγιασμοῦ, σωτηρίας καὶ λυτρώσεως.** Δὲν μπορούμε νὰ μεταβοῦμε στὸ φῶς, τὴ χαρὰ καὶ τὴ δόξα τῆς Κυριακῆς τοῦ Πάσχα, ἂν ἀπαραίτητα δὲν διέλθουμε ἀπὸ τὸν λόφο τῆς Μεγάλης Παρασκευῆς, δὲν ἀναπνεύσουμε τὸ κλῆμα ποὺ ἐπικρατεῖ ἐκεῖ, δὲν σκιασθοῦμε στὸν Σταυρὸ, δὲν προσκυνήσουμε ταπεινά, δὲν προσλάβουμε γνήσιο ἀσκητικὸ μαρτυρικὸ φρόνημα, δὲν σταυρώσουμε πάθη κι ἐπιθυμίες. Ἡ μωρία, ἡ αἰσχύνη, ἡ ἀτίμωση, ἡ ἥττα τοῦ Σταυροῦ, γίνεται γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς καύχιση, τιμὴ, δόξα, νίκη. Τὸ νεκρὸ ξύλο γίνεται ζωοπάροχο. Τὸ σύμβολο τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ εἶναι ὁ ἀπλός, λιτός, ἀπέρριτος, μαρτυρικὸς Σταυρὸς.

Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι σταυρωμένη, ταπεινή, ἀμόλυντη, ἀρτυδίωτη. Κόσμημα, ἔμβλημα, τρόπαιο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὁ Σταυρὸς. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς, τὸ κάλλος τῆς, ἡ

δύναμή τῆς, ἡ ἐπιρροή τῆς, ἡ ἔμπνευσή τῆς. Σταυρώσμη ἡ Ἐκκλησία, σταυροφόροι οἱ Χριστιανοί. Στὸν Σταυρὸ μετρούμεθα, ζυγιαζόμαστε, ὀριοθετούμεθα. **καθρεφτιζόμαστε, καυχόμαστε μὲ τὸν πρωτοκορυφαῖο Παῦλο.** Ὁ εὐλογημένος Σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ διδάσκει, φρονηματίζει, χαριτώνει, ἐνισχύει, φυλάγει, παραμυθεῖ.



## Κύριε, Ἐλέησον!

*Μωυσῆς μοναχὸς Ἀγιορείτης.*

**Κ**αὶ ξαφνικὰ ἀνοίγει ἓνα παραθυράκι στὸ νοῦ. Ἔρχεται ἓνα φῶς. **Τότε ἔχεις μία ἄλλη αἴσθηση.** Τότε τὰ κατανοεῖς καλά. Ὅχι πρὸς τὸ ἐτυμολογικόν. Μὰ μὲ μία κατάνυξη καὶ συναίσθηση καὶ θεία θαλπωρή. Καὶ λές: «Τὶ ἄλλο νὰ λέω;»

Παρὰ μόνο πάλιν καὶ πολλάκις καὶ συνεχῶς: «Κύριε ἐλέησον!»

Δίχως νὰ βαριέσαι. Δίχως νὰ κουράζεσαι. Αὐτὸ τὰ λέει ὅλα. Δὲν θέλει ἄλλα καὶ πολλά. Μόνο ποιητικὰ μπορεῖ κανεὶς μερικὲς φορὲς νὰ ἐκφραστεῖ. Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι ποίηση. Ὅλες οἱ προσευχὲς εἶναι ποιήματα.

Οἱ ποιητὲς νιώθουν τοὺς συναθρώπους τους καὶ τοὺς παρηγοροῦν, ὅπως οἱ ἅγιοι. Εἶναι μεγάλη εὐλογία νὰ συναντᾶς ἓνα ποιητὴ κι ἓνα ἅγιο. Οἱ ἅγιοι δὲν θέλουν νὰ ἀφήσουν πίσω τοὺς ἴχνη. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι μόνον ἀφήνουν πάνω τους τ' ἀχνάρια τῆς κακίας τους. Κύριε ἐλέησέ τους, δὲν ξέρουν τὶ χάνουν καὶ τὶ κάνουν.

Λυπᾶμαι ὅταν δὲν μπορῶ νὰ προσευχηθῶ. Καὶ τοῦτο προσευχὴ εἶναι, μοῦ 'πε ἓνας διακριτικὸς γέροντας. Ὅπως χαίρομαι ὅταν μὲ τόση ἰκετευτικὴ στάση μοῦ ζητοῦν νὰ προσεύχομαι στὸν Κύριο. Πιστεύω πὼς γιὰ τὴν ταπείνωσή τους θὰ τοὺς ἐλεήσει ὁ Κύριος.

Προτιμῶ, ἔλεγε ἓνας ἄλλος γέροντας, τὴν προσευχὴ ἀπὸ τὰ κούφια λόγια, τὶς ψευτο-εὐγένειες καὶ τὶς θολὲς καλοσύνες. Ἡ μεγαλύτερη φιλανθρωπία εἶναι ἡ προσευχὴ καὶ ἂς μὴ τὸ καταλαβαίνουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι. Εἶναι ἡ μεγαλύτερη ἱεραποστολὴ κι εὐεργεσία τοῦ κόσμου. Τὰ πολλὰ λόγια δὲν ἀναπαύουν.

Ἡ προσευχὴ γιὰ τοὺς ἄλλους ἐπηρεάζει θεομότερα. Ἡ ἀγάπη εἶναι ἀβίαστη καὶ πάντα μία θυσία. Ἡ ἀληθινὴ προσευχὴ δὲν εἶναι ἡδονικὴ ἀνάπαυλα, μὰ ὀρθοστασία, μὰ περπάτημα στὶς μύτες, σὲ τεντωμένο σχοινί. Στὴν ἀληθινὴ προσευχὴ δὲν δίνουμε περισσεύματα τοῦ χρόνου, μὰ τὶς πιδὲ καλὲς κι ἀποδοτικὲς ὥρες μας, τὶς κύριες ὥρες τῆς ἡμέρας, τῆς ζωῆς μας.

Κύριε, συγχώρεσέ με γιὰ ὅσα εἶπα κι ἔγραψα, ποὺ δὲν τὰ ζοῦσα καὶ τὰ πιστεύα ἀκόμη, ποὺ ἀπέφυγα νὰ μιλήσω γιὰ τὶς ἥττες καὶ τὶς ἀποτυχίες μου κι ἠθελα νὰ μιλῶ μόνον γιὰ νίκες. Δεῖλιαζα γιὰ τὸ δὲν εἶχα μετανοήσει.

Κύριε, ἐλέησον...

## Τὸ Ἅγιον Φῶς Μαρτυρεῖ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία

*Συνοπτικὴ Παρουσίαση ἀπὸ τὶς ἱστοσελίδες τῆς «Ρομφαίας».*

Συμβολίζει, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀποδεικνύει περιτρανῶς τὸ Μέγα Μυστήριον τῆς ἐκ νεκρῶν Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Μᾶς γεμίζει αἰσθήματα πνευματικῆς, ψυχικῆς καὶ θρησκευτικῆς ἀνατάσεως. Αἱ καρδίαι ὄλων χτυποῦν ἀπὸ πίστιν, θαυμασιμὸν καὶ ἐλπίδα διὰ τὸ Μέγα μυστήριον τῆς Ζωῆς. Πρόκειται διὰ ἀληθινὸν θαῦμα, τὸ ὁποῖον δὲν χωρᾶ καμιὰν ἀμφισβήτησιν.

Ἀπὸ τὸ πρῶτὸ τοῦ Μεγάλου Σαββάτου χιλιάδες πιστοὶ τῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ προσκυνηταὶ ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ μέρη τοῦ κόσμου κατακλύζουσι τὸν Ναὸν τῆς Ἀναστάσεως διὰ νὰ παρακολουθήσουν τὴν Τελετὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Φωτός.

Τὴν 12<sup>ην</sup> μεσημβρινὴν, ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος Πατριάρχης τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων, συνοδεῖα Ἀρχιερέων καὶ ἄλλων κληρικῶν, φθάνει εἰς τὸ Πατριαρχεῖον. Εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὸ Ἅγιον Βῆμα τοῦ Καθολικοῦ. Κατόπιν οἱ Ἀρχιερεῖς

καὶ κληρικοὶ ντύνονται με ἄμφια καὶ ὁ Πατριάρχης με τὴν πλήρη Ἀρχιερατικὴν στολήν. Ὁ Πατριάρχης ἠγεῖται τῆς πομπῆς, ἡ ὁποία ξεκινᾶ ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιον Βῆμα τοῦ Καθολικοῦ καὶ βαδίζει τρεῖς φορὰς πέριξ τοῦ ἱεροῦ Κουβουκλίου ὑπὸ τῶν ἤχων τῶν ψαλμῶδων, οἱ ὁποῖοι ψάλλουσι τὸ «Τὴν Ἀνάστασιν σου Χριστὲ Σωτήρ...»



Εἶναι ἀναγκαῖον νὰ τονίσουμε ὅτι οἱ ἑτερόδοξοι ἔχουν προκαταβολικῶς ἐρευνήσει ὄλον τὸ ἐσωτερικὸν τοῦ ἱεροῦ Κουβουκλίου, διὰ νὰ πιστοποιήσουν... ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀναμμένον κανδήλιον ἢ ἄλλη πηγὴ φωτός. Μετὰ τὴν λιτανεῖαν ὁ Πατριάρχης ἴσταται ἔμπροσθεν τῆς θύρας τοῦ Ἁγίου Κουβουκλίου, ἀφαιρεῖ τὰ ἄμφια καὶ περιμένει με τὸ στοιχάρι, πετραχήλι καὶ τὴν ζώνην. Οἱ ἑτερόδοξοι κάνουν ἐρευνα διὰ νὰ βεβαιωθοῦν ὅτι ἐπάνω του δὲν ἔχει κάτι, τὸ ὁποῖον θὰ ἠδύνατο νὰ δημιουργήσῃ ὑπονοίας, ἢ νὰ κινήσῃ ὑποψίας. Ὅταν ὀλοκληρωθῇ ἡ ἐρευνα, οἱ φύλακες ἀφαιροῦν τὰς σφραγίδας ἀπὸ τὴν θύραν καὶ ὁ Πατριάρχης εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὸ Ἱερὸν Κουβούκλιον με δυὸ δεσμίδας ἐσβησιμένα κεριά. Μαζί του εἰσέρχονται εἰς τὸν προθάλαμον ὁ Ἀρμένιος Πατριάρχης καὶ ὁ Δραγομάνος, οἵτινες παραμένουν εἰς τὸν προθάλαμον. Εἰς ὄλον τὸν Ναὸν ἐπικρατεῖ συγκίνησις καὶ ἀγωνία.

Ὁ Πατριάρχης γονατιστὸς ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Ἁγίου Τάφου τοῦ Χριστοῦ προσεύχεται πρὸς τὸν Σταυρωθέντα,

κρατῶν δυὸ σβηστὰς λαμπάδας καὶ με ταπεινώσιν καὶ εὐλάβειαν ἀναπέμπων τὴν ἀκόλουθην εὐχήν:

«Δέσποτα Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἡ ἀρχίφωτος σοφία τοῦ ἀνάρχου Πατρός. Ὁ φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον, ὁ εἰπὼν ἐκ σκότους φῶς λάμπει, ὁ εἰπὼν γεννηθῆτω φῶς καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς. Κύριε, ὁ τοῦ φωτὸς χορηγός, ὁ ἐξαγαγὼν ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους τῆς πλάνης καὶ εἰσαγαγὼν εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν φῶς τῆς σῆς ἐπιγνώσεως, ὁ τὴν γῆν μὲν πᾶσαν διὰ τῆς ἐν αὐτῇ ἐνσάρκου παρουσίας σου, τὰ καταχθόνια δὲ διὰ τῆς εἰς Ἄδην καταβάσεώς σου φωτὸς πληρώσας καὶ χαρᾶς, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα διὰ τῶν ἁγίων σου Ἀποστόλων φῶς καταγγείλας πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. Εὐχαριστοῦμεν σοί, ὅτι διὰ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς πίστεως μετήγαγες ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ σκότους εἰς φῶς καὶ γεγόναμεν υἱοὶ διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος, θεασάμενοι τὴν δόξαν σου πλήρη οὐσαν χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. ἀλλ' ὦ φωτοπάροχε Κύριε, ὁ τὸ μέγα φῶς ὢν, ὁ εἰπὼν, ὁ λαὸς ὁ καθήμενος ἐν σκότει.

Δέσποτα Κύριε, τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὁ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. Τὸ μόνο φῶς

τοῦ κόσμου καὶ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οὗ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης ἐπληρώθη τὰ σύμπαντα, ὅτι φῶς εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἐλήλυθας διὰ τῆς ἐνσάρκου σου οἰκονομίας, εἰ καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἠγάπησαν μᾶλλον τὸ σκότος ἢ τὸ φῶς. Σὺ Κύριε φωτοδότα, ἐπάκουσον ἡμῶν τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν καὶ ἀναξίων δούλων σου τῶν τῆ ὥρα ταύτῃ παρισταμένων

τῶ παναγίῳ σου καὶ φωτοφόρῳ τούτῳ τάφῳ καὶ πρόσδεξι ἡμᾶς τιμώντας τὰ ἄχραντα πάθη σου, τὴν παναγίαν σου σταύρωσιν, τὸν ἐκούσιον θάνατον καὶ τὴν ἐν τῷ πανσεβάσῳ τούτῳ μνήματι τοῦ τεθεωμένου σου σώματος κατάθεσιν καὶ ταφὴν καὶ τριήμερον ἐξανάστασιν, ἢν χαρμονικῶς ἤδη ἀρξάμενοι ἐορτάζειν, μνεῖαν ποιούμεθα καὶ τῆς ἐν Ἄδου καθόδου σου, δι' ἧς τὰς ἐκεῖσε τῶν δικαίων κατεχομένας ψυχὰς δεσποτικῶς ἠλευθέρωσας τῆ ἀστραπῇ τῆς σῆς θεότητος φωτὸς πληρώσας τὰ καταχθόνια.

Ὅθεν διὰ ἀγαλλομένη καρδίᾳ καὶ χαρᾶ πνευματικῇ κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ ὑπερευλογημένον Σάββατον τὸ ἐν γῆ καὶ ὑπὸ γῆν θεοπρεπῶς τελεσθέντα σοὶ σωτηριωδέστατα μυστήρια σου ἐορτάζοντες καὶ σὲ τὸ ὄντως ἰλαρὸν καὶ ἐφετὸν φῶς ἐν τοῖς καταχθονίοις θεϊκῶς ἐπιλάμπαν ἀναμιμνησκόμενοι, φωτοφάνειαν ποιούμεθα, σοὺ τὴν πρὸς ἡμᾶς συμπαθῶς γενομένην θεοφανεῖαν, εἰκονίζοντες. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τῆ σωτηρίῳ καὶ φωταυγεῖ νυκτὶ πάντα πεπλήρωται φωτὸς οὐρανὸς τὲ καὶ γῆ



καὶ τὰ καταχθόνια διὰ τὸ ὑπερφυεὲς μυστήριον τῆς ἐν Ἄδου καθόδου σου καὶ τῆς ἐκ Τάφου σου τριημέρου ἀναστάσεως.

Διὰ τοῦτο, ἐκ τοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦτον τὸν φωτοφόρον σου Τάφον εὐλαβῶς λαμβάνοντες, διαδίδομεν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς σὲ τὸ ἀληθινὸν φῶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν καὶ δεόμεθα σου, Πανάγιε Δέσποτα, ὅπως ἀναδείξῃς αὐτὸ ἀγιασμοῦ δῶρον καὶ πάσης θεϊκῆς σου χάριτος πεπληρωμένον, διὰ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Παναγίου καὶ φωτοφόρου Τάφου σου. Καὶ τοὺς ἀπτομένους εὐλαβῶς αὐτοῦ εὐλογήσης καὶ ἀγιάσης, τοῦ σκότους τῶν παθῶν ἐλευθεριῶν καὶ τῶν φωτεινοτάτων σου σκηνῶν καταξιώσης, ὅπου φῶς τὸ ἀνέσπερόν της σῆς θεότηας λάμπει. Χάρισαι αὐτοῖς, Κύριε, ὑγίαν καὶ εὐζωίαν καὶ τοὺς οἴκους αὐτῶν παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ πληρῶσον.

Ναί, Δέσποτα φωτοπάροχε, ἐπάκουσόν μου τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ ταύτῃ καὶ δὸς ἡμῖν τέ καὶ αὐτοῖς περιπατεῖν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ σου καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν, ἕως τὸ φῶς τῆς προσκαιροῦ ζωῆς ταύτης ἔχωμεν. Δὸς ἡμῖν Κύριε, ἵνα τὸ φῶς τῶν καλῶν ἔργων ἡμῶν λάμπῃ ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ δοξάζωσι σὲ σὺν τῷ ἀνάρχῳ σου Πατρὶ καὶ τῷ Παναγίῳ Πνεύματι. Εἰς φῶς γὰρ ἐθνῶν ἡμᾶς τέθηκας, ἵνα αὐτοῖς τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατοῦσι φαίνωμεν. Ἄλλ' ἡμεῖς ἠγαπήσαμεν τὸ σκότος μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ φῶς, φαῦλα πράσσοντες. Πᾶς γὰρ ὁ φαῦλα πράσσων μισεῖ τὸ φῶς κατὰ τὸν ἀψευδῆ λόγον σου. Διὰ τοῦτο ὁσμημέραι προσκόπτομεν ἁμαρτάνοντας, ἐπειδὴ περιπατοῦμεν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ. Ἄλλ' ἀξιώσον ἡμᾶς τὸ ὑπόλοιπόν της ζωῆς ἡμῶν βιωτεῦσαι πεφωτισμένους τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς διανοίας ἡμῶν. Δὸς ἡμῖν, ἵνα ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατήσωμεν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ τῶν ἐντολῶν σου. Τὸ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος φωτεινὸν ἔνδυμα, ὅπερ διὰ τῶν ἔργων ἡμαυρώσαμεν, λεύκανον, ὡς τὸ φῶς, ὁ ἀναβαλλόμενος τὸ φῶς ὡσπερ ἱμάτιον. Δὸς ἡμῖν ἐνδύσασθαι τὰ ὄπλα τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα δι' αὐτῶν τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦ σκότους τροποῦμεθα, ὃς μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἄγγελον φωτός. Ναί, Κύριε, καὶ ὡς ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῖς ἐν σκοτίᾳ καὶ σκιά θανάτου καθημένοις φῶς ἔλαμψας οὕτω σήμερον λάμπσον ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν τὸ σὸν ἀκήρατον φῶς ἵνα τούτου φωτιζόμενοι καὶ θερμαινόμενοι ἐν τῇ πίστει, δοξάζωμεν Σὲ τὸ μόνον ἐκ μόνου τοῦ ἀρχιφώτου φωτός, ἰλαρὸν φῶς εἰς τοὺς ἀτελευτήτους αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν».

Μετὰ τὸ πέρας τῆς εὐχῆς τοποθετεῖ τὸ βαμβάκιον εἰς τὸν Πανάγιον Τάφον καὶ μεθ' αὐτὸν ἀνάβει. Μετὰ αὐτὸ ἀνάβει τὰ κεριὰ καὶ ἐξέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸ Ἱερὸν Κουβούκλιον. Τὸ σπουδαῖον εἶναι ὅτι τὸ ἅγιον φῶς διὰ ὀλίγα λεπτὰ δὲν ἔχει πυράδα. Δηλαδή ἐὰν εἰς ἀκουμπήσῃ τὸ ἅγιον φῶς εἰς τὰ χέρια του δὲν θὰ καῖ. Πραγματικῶς εἶναι ἐν ἐκ τῶν μεγαλυτέρων Θαυμάτων τῆς Χριστιανοσύνης, τὸ ὁποῖον ἐπαναλαμβάνεται κάθε χρόνον τὸ Μέγα Σάββατον.

## Τὶ ΔΕΝ Εἶναι τὸ Πάσχα...

Πηγή: Ἐφημερίδα Διψῶ, τ. 77.



Πάσχα δὲν εἶναι τὸ κρόκον, δὲν εἶναι τὸ τσουρέκι, δὲν εἶναι ἡ λαμπάδα, δὲν εἶναι τὰ καινούρια ροῦχα, δὲν εἶναι ἡ παρουσία μας στὴν Ἐκκλησία δέκα λεπτὰ πρὶν τὸ «Χριστὸς Ἄνεστη» καὶ ἓνα λεπτὸ μετὰ. Πάσχα δὲν εἶναι ἡ λατρεία τοῦ φαγητοῦ, τὸ πανηγύρι, ὁ χορὸς καὶ τὸ ποτό. Πάσχα δὲν εἶναι οἱ σουβλές στὸ δρόμο, δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἀνταλλαγὴ εὐχῶν, δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἐπιστροφή στὸ χωριό. Ἦ, τουλάχιστον, δὲν εἶναι μόνο αὐτά.

Πάσχα εἶναι πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα ἡ γεύση τῆς Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ ποῦ ἔρχεται μέσα μας, ὅταν μεταλαμβάνουμε στὴν Θεῖα Λειτουργία. Τότε ἡ ψυχὴ μας, ἔστω καὶ γιὰ λίγο, μεταμορφώνεται, ἡρεμεῖ, νιώθει κάτι ἀπὸ τὴν συγγνώμη καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη ποῦ ἀνατέλλει μέσα ἀπὸ τὸν Τάφο. Τότε, νιώθουμε πὼς μ' ὅλο τὸν κόσμον εἴμαστε ἀδελφία, γιὰ τὴν μετέχουμε τοῦ κοινοῦ ποτηριοῦ τῆς Ζωῆς. Πάσχα εἶναι ἡ ἀλλαγὴ τῆς ζωῆς μας, ἡ ἀνάστασή μας ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη καὶ τὶς κακίες ποῦ μᾶς δέρνουν. Δὲν ἀξίζει νὰ λέμε ὅτι ἦρθε τὸ Πάσχα κι ἐμεῖς δὲν εἴμαστε συμφιλιωμένοι μετὰ τὸ Θεό, τὸ συνάνθρωπο, τὸ γείτονα, τὸν ἑαυτό μας, ὅτι δὲν νιώθουμε πὶδ ἐλεύθεροι ἀπὸ τὰ δεσμὰ τῆς κακίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου. Πάσχα ἄλλωστε εἶναι ἡ συντριβὴ τοῦ ἔσχατου ἐχθροῦ τῆς ἀνθρώπινης φύσης, ποῦ εἶναι ὁ... θάνατος: «**Θανάτω θάνατον πατήσας**».

Πάσχα εἶναι ἡ ἀφορμὴ γιὰ ἐνότητα, ἐνότητα μετὰ τῶν λαῶν καὶ τῶν κοινωνιῶν. Δὲν γίνεται νὰ λέμε ὅτι γιορτάζουμε τὴν Ἀνάσταση καὶ ὁ πόλεμος καὶ ἡ διχόνοια κυριαρχεῖ στὶς ψυχές μας. Δὲν γίνεται νὰ λέμε ὅτι πιστεύουμε στὰ μηνύματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ νὰ ἐπικαλούμαστε αὐτὴ τὴν ιδιότητά μας καὶ νὰ συντριβούμε λαοὺς, ὑπολήψεις, συνειδήσεις, συνανθρώπους, πλησίον, ἀδελφούς μας. Δὲν γίνεται νὰ κάνουμε Πάσχα μετὰ κακία γιὰ τοὺς ἄλλους, ὅποιοι κι ἂν εἶναι αὐτοί, ὅ,τι κι ἂν μάς ἔχουν κάνει!



Αὐτοὶ οἱ τρεῖς κανόνες ζωῆς εἶναι χρήσιμοι, τὸ νὰ ἀφοβᾶσαι τὸν Θεόν, τὸ νὰ προσεύχεσαι ἀδιάλειπτα καὶ τὸ νὰ κάνῃς τὸ καλὸν στὸν πλησίον σου.

**Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν ὁ Μέγας**

## Πώς να Μιλᾶμε στὰ Παιδιά μας: Γιὰ τοὺς Δαίμονες, τὴν Κόλαση καὶ τὸ Θάνατο

*Απόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Σκέψεις γιὰ τὰ Παιδιά στὴν Ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία Σήμερα», Ἀδελφῆς Μαγδαληνῆς, Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Τίμιου Προδρόμου, Ἑσσεξ Ἀγγλίας, 1994.*

Εἶναι σοβαρὸ παιδαγωγικὸ σφάλμα νὰ μιλᾶμε στὰ μικρὰ παιδιά μὲ κάθε λεπτομέρεια γιὰ τοὺς δαίμονες, διότι, ἂν ἓνα παιδί ἀκούσει μία φορὰ πὼς ἀκριβῶς εἶναι, εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ μὴν ἀρχίσει νὰ τοὺς φαντάζεται.

Οἱ ἐνήλικες εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ προειδοποιηθοῦν γιὰ τὸν κίνδυνο ποὺ διατρέχουν, ἂν ἀφήσουν εἰκόνες τῶν δαιμόνων νὰ εἰσβάλουν στὸ μυαλό τους, ἀλλὰ ἓνα μικρὸ παιδί, ἀκόμη κι ἂν τὸ προειδοποιήσουμε, δὲν μπορεῖ εὐκόλα νὰ σταματήσει νὰ σκέπτεται κάτι ποὺ τὸ βασανίζει, καὶ αὐτὸ μπορεῖ νὰ τὸ ὀδηγήσει σὲ μία ἐπικίνδυνη πνευματικὴ κατάσταση ἢ, τὸ λιγότερο, νὰ ὑποφέρει ἀπὸ ἐφιάλτες.

Ὅταν τὰ μικρὰ παιδιά ρωτοῦν γιὰ τὸ διάβολο ἢ γιὰ τὴν ὑπαρξὴ τῶν πνευμάτων τοῦ κακοῦ, εἶναι προτιμότερο νὰ μὴν κάνουμε διεξοδικὴ ἀνάλυση ἀλλὰ νὰ λέμε ὅτι δὲν πρέπει νὰ δίνουμε σ' αὐτὰ περισσότερη προσοχὴ ἀπ' ὅ,τι στὰ ὄνειρα ἢ κάτι παρόμοιο. Γενικὰ πρέπει νὰ στρέφουμε τὸ μυαλό τῶν παιδιῶν πρὸς τὸν Χριστό, τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους.

Εἶναι καλύτερα νὰ διδάσκουμε στὰ παιδιά τὸ Χριστιανικὸ ἀγῶνα χωρὶς ἄμεση ἀναφορὰ στὴ μάχη ἐναντίον τῶν δαιμόνων. Τὰ παιδιά μποροῦν νὰ μάθουν ἐντελῶς φυσικὰ νὰ κάνουν τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ πρὶν κοιμηθοῦν (ἐπάνω τους καὶ πάνω στὸ κρεβάτι ἢ τὸ μαξιλάρι τους) ὡς εὐλογία γιὰ τὴ νύκτα, νὰ χρησιμοποιοῦν τὴν προσευχὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ ἐλέησον με) ἢ νὰ μιλοῦν στὸν Κύριο καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους μὲ δικὰ τους λόγια, ὅποτε θέλουν. Ἔτσι ὅταν δοκιμάσουν κάποιο πειρασμὸ (π.χ. ἀπὸ φόβο ἢ ἐφιάλτες), θὰ χρησιμοποιήσουν ἐντελῶς φυσικὰ τὰ σωστὰ ὄπλα. Τὰ παιδιά μποροῦν νὰ κοιμοῦνται μὲ ἓνα κομποσκοῖνι στὸ χέρι ἢ κάτω ἀπ' τὸ μαξιλάρι τους καὶ νὰ λένε τὴν προσευχὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (ἔστω μόνο λίγες φορὲς στίς καθημερινές τους προσευχές).

Ἡ ιδέα τῆς κολάσεως φοβίζει τὰ παιδιά. Βέβαια φοβίζει κι ἐμᾶς ἄλλα ὁ φόβος μας δὲν εἶναι παθολογικός, πηγάζει ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη μας γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ φόβο μας μήπως ἀποξενωθοῦμε ἀπ' Αὐτόν. Αὐτὸ τὸ ὅποιο πρέπει νὰ καλλιεργήσουμε στὰ παιδιά δὲν εἶναι ὁ φόβος τῆς κολάσεως ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀγάπη γιὰ τὸν Θεό. Τὰ παιδιά μποροῦν νὰ σκεφθοῦν σοβαρὰ τὸ μεταφυσικὸ πρόβλημα τοῦ κακοῦ καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὅταν μιλᾶμε γιὰ τὴν κόλαση (ὄχι, φυσικὰ, σὲ μικρὰ παιδιά) πρέπει νὰ τονίζουμε ὅτι ἡ κόλαση δὲν εἶναι ἓνας τόπος ὅπου ὁ Θεὸς θέλει νὰ στείλει τοὺς κακοὺς ἀνθρώπους,

κόλαση εἶναι ὁ πόνος ποὺ ἐπιβάλλουμε στὸν ἑαυτό μας μὲ τὴν ἀπόρριψη τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κόλαση εἶναι ἡ θέα τοῦ φωτὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ ποὺ κατακαίει ὅσους δὲν ἔχουν γίνει ὅμοιοι μ' Αὐτόν.

Ἡ ἀκόμη μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι, ἂν κάποιος εἶναι ἄρρωστος ἀλλὰ ἀρνεῖται νὰ πάρει τὰ φάρμακα ποὺ συνιστᾷ ὁ γιατρός, δὲν φταίει ὁ γιατρός, ἂν δὲν θεραπευθεῖ. Ὅπως πάντα δὲν ὑπάρχουν συνταγές, δίνω μόνο μερικὰ παραδείγματα. Ὑπάρχουν πολλές περιπτώσεις ἐνηλίκων οἱ ὅποιοι ἀπέρριψαν τὸ Χριστιανισμὸ, ἐπειδὴ αὐτὸ νόμιζαν ὅτι ἦταν ὁ καλύτερος τρόπος νὰ ἐλευθερωθοῦν ἀπ' τὸν ἀσφυκτικὸ φόβο τῆς κολάσεως μέσα στὸν ὅποιο ἀνατράφηκαν. Ἀκόμα κι ὅταν μιλᾶμε γιὰ κακὲς πράξεις ἢ γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ τὶς διέπραξαν, εἶναι σημαντικὸ νὰ γνωρίζει σίγουρὰ τὸ παιδί ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι πάντα ἔτοιμος νὰ συγχωρήσει ὅποιοδήποτε ἁμάρτημα.

Ὅταν τὰ παιδιά μιλοῦν γιὰ τὸν Οὐρανὸ, ἐκφράζουν συχνὰ διάφορες ιδέες γιὰ τὸ τι μποροῦμε νὰ συναντήσουμε ἐκεῖ, ιδέες οἱ ὁποῖες θεολογικὰ φαίνονται ἴσως λανθασμένες. Πρέπει ὅμως νὰ εἴμαστε πολὺ προσεκτικοὶ γιὰ νὰ μὴν καταστρέψουμε μέσα τους τὴν ἐπιθυμία νὰ πάνε στὸν Οὐρανὸ. Μπορεῖτε νὰ φαντασθεῖτε ὅτι θὰ ἐπιθυμοῦσε κανεὶς νὰ πάει σ' ἓναν τόπο, ὅπου δὲν ὑπάρχει οὔτε φαγητό, οὔτε παιχνίδια, οὔτε ἀγαπημένα ζώακια; Πρέπει νὰ δίνουμε τὴν ἐντύπωση (καὶ δὲν εἶναι ἐσφαλμένη ἐντύπωση) ὅτι ὁ Οὐρανὸς εἶναι ἀσυγκρίτως καλύτερος ἀπ' ὅ,τι μποροῦμε νὰ φαντασθοῦμε. Μερικὰ παιδιά, μόλις τὸ ἄκουσαν αὐτό, ρώτησαν αὐθόρμητα:

**Καλύτερος κι ἀπ' τὴ νύχτα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως; Καλύτερος κι ἀπ' τὸ παγωτό; Καλύτερος κι ἀπ' ὅταν ἡ μαμά σὲ βάζει νὰ κοιμηθεῖς;** Ἡ Βίβλος μᾶς διδάσκει ὅτι θὰ ὑπάρχει οὐράνια τροφή, οὐράνιο γέλιο κ.λ.π. Ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὰ ζῶα, τὰ παιδιά θέλουν νὰ ξέρουν ἂν τὸ ἀγαπημένο τοὺς ζῶο θὰ ἔχει μία θέση στὸν οὐρανὸ. Δὲν ὑπάρχει λόγος νὰ ἐξηγήσουμε θεολογικὰ αὐτὴ τὴ στιγμή σ' ἓνα παιδί σὲ τι διαφέρει ἡ ψυχὴ ἐνδὸς ζῶου ἀπὸ τὴν ψυχὴ ἐνδὸς ἀνθρώπου. Εἶναι προτιμότερο νὰ τοῦ θυμίσουμε πόσο φροντίζει ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ κάθε μικρὸ σπουργίτι. (Βλ. Ματθ. 10:29).

**Δὲν πρέπει ποτέ, ὅταν μιλᾶμε θεολογικά, νὰ καταστρέψουμε μία ιδέα ποὺ ἔχει κάποιος μέσα του, ἂν δὲν τὴν ἀντικαταστήσουμε μὲ μία ὀριμότερη ιδέα, ἡ ὁποία δὲν ξεπερνᾷ τὸ ἐπίπεδο ἀντιλήψεώς του.** Στὸ Γερωντικὸ ὑπάρχει μία διήγηση γιὰ κάποιο μοναχὸ ὁ ὅποιος ἦταν ἀνθρωπομορφιστὴς (δηλαδὴ ἐρμηνεύεε στὴν κυριολεξία ἀγιογραφικὲς ἐκφράσεις ὅπως τὰ χέρια τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὰ μάτια τοῦ Θεοῦ κ.λ.π.). Οἱ Ὀρθόδοξοι μοναχοὶ τὸν διόρθωσαν. Τὸν ἐπισκέφθηκε ὅμως κάποιος ἄλλος μοναχὸς καὶ τὸν βρῆκε νὰ κλαίει. Ὁ ἐπισκέπτης τὸν ρώτησε: Γιατὶ κλαῖς, πάτερ; Δὲ

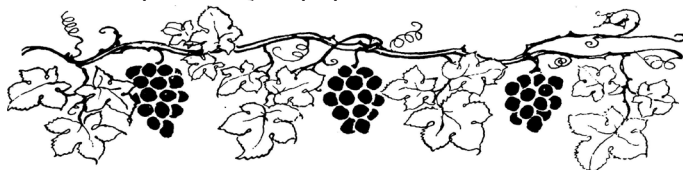
χαίρεσαι ποῦ ἐπέστρεψες στή σωστή πίστη; Ὁ μοναχὸς ἀπάντησε: Κλαίω, γιατί μου πήραν τὸν Θεό μου καὶ τώρα πιά δὲν ξέρω ποιὸν νὰ λατρέψω.

Δὲ θέλουμε τὰ παιδιά μας νὰ φοβοῦνται τὸ θάνατο. Πρέπει νὰ μιλάμε γι' αὐτὸν ὡς ἓνα κομμάτι τῆς ζωῆς μας—τὸ κατώφλι τῆς οὐράνιας ζωῆς—τὸ σκαλοπάτι πρὸς τὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ μὲ τὸν Χριστό. Μερικὲς φορὲς ὀρισμένα παιδιά θέλουν τόσο πολὺ νὰ πᾶνε στὸν Οὐρανό, ὥστε ἐκφράζουν τὴν ἐπιθυμία νὰ πεθάνουν ἢ ἀκόμα νὰ θέσουν μόνα τους τέρμα στὴ ζωὴ τους. Δὲν πρέπει νὰ βάζουμε μέσα σ' αὐτὰ τὰ παιδιά ἓνα νοσηρὸ φόβο τοῦ θανάτου γιὰ νὰ μετριάσουμε αὐτὴ τὴν ἐπιθυμία, ἀλλὰ νὰ τοὺς ἐξηγοῦμε ὅτι ὁ θάνατος εἶναι εὐλογημένος μόνο ἂν φύγουμε ἀπ' αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμο ὅταν μᾶς καλέσει ὁ Θεός, ἐπειδὴ Ἐκεῖνος μόνο γνωρίζει πότε εἴμαστε ἔτοιμοι.

Δὲν πηγαίνουμε στὸν Οὐρανὸ πρὶν μᾶς στείλει τὸ εἰσιτήριο. Δὲν ὑπάρχουν συνταγὲς γιὰ τὸ τί θὰ ποῦμε στὸ κάθε παιδί, πρέπει νὰ προσπαθοῦμε νὰ προσαρμόζουμε τὴν ἀπάντησή μας στὴν κάθε περίπτωση.

Πρόκειται γιὰ ἓνα πρόβλημα τὸ ὁποῖο συχνὰ βρῖσκει τοὺς γονεῖς ἀπροετοίμαστους. Εἶναι λυπηρὸ το γεγονός ὅτι μικρὰ παιδιά ἔχουν ἔστω ἀκούσει γιὰ τὴν αὐτοκτονία ἀλλὰ εἶναι μία πραγματικότητα τὴν ὁποία οἱ Χριστιανοὶ κατηχητὲς πρέπει νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσουν.

Οἱ ἐρωτήσεις γιὰ τὴν κόλαση καὶ τὸν Οὐρανό, τὸ κακὸ καὶ τὸ καλὸ, τοὺς δαίμονες, τὸ θάνατο, τὴν αὐτοκτονία κ.λ.π. θὰ τεθοῦν πολλὲς φορὲς κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς παιδικῆς ἡλικίας. Οἱ ἀπαντήσεις μας σ' αὐτὲς (ὅπως καὶ **στὴν ἐρώτηση πὼς γεννιοῦνται τὰ παιδιά**) πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ἀνάλογες μὲ τὸ ἐπίπεδο ἀναπτύξεως τοῦ παιδιοῦ. Δὲν ἀπαντοῦμε σ' ἓνα πεντάχρονο παιδί μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο πὸν θὰ ἀπαντούσαμε σ' ἓνα δεκάχρονο, ἂν ἔθετε τὴν ἴδια ἐρώτηση.



**Δ**ύσκολον εἶναι χωρὶς ἄσκηση νὰ δεσμευθῆ ἡ νεότητα στὸν ζυγὸ τῆς καθαρότητος. Ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ σκοτεινιάσματος τοῦ νοῦ πηγάζει, κατὰ πρῶτον ἀπὸ τὴν ὀκνηρία, ἡ ὁποία ἐκδηλώνεται στὴν πνευματικὴ ἐργασία καὶ στὴν προσευχή. Διότι ἄλλη ὁδὸς πλάνης δὲν ὑπάρχει στὴν ψυχὴ, παρὰ τὸ νὰ ἐκπέση προηγουμένως ἀπὸ τὴν πνευματικὴν ἐργασία καὶ τὴν προσευχή. Ἐπειδὴ πέφτει εὐκόλα στὰ χέρια τῶν ἐχθρῶν τῆς ἡ ψυχῆ, ὅταν στερηθῆ τὴν βοήθειαν τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ πάλιν ξαναλέγω ὅτι, ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ δὲν φροντίζει γιὰ τὰ ἔργα τῆς ἀρετῆς, εὐκόλα ἔλκεται ἀπὸ τὰ ἐνάντια τῶν ἀρετῶν.

**Ἅγιος Ἰσαὰκ ὁ Σύρος**

## Τι Εἶναι τὸ Κουτσομπολιό

*Ἀρχιμ. Παύλου Παπαδόπουλου.*



**Ἦ**ταν κάποτε μία κυρία ἡ ὁποία προσήλθε μὲ μετάνοια νὰ ἐξομολογηθεῖ σὲ κάποιον ἱερέα. Ὁ ἱερέας τὴν καλοδέχτηκε, ἔβαλε τὸ πετραχήλι του καὶ τὴν παρότρυνε νὰ ἀρχίσει νὰ τοῦ λέγει τὰ λάθη της. Ἡ γυναίκα κομπίαζε.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγη ὥρα καὶ μετὰ ἀπὸ τὰ πειστικὰ λόγια τοῦ ἱερέως ὅτι δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ ντρέπεται ἢ νὰ φοβᾶται νὰ ὁμολογήσει τὰ λάθη της, ἡ γυναίκα ἄρχισε νὰ τοῦ διηγῆται τὰ λόγια, τίς κατακρίσεις καὶ τὰ κουτσομπολιὰ πὸν σὲ ὅλη της τὴν ζωὴ ἔλεγε γιὰ ἀνθρώπους πὸν εἶτε τοὺς γνώριζε εἶτε δὲν τοὺς εἶχε συναντήσῃ ποτέ.

Ὁ ἱερέας τὴν ἄκουσε ὑπομονετικά. Ὅταν τελείωσε ὁ ἱερέας σηκώθηκε ὀρθιος. Τῆς διάβασε τὴν συγχωρητικὴ εὐχή. Ἡ γυναίκα νόμιζε τελείωσαν καὶ πῆγε νὰ φύγει.

Ὁ ἱερέας ὁμως τὴν εἶπε: «Μὴν βιάζεσαι, θέλω νὰ πᾶς στὸ σπίτι σου, νὰ πάρεις τὸ μαξιλάρι σου καὶ νὰ ἀνέβεις στὴν στέγη. Ἐκεῖ, νὰ πάρεις ἓνα μαχαίρι καὶ νὰ ἀνοίξεις στὰ δύο το μαξιλάρι. Θέλω νὰ τὸ κάνεις αὐτὸ καὶ νὰ παρατηρήσεις τί θὰ γίνῃ. Ἐλα αὔριο νὰ μοῦ πεῖς τί ἔγινε.

Ἡ γυναίκα πῆγε καὶ ἔκανε ὅτι τῆς εἶπε ὁ ἱερέας.

Τὴν ἐπαύριον ἡ γυναίκα ξαναπῆγε στὸν ἱερέα. «Ἐκανα ὅτι μου εἶπατε», εἶπε ἡ γυναίκα. Ὁ ἱερέας λοιπὸν τὴν ρώτησε: «Τι παρατήρησες καθὼς ἔσκιζες τὸ μαξιλάρι»; Ἡ γυναίκα χωρὶς δισταγμὸ εἶπε: «Μὲ τὸ πὸν ἄρχισα νὰ σκίζω τὸ μαξιλάρι ἄρχισαν νὰ βγαίνουν τὰ πούπουλα πὸν ὑπῆρχαν μέσα του καὶ νὰ γεμίζουν τὸν τόπο... κάποια τὰ ἔπαιρνε ὁ ἀέρας καὶ τὰ πῆγαινε πολὺ μακριά».

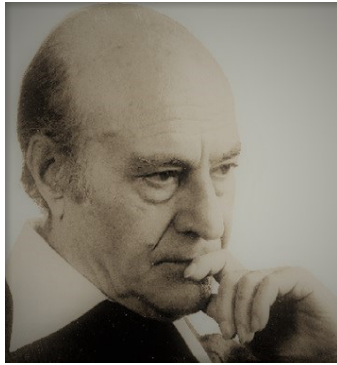
Ὁ ἱερέας μετὰ τὴν σύντομη αὐτὴ περιγραφή τῆς εἶπε: «Τώρα λοιπὸν, θέλω νὰ πᾶς σπίτι σου καὶ νὰ μαζέψεις ὅλα ἐκεῖνα τὰ πούπουλα πὸν ὑπῆρχαν μέσα στὸ μαξιλάρι σου»!

Ἡ γυναίκα τὰ ἔχασε. «Μά, τί λέτε πάτερ, πὼς νὰ τὰ μαζέψω ὅλα ἐκεῖνα τὰ πούπουλα; Ἕνας Θεὸς ξέρει πὸν ἔχουνε πάει τώρα μὲ τὸν ἀέρα. Αὐτὸ πὸν λέτε εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ τὸ κάνω». Ὁ ἱερέας τὴν κοίταξε στὰ μάτια γεμάτος ἠρεμία καὶ τίς εἶπε: «Νὰ λοιπὸν τί εἶναι τὸ κουτσομπολιό»!!!

Ἡ γυναίκα σάστισε. Κατάλαβε ὅτι ἂν καὶ μετανίωσε γι' αὐτὰ πὸν εἶπε, τὰ λόγια της ἀκόμα καὶ τώρα πληγώνουν ἀνθρώπους καὶ γίνονται αἰτία σκανδαλισμοῦ κι ἄλλων.

## Μ' Αὐτὰ καὶ μ' Αὐτὰ Ἐφτάσαμε στὴν «Ψευδοφάνεια»

*Ὀδυσσεὺς Ἐλύτης (+1996), ὁ Νομπελίστας ἐθνικὸς μας ποιητής.*



Δὲν μ' ἐνδιαφέρει ὁ ἐπίσημος ὄρος τῆς δουλοπρέπειας. Μ' ἐνδιαφέρει ἡ οὐσία. Κι ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ξέρω εἶναι ὅτι μ' αὐτὰ καὶ μ' αὐτὰ ἐφτάσαμε σὲ κάτι ποὺ θὰ μοῦ ἐπιτρέψετε νὰ ὀνομάσω «ψευδοφάνεια»...

Ἔχουμε, δηλαδή, τὴν τάση νὰ παρουσιαζόμαστε διαρκῶς διαφορετικοὶ

ἀπ' ὅ,τι πραγματικὰ εἴμαστε. καὶ δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀσφαλέστερος δρόμος πρὸς τὴν ἀποτυχία, εἴτε σὰν ἄτομο σταδιοδρομεῖς εἴτε σὰν σύνολο, ἀπὸ τὴν ἔλλειψη τῆς γνησιότητας· τὸ κακὸ πάει πολὺ μακριά.

Ὅλα τὰ διοικητικὰ μας συστήματα, οἱ κοινωνικοὶ μας θεσμοί, τὰ ἐκπαιδευτικὰ μας προγράμματα, ἀρχῆς γενομένης ἀπὸ τοὺς Βαυαροὺς, πάθθηκαν μὲ προχειρότατο τρόπο ἀπὸ ἔξω, καὶ κόπηκαν καὶ ράφτηκαν ὅπως-ὅπως, ἐπάνω σ' ἓνα σῶμα μὲ ἄλλες διαστάσεις καὶ ἄλλους ὄρους ἀναπνοῆς...

Καὶ δὲν πρόκειται βέβαια γιὰ «προγογοπληξία».

Τὰ λέω, ἄλλωστε, αὐτὰ ἐγὼ πού, σ' ἓναν τομέα ὅπως ὁ δικός μου, κήρυξα μὲ φανατισμὸ τὴν ἀνάγκη τῆς ἐπικοινωνίας μας μὲ τὸ διεθνὲς πνεῦμα, καὶ ποὺ σήμερα μὲ ἐμπιστοσύνη ἀποβλέπω στὴ διαμόρφωση ἑνὸς ἐνιαίου εὐρωπαϊκοῦ σχήματος, ὅπου νὰ ἔχει τὴ θέση τῆς ἡ Ἑλλάδα. Μὲ τὴ διαφορὰ ὅτι ὁ μηχανισμὸς τῆς ἀφομοιώσεως τῶν στοιχείων τῆς προόδου πρέπει νὰ λειτουργεῖ σωστά, καὶ νὰ βασιζέται σὲ μιὰ γερὴ καὶ φυσιολογικὰ ἀναπτυγμένη παιδεία.

Ἐνῶ σ' ἐμᾶς, ὄχι μόνον δὲν λειτουργεῖ σωστά, ἀλλὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει κἄν ὁ μηχανισμὸς αὐτὸς γιὰ νὰ λειτουργήσῃ!

Καὶ μὲ τὴ διαφορὰ ἀκόμη ὅτι, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ ἐλάχιστες ἐξαιρέσεις, ἡ ἡγετική μας τάξη, στὸ κεφάλαιο τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας, ἔχει μαῦρα μεσάνυχτα!

Κοιτάξτε μὲ προσοχὴ τὰ ἔντυπα ποὺ εκδίδει ἡ ἴδια, ἢ ποὺ προτιμᾷ νὰ διαβάξῃ, τὰ διαμερίσματα ὅπου κατοικεῖ, τὶς διασκεδάσεις ποὺ κάνει, τὴ στάση τῆς ἀπέναντι στὴ ζωὴ.

Οὔτε μιὰ σταγόνα γνησιότητας! Πῶς θέλετε, λοιπόν, ν' ἀναθρέψῃ σωστὰ τὴ νέα γενιά;

Ἀπὸ τὰ πρῶτα διαβάσματα ποὺ θὰ κάνει ἓνα παιδί ὡς τὰ διάφορα στοιχεῖα ποὺ θὰ συναντήσῃ στὸ καθημερινό του περιβάλλον, καὶ ποὺ θὰ διαμορφώσουν τὸ γοῦστο του, μιὰ συνεχῆς καὶ ἀδιάκοπη πλαστογραφία καὶ τίποτε ἄλλο!

Θὰ μοῦ πεῖτε: εἶσαι λογοτέχνης, καλαμαράς, καὶ βλέπεις τὰ πράγματα ἀπὸ τὴ μεριά ποὺ σὲ πονᾶνε. Ὅχι, καθόλου! καὶ νὰ μοῦ ἐπιτρέψετε νὰ ἐπιμείνω.

Ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα κακὰ ποὺ θὰ μπορούσα νὰ καταγγείλω—ἡ ἔλλειψη οὐσιαστικῆς ἀποκεντρώσεως καὶ αὐτοδιοικήσεως, ἡ ἔλλειψη προγραμματισμοῦ γιὰ τὴν πλουτοπαραγωγικὴ ἀνάπτυξη τῆς χώρας, ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ τρόπος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο ἀσκεῖται ἡ ἔξωτερικὴ μας πολιτικὴ—εἶναι ζητήματα βαθύτερης Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας!

Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄποψη ὅτι μόνον αὐτὴ μπορεῖ νὰ προικίσει ἓναν ἡγέτη μὲ τὴν ἀπαραίτητη εὐαισθησία ποὺ χρειάζεται γιὰ νὰ ἐνστερνιστεῖ, καὶ ἀντιστοιχῶς νὰ ἀποδώσῃ, τὸ ἦθος τοῦ λαοῦ. Γιατὶ αὐτὸς ὁ λαός, ποὺ τὴν ἐννοία του τὴν ἔχουμε παραμορφώσει σὲ σημεῖο νὰ μὴν τὴν ἀναγνωρίζουμε, αὐτὸς ἔχει φτιάξῃ ὅ,τι καλὸ ὑπάρχει—ἂν ὑπάρχει κάτι καλὸ σ' αὐτόν τὸν τόπο!

Καὶ αὐτὸς, στὶς ὥρες τοῦ κινδύνου, καὶ στὸ πείσμα τῆς συστηματικῆς ἠττοπαθείας τῶν ἀρχηγῶν του, αἵρεται, χάρη σ' ἓναν ἀόρατο, εὐλογημένο μηχανισμό, στὰ ὕψη ποὺ ἀπαιτεῖ τὸ θαῦμα!

Ὅσο, λοιπόν, καὶ ἂν εἶναι λυπηρό, πρέπει νὰ τὸ πῶ: ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς, γιὰ τὴν ὥρα τουλάχιστον, ἐπέτυχε ὡς γένος, ἀλλ' ἀπέτυχε ὡς κράτος!

Καὶ παρακαλῶ νύχτα μέρα τὸν Θεό, καὶ τὸ μέλλον, νὰ μὲ διαψεύσουν.

† † †

*Καὶ ἀναρωτιόμαστε—ποῦ νὰ ζοῦσε στὶς μέρες μας ὁ προφητικὸς, ἐθνικὸς μας ποιητὴς καὶ νὰ ἔβλεπε τὴν κατάντια τῆς σημερινῆς κρατικῆς, κοινωνικῆς, καὶ θρησκευτικῆς «ψευδοφάνειας»...*

**ΚΥΡΙΕ ΕΛΕΗΣΟΝ!**



Γέμισε ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη κοινωνία ἀπὸ ἀνασταυρωτὰς τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου! Καὶ τί νὰ εἰπῇ κανεὶς γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν ὁποίων σεῖεται ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη κοινωνία καὶ σκοτίζεται ὁ ἥλιος τῆς καλωσύνης, ὅπως σεῖσθηκε ἡ γῆ καὶ σκοτίσθηκε ὁ ἥλιος κατὰ τὴ σταύρωσι τοῦ Θεανθρώπου;

Γιὰ τοὺς ἀνασταυρωτὰς τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἓνα νὰ εἰποῦμε· ὅσοι δὲν ἔχουν διαστραφῇ ὅπως οἱ δαίμονες καὶ μποροῦν νὰ μετανοήσουν, ἄς μετανοήσουν, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἔχουν τοῦ Ἰούδα, τοῦ Καϊάφα, τοῦ Πιλάτου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων σταυρωτῶν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ τὸ τέλος καὶ τὴν ἄνευ τέλους δυστυχία, ἀλλὰ νὰ τύχουν ἐλέους καὶ σωτηρίας ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο.

**Νικολάος Ἰω. Σωτηρόπουλος (+2014)**

## THE FINAL GOAL OF MAN: A LIVING UNITY WITH GOD

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "The Path to Salvation, A Concise Outline of Christian Asceticism," translated by Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose), published by the Holy Monastery of St. Paisius, Arizona (2016), pp. 181-190.

Let us recall that the person has just turned from darkness to light, from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God; he just entered a new path, on which he has not yet made a single step. But he burns with zeal to do everything necessary in order to establish himself in the work he has begun and not to give in again to his former tyrants, who separated him from God and the Saviour, dragging him to destruction.

We might ask: Where is he to go, and what should he do in order to arrive where he should, and to arrive surely, directly, quickly and successfully? The goal towards which the convert should direct all his attention and labors is the final goal of man and the economy of salvation, namely: pleasing God, a living unity with God, becoming worthy of His kingdom. The searching, zealous spirit will only be at peace when he attains God, tastes Him and is filled. Therefore the first law for him is: *Seek ye the Lord, and be strengthened; seek ye His face at all times.* (Pss 104:4). The blessedness of this is incomprehensible to man. He himself could not even have conceived of such a height. But when it pleased God to give him this dignity, it was audacious for man to refuse it through his unbelief, inattentiveness, and neglect of it in his thoughts, even during his labors. *I will dwell in them* (2 Cor 6:16), says God, and this is all three Persons of the Most-Holy Trinity. The Lord says of God the Father and of Himself: *We will come unto him,* (to him who believes in Him and loves Him) *and make our abode with him.* (Jn 14:23). And about Himself Alone: *I will come in to him, and will sup with him.* (Apoc 3:20); and even more clearly: *I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you.* (Jn 14:20). The Apostle says about the Holy Spirit: *The Spirit of God dwelleth in you* (1 Cor. 3:16), or: *that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.* (Gal 3:14).

We should note that God's indwelling is not merely mental, as sometimes happens during divine contemplation, but it is a living, enlivening thing, to which contemplation should only be considered a means. Mental and heartfelt longing for God, that has come by God's good will, prepares a person to truly receive God. It is a kind of unity in which, without eradicating human strength and personality, God manifests Himself as one that *worketh* in him *both to will and to do* (Phil 2:13); and the person, according to the Apostle, does not live but *Christ lives in him.* (Gal. 2:20). This is not only the person's goal, but also the goal of God Himself. All is created in God and endures in God. Free creatures are given over to their own volition, but not finally and not forever, so that they would give themselves to God All-powerful, not making any particular kingdom of themselves independent of God's kingdom.

It may seem strange that communion with God must be attained when it is already present, or is given through the Sacrament of Baptism or Confession, for it is said: *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27); or: *For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* (Col. 3:3). Indeed, according to a simple understanding God is everywhere: *That they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us* (Acts 17:27), and He is ready to abide in anyone who is ready to receive Him. Only lack of desire, coarseness and sinfulness keep us from Him. Now that the penitent has renounced everything and given himself to God, what hinders God from dwelling in him?

### I. Various Aspects of Communion with God

To clear up such a perplexity, we must discriminate between the various aspects of communion with God. Communion begins at the moment of awakening. Man discovers it through searching and longing for God, and God reveals it through His good will, assistance, and protection. But God is still outside of man and man is outside of God, not commingling and not freely mutually accepted. In the Sacrament of Baptism or Confession the Lord enters a man by His grace, is in live communion with him, and allows him to taste all the sweetness of Divinity, so abundantly and perceptibly, as though it were essentially culminated in him. But then He again hides this manifestation of His communion, only renewing it from time to time—and at that only lightly, as if in a reflection and not in His original state. He leaves man in ignorance of Himself and His dwelling in man until the man has reached a specific level of maturity or education, according to God's wise guidance. After this, the Lord perceptibly manifests His dwelling in the man's spirit, which has by then become a temple of the Tri-hypostatic Divinity filling him.

Thus, there are three forms of communion with God: One is mental, which happens during the period of conversion; and the other two are actual, but one of them is hidden, invisible to others and unknown to us ourselves, while the other is obvious to us and to others.

The first form of communion, the most understandable and common, does not cease during the second or even third stages, because spiritual life is mental life. However, in these stages it differs characteristically from its first quality, which is something impossible to explain in words. All spiritual life consists in the movement from mental communion with God to actual, live, perceptible and manifest communion.

### II. How Grace Settles In the Repentant Soul

In looking at a person who has repented, we are looking at a person who has actually entered into communion with God, but this communion is still hidden, secret, unmanifest. His goal is to attain communion that is complete, tangible, and perceptible. We must precisely determine all of this for ourselves and be assured, because all the penitent's labor for salvation should be built upon this foundation, namely: that

in the Sacrament of Confession (or Baptism) grace descends perceptibly to the spirit but then hides itself from the awareness, although it does not in fact go away. It remains imperceptible until the heart is purified, at which time it dwells visibly and finally. It is obvious that our only instructors in this matter can be the Holy Fathers. None of them expresses it so well as St. Diadochos, Bishop of Photiki, and St. Makarios of Egypt. We present their witness to our suppositions.

*Grace settles in a person and stays with him from the moment he receives the Mysteries*

“From the instant we are baptized,” says St. Diadochos, “grace is hidden in the depths of the intellect.” Also: “For when through Holy Baptism divine grace in its infinite love permeates the lineaments of God’s image—thereby renewing in the soul the capacity for attaining the divine likeness—what place is there for the devil?” (St. Diadochos of Photiki, *Philokalia*, vol. i, nos. 77-78, p. 279-280). St. Makarios says: “Grace is constantly present, and is rooted in us, and worked into us like leaven, from our earliest years, until the thing thus present becomes fixed in a man like a natural endowment, as if it were one substance with him.” (St. Makarios the Great, Homily 8:2).

*When grace first settles in a person through a Sacrament it vouchsafes that person a complete taste of the blessedness of communion with God*

“If we fervently desire holiness,” says St. Diadochos, “the Holy Spirit at the outset gives the soul a full and conscious taste of God’s sweetness, so that the intellect will know exactly of what the final reward of the spiritual life consists.” (St. Diadochos of Photiki, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, no. 90, p. 289). In addition: “At the start of the spiritual way, the soul usually has the conscious experience of being illumined with its own light through the action of grace.” (St. Diadochos of Photiki, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, no. 90, p. 276). This most perceptible illumination of grace is at first expressed by the white clothing that the newly baptized wear for seven days. That this is not just a formality is seen from the examples of the holy converts, for some were visibly clothed in light, upon others a dove descended, and the faces of others became bright. In general all who have truly come close to the Lord have felt a certain leaping of spirit, similar to the leaping of the Forerunner of the Lord in the womb of Elizabeth when the Mother of God approached her carrying the Lord within her. In the Lives of Sts. Symeon and John is written that they saw a light around a brother who was baptized and received the monastic habit—and it lasted seven days. Feeling a particular action of God upon receiving the monastic habit, they sought to preserve it forever, and immediately departed to a solitary place more suitable for that form of asceticism.

*Grace hides itself from the one who is laboring for his salvation*

Then grace hides itself from the one who is laboring for his salvation, and although it dwells and works in him, it does so unnoticeably to him, and he is so unaware of it that he often

considers himself to be abandoned by God and perishing, which causes him to fall into constrictions, lamentations and even light depression. Thus St. Diadochos continues, from the foregoing citation: “Incidentally, it hides the treasure of this life-creating gift for a long time, so that we would count ourselves as nothing though we fulfill every virtue, for we have not yet made holy love habitual in ourselves...” “But as we continue our ascetic struggles, it produces in the theologizing soul its secret activity in a manner unknown by the soul, so that it might incline us who have been called, at the first opportunity, from the unknown to the known, to enter the way of divine visions; and secondly, so that amidst our ascetic labors we might preserve our knowledge from vainglory.” (St. Diadochos of Photiki, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, no. 69, p. 276).

In another place he explains how grace works in general: “Grace at first conceals its presence, in those who have been baptized, waiting to see which way the soul inclines; but when the whole man has turned towards the Lord it then reveals to the heart its presence there with a feeling which words cannot express, once again waiting to see which way the soul inclines. At the same time, however, it allows the arrows of the devil to wound the soul at the most inward point of its sensitivity, so as to make the soul search out God with warmer resolve and more humble disposition...” “And I am speaking here of the struggle that takes place when God recedes in order to educate us—then grace conceals itself a little, as I have said, but nevertheless supports the soul in a hidden way, so that in the eyes of its enemies the victory appears to be due to the soul alone. This brings great sadness, humility and even some measure of despair to the soul.” (St. Diadochos of Photiki, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, nos. 85-87; pp. 285-287).

St. Makarios of Egypt also says: “God’s grace in man (which is already present, already granted), and the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is vouchsafed to a faithful soul, proceeds with much contention, with much endurance and long suffering, and temptations and trials.” (St. Makarios the Great, Homily 9:7). This refers of course not to the first time grace is received, but its complete indwelling and activity, as we can see from his own words, where he says that “The spiritual influence of God’s grace within the soul works with great patience, wisdom, and mysterious management of the mind, while the man for long times and seasons contends in much endurance; and then the work of grace is proved to be perfect in him.” (St. Makarios the Great, Homily 9:1). He explains this using the examples of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and David, who, having received great promises, were made to suffer a long time in unknowing until they finally saw the fulfillment of the promise. (St. Makarios the Great, Homily 9:2-6.).

It is necessary to note that this hiddenness and imperceptibility is not all-encompassing, but is sometimes mixed with consolations, although these consolations are something entirely different from those which occur with the indwelling of the Spirit.

*Finally, God dwells in man in a special manner*

*Finally, when this period of hidden communion with God and His mysterious activity in the soul is over* (the duration of this period not being in man's hands but in the guiding wisdom of man-saving grace), *God dwells in man in a special manner.* He visibly fills him, unites Himself to him and communes with him. This is the goal man strives to achieve through all his ascetic struggles and labors, all the economy of salvation from God Himself, and all that happens to each person in the present life from birth to the grave. St. Makarios writes that the work of grace after long trials finally shows itself fully, and the soul acquires full sonship of the Spirit. God Himself proves the heart, and man is made worthy to be of one spirit with the Lord. According to St. Diadochos, "If a man, while still alive, can undergo death through his labors, then in his entirety he becomes the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit." (St. Diadochos of Photiki, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, no. 82, p. 284). "Grace illumines his whole being with a deeper awareness, warming him with great love of God." (St. Diadochos of Photiki, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, no. 85, p. 2.85). This action reveals itself or is accompanied by different manifestations with different people.

### III. Two Ways of Communing with God

These two ways of actually communing with God were beautifully described by the wise Sirach, speaking of wisdom, which is the very grace of God which saves us: *For at the first she will walk with him by crooked ways, and bring fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline, until she may trust his soul, and try him by her laws. Then will she return the straight way unto him, and comfort him, and show him her secrets.* (Eccl 4:17-19).

*For at first she will walk with him by crooked ways*—that is, austere, strictly, unmercifully, with a seeming lack of love; *and bring fear and dread upon him*, the fear of God's abandonment and the ever-imminent threat of attack from vicious enemies. According to St. Diadochos, grace acts like a mother who hides from her children so that from fear they would begin to cry and seek her, especially when they see strange faces before them (St. Diadochos of Photiki, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, no. 86, p. 286);

*and torment him with her discipline*—it will keep him a long time in this period of hidden and severe instruction. According to St. Makarios, grace in many and various ways, as it wills and corresponds to the person's needs, orders everything for him, keeps him in many temptations and mysterious trials of the mind (St. Makarios the Great, Homily 8:2), and so on; *until she may trust his soul, and try him by her laws*—that is, grace leads him to the point where he can be relied upon completely as one tried and true. St. Makarios says that when after many temptations the will has come to please the Holy Spirit, and over a long period of time has shown itself to be patient and unwavering in this; when the soul does not offend the Spirit in any way, but is cooperative with grace and all the commandments (St. Makarios the Great, Homily 9:1), then

*will she return the straight way unto him*—that is, openly, face-to-face appear to him as if after a separation. Then, according to St. Makarios, "the work of grace is proved to be perfect in him—he acquires full sonship" (St. Makarios the Great, Homily 9:1); or according to St. Diadochos, grace illumines his whole existence with some kind of deep feeling, and he becomes entirely the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit—the light of God's face (Ps. 4:7). Our Lord and God comes and makes His abode with him (Jn 14:23); and comforts him.

*And your heart shall rejoice, says the Lord, and your joy no man taketh from you.* (Jn 16:22). The kingdom of God is *joy in the Holy Spirit.* (Rom 14:17). The light that shines in man, says St. Makarios, so penetrates all the inward parts of a man, that he, immersed in this sweet and pleasant feeling, is totally outside himself because of the super-abundance of love and the hidden mysteries that he himself now sees. St. Diadochos says that the soul then flames and yearns with an indescribable kind of joy and love to leave the body and depart to the Lord, and as if to forget this temporary life. (St. Diadochos of Photiki, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, no. 13, p. 256).

*And show him her secrets*—the secrets of divine wisdom, the Trinity worthy of worship, the economy of salvation, the acquisition of salvation, the secret of sin and virtue, Providence for creatures rational and material and, in general, the whole divine order of things, as described in great detail by St. Isaac the Syrian in his epistle to St. Symeon. "When the intellect is renewed and the heart is sanctified... His intellect perceives the spiritual knowledge of created things, and the divine vision of the mysteries of the Holy Trinity together with the mysteries of the worshipful economy on our behalf shines forth in him; then he becomes one through the completeness of the knowledge of the hope of future things ... For if the intellect, which beholds hidden spiritual mysteries, is in its natural state of health, it distinctly beholds the glory of Christ. It does not question or receive instruction, but more than in the freedom of the will it delights in the sweetness of the mysteries of the new world ... " (The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian, Appendix B, Part II, p. 437). Such perfect knowledge comes with the receiving of the Spirit, which leads our spirit into that world, or realm of contemplation. The Holy Spirit takes the covering away from the soul, transports his soul to the future age and shows it everything wondrous. (St. Makarios the Great, Homily on "Exultation of the Mind," sec. 13, On Freedom, 24, 20 and 21, conv. 17, sec. 4).

Thus, it is now clear that the grace that comes to the convert through the Sacraments unites with him and gives him at first a taste of all the sweetness of life in God, and then hides its presence from him, leaving him to act on his own in labors, sweat, perplexities and even falls; finally, after this period of trial is over; it abides in him obviously, actively, powerfully, and perceptibly.

## A GOOD DISBELIEF [JN 20:19-29]

*By the late Metropolitan Avgoustinos N. Kantiotis (+2010) from his book "Follow Me," published by the Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Inc., Belmont, Massachusetts (1989), pp. 269-276.*

*Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"*

[Jn 20:28]

† † †

**Illusionism**

If there is one event in evangelical history at which disbelief more tempestuously hurls its fires, it is the Lord's Resurrection. What haven't disbelievers said, and what haven't they written against the Resurrected Lord? "The Resurrection was not an actual event," they said. "The Resurrection is the product of excited minds and the gullible believed it to be real."

But who, I ask, are the imaginative and who are the gullible? The disciples? The myrrh-bearing women? When Mary Magdalene went to the tomb very early that morning, she had no thought of a Resurrection. Her desire was to anoint Jesus' Body. Her only concern was who would remove the heavy stone which blocked the door of the tomb. When to her surprise she found it open and the tomb empty, she might have suspected Jesus' Resurrection as a likely reason for this phenomenon; however, Mary Magdalene had no thought of the Resurrection; instead, her thoughts were of one who, gazing into the empty tomb of an ordinary mortal, suspected the body had been stolen and began to weep.

When a stranger appeared and asked why she was weeping, the thought never entered her head that the stranger might be Jesus; she mistook Him for the gardener. Where, then, do you see an overactive imagination in Mary Magdalene? She was in the midst of events which must have evoked thoughts of the Lord's Resurrection, but she did not abandon her lowly, pessimistic suspicion that Jesus' Body had been stolen. Nor did the disciples believe the joyful message of the Resurrection when it was delivered to them. They rejected the myrrh-bearers' story as make-believe—an old wives' tale, *an idle tale* (Lk 24:11). Two of them, Peter and John, decided to go to the grave and look carefully inside to make sure it was empty. The Resurrected Lord appeared to the disciples, and they thought He was a ghost. He invited them to touch His hands and feet, and before their eyes He ate roasted fish and a honeycomb, so that they would believe.

Who, then, was overly imaginative or gullible among the disciples?

### Thomas Was Not There

It is with the case of Thomas that the opinion about overactive imaginations and gullibility is crushed. As the Evangelist John states, Thomas was not there when the Lord first appeared to the disciples. Where he was we do not know.

Thomas was a melancholy character who more than anyone had sunk into despair because of his Teacher's tragic end. In vain he had tried to dissuade the Teacher from His martyrdom, and now it appeared as if everything was ruined. He had no desire to speak to anyone. As happens with this personality type, Thomas went into seclusion; he withdrew into himself and became painfully nostalgic of the days he had spent with the Teacher.

Was it only his depression that caused him to be absent on that unforgettable day, that day after the Sabbath when the Resurrected Lord appeared to the disciples? We think not. Believing that God's Providence is in the details of everyone's life, much more in those of the faithful, and to an even greater degree in those of the Apostles, we think that Thomas' absence on that evening was not by chance; it was in God's plan. It served a higher purpose. As an ancient church writer stated, *This was also a work of divine economy, that the absence of the disciple became a cause of full assurance and certainty. For if Thomas were present, he would not have doubted; and if he had not doubted, he would not have curiously sought; and if he had not sought, he would not have touched; and if he had not touched, he would not have proclaimed Him Lord and God; and if he had not called Christ Lord and God, we would not have been taught to hymn Him so.* (Migne 63:927).

### Thomas' Incredulity

Thomas was not present, but when he met with the disciples, they told him all the details of the Lord's appearance. "Thomas, we have seen the Lord. We heard His sweet voice which calmed our hearts, gave us tranquility, calmness, and His inexpressible peace. We saw the marks which the nails and lance left on His Body. We dared to go near and touch them, and we were convinced that He was the Lord. We fell down and worshiped Him. We received a puff of wind from His mouth, a spiritual wind that bears every grace. We received authority to forgive sins. We poor men were enriched that evening with spiritual riches ineffable! Thomas, *We have seen the Lord!*" (Jn 20:25).

After this testimony, what would you expect? Do you think Thomas would have believed? Because the witnesses were not strangers to Thomas, but his fellow disciples whom he had come to know well over three years, he had no reason to doubt their sincerity. The testimony of ten witnesses worthy of belief should have become his own.

Alas, if we had to be present for every event that occurred on earth to verify it personally, history would cease to be. Our knowledge would be confined, limited only to those things we happened to witness personally. We see and hear through the eyes and ears of others, everyone worthy of credence.

Thomas, were any others more worthy of credence than your fellow disciples? Why did you doubt their words? Why



did you scourge their hearts? But Thomas was incredulous; he did not believe. He believed only his own senses and did not accept any other proofs. Was he not heard to say, *Unless I see... I will not believe?* (Jn 20:25).

How saddened the ten must have been at Thomas' response. "Ten people assured him and he will not believe us! What kind of man is this? The word of God says that *by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.* (Deut 19:15). And we, who are many more, you do not judge worthy of credit!" This is perhaps what the other disciples thought and said, being indignant at Thomas' incredulity.

### The Lord's Condescension

And the Lord? In His infinite condescension and love He didn't let Thomas drown in the sea of doubt and disbelief. The following Lord's Day He appeared again in the same manner. Thomas was also present this time. After His blessing, *Peace to you!* the Lord turned to Thomas and said, *Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.* (Jn 20:27). Thomas heard the Lord's invitation in amazement, for now he had proof not only that the Lord had risen and lived, but that He knew the arguments he put forth with the other disciples raising as dogma his "Unless I see, I will not believe."

What could Thomas say here? "Had the Lord heard me when I spoke so insolently about His Resurrection? Was He invisibly present?" Did this revelation serve to convince Thomas that the risen Lord was before him? After this revelation did Thomas dare touch Him? The Gospel does not say whether he touched Him or not, and the opinions of interpreters are divided. We tend to agree with the opinion that Thomas did not touch Him. The vision of the Lord, as well as the words heard from His mouth, made every trace of doubt vanish from Thomas' heart, and he considered touching Him entirely fatuous. He therefore immediately cried out and said, *My Lord and my God!* (Jn 20:28).

The same thing happens to those who doubt Christ enough to attempt to explain Christianity with the aim of defining Christ's Person and work down to the last detail—that is, to touch Him. But as soon as they begin their investigation, because their intentions are good, such light shines up from within them that they are wrapped in wonder and belief, leaving further interpretation to the wind, and they cry out like Thomas, *My Lord and my God!*

### Gullibility and Incredulity

Thomas finally believed, but belief attained after much searching and roaming is inferior. Superior faith, the best faith, does not busy itself with details or try to balance everything, but eagerly opens the ears of the soul, hears God's word, and places Him above the senses and precarious reasonings. Its tongue moves in praise and glorification, and its hands stretch out to receive His priceless gifts. It is this faith the Lord commends, saying, *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.* (Jn 20:29).

This faith, abiding in simple, humble souls, is scorned and mocked by those of proud spirit. This faith, they tell you, is for little children and old ladies. We need proof to believe. How curious! They need proof of the religion of Jesus Christ, yet like mindless fish they gulp down other things offered them without examination, research, or proof, even if the hook of death be hidden beneath the alluring bait. They unreservedly accept theories and hypotheses, and



senseless false philosophies and sciences. They blindly follow arrogant political leaders of unproven moral status or intellectual prowess. They anxiously listen to the prophecies of "sages," astrologers, and mediums as though they were commandments. They entrust their persons and possessions to individuals and anonymous societies and organizations. They believe everyone and everything, and so they tra-

verse the land, sail the oceans, and fly into space. When they are sick, they take medicines and submit to painful operations, believing in humanity.

In Him alone they do not believe. Gullible in everything, credulous of the devil, incredulous toward the Christ. Like Thomas, they want to touch everything connected with the Lord, to submit it to research, to "control" it. The Lord condescends; the Highest submits to investigation. How is it that they do not hear His bitter complaint against those who constantly seek a sign to believe, yet when signs are given, they, hard-necked and unaffected, will not believe? How is it that the Lord does not say to them again, *O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?* (Mt 17:17).

### Continuous Investigation

In this category of people, can we not include disbelievers, those who deny the Lord's Resurrection? They say they want proof, yet we give them the greatest proof—the testimony of Thomas, one of the most incredulous of people, who said,

*Unless I see . . . I will not believe.* Because he was a sincere person, however, he believed from the depths of his heart and cried out in a loud voice, *My Lord and my God!* which for many like Thomas became an aid to belief. For this reason Thomas' disbelief ended exquisitely in a loud declaration of the Lord's Resurrection. The Fathers of the Church call this "a good disbelief." The hymnist sings, *O good disbelief of Thomas! It led faithful hearts to recognize.*

Beloved, may your own doubt and disbelief culminate in faith. You will become a staff of faith for others, but for the coldly corrupt—those who close their ears to the word of truth and have the attitude of "try as you might, you can't convince me"—no proof will ever lead them from the labyrinth of their incredulity. If thousands of Thomases were to appear and give testimony, repeating that bright declaration, *My Lord and my God*, the corrupt would not believe. For this reason, an illiterate shepherd who goes to church on Resurrection eve, hears *Christ Is Risen*, breathes the pure air of faith, and rejoices is far superior to the philosopher who is still at home studying, examining, and investigating the Gospel texts without ever attaining the faith that simple, humble people have. It is for this reason the Lord said, *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.* (Jn 20:29).



I know that a physiologically healthy young person cannot easily attain a spiritual state where *there is neither male nor female* (Gal 3:28). This is why the Spiritual Fathers recommend that young men and women—no matter how spiritual they may be—should not spend time together; [because]—at their age—problems will naturally arise, and then temptation will step in and take advantage of their youth.

It is better for a young man or a young woman to bear this heavy cross, and risk being considered a fool by the opposite sex for his or her spiritual prudence and innocence. This heavy cross hides all the power and wisdom of God, making the young man stronger than Sampson and wiser than Solomon. Better, then, that he walk down the street praying, rather than looking left and right, even if relatives may misunderstand him and think that he snubbed them by not speaking to them. Otherwise, if he walks looking around with curiosity, he may get in trouble; or get misunderstood by lay-people who always harbor suspicious thoughts.

It is a thousand times better to leave Church right away after Liturgy, like a lone animal, and keep his spiritual good sense and whatever he learned intact, rather than stay around and stare at fancy furs or ties, and become spiritually agitated as the enemy starts scratching his heart.

**St. Paisios the Athonite**

## ADVICE TO HUSBANDS...

**YOU, THE MAN THAT HEARS ST. PAUL, ADVISING THE WOMAN TO SUBORDINATE HER WILL TO HER HUSBAND, YOU PRAISE AND ADMIRE HIM. LISTEN, HOWEVER, WHAT ELSE HE SAYS AFTER THESE ADMONITIONS. LISTEN TO WHAT HE ASKS OF YOU!...**

*By Iliadis Christodoulos, from the web pages of "Agioireitika," translated from Greek by the staff of "Orthodox Heritage."*

### St. John Chrysostom's Words

**M**an is the head and the woman is the body, as evidenced through this timeless apostolic reasoning: *For the husband is the head* (i.e., the leader) *of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.* (Eph 5:23-24).

You, the man that hears St. Paul, advising the woman to subordinate her will to her husband, you praise and admire him. Listen, however, what he says right after this first advice. Listen carefully to what he asks of you: *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for It.* (Eph 5:25). You noted previously the demand for excessive and absolute obedience. Now observe the Holy Apostle's demand for absolute love! Therefore, you wish and desire your wife to be obedient to you and your wishes, just as the Church obeys Christ. Then you ought, at all times, to care for her just as Christ cares for the Church. In addition, should it become necessary that you sacrifice your life for her, stand ready to be broken up in a thousand pieces and endure everything that may be necessary for her; never refuse to do so. Be advised that even with such a sacrifice, you still have not endured anything equitable to what Christ sacrificed for the Church; your sacrifice and suffering would be on behalf of the person with whom you have been willingly united—Christ, on the other hand, suffered on behalf of a people that abhorred and despised Him.

So, then, Christ, with neither threats, nor swearing, but with humility, love and affection, with care and immense sacrifice, He succeeded in inspiring docility to the people who had so saddened Him; likewise, you as well must treat your wife equitably. If she displays lack of care or interest in you, if she confronts you with pride, indifference or even contempt, you must respond with love and kindness, never with rage and threats. Rage and threats may be effective towards your servants, albeit that even is doubtful for the long-term—for the servant shall become despondent and eventually depart from your service. Your life's partner, the mother of your children, the basis of any real joy in your family, must never be treated with any type of threats, screaming, indignation or indifference; instead, love and Christ-like mannerisms ought to characterize your behaviors, attitude and thoughts.

What kind of married life would it be when the wife is terrified and trembles in front of her husband? Furthermore, what possible family warmth and true peace can a husband possibly enjoy when sharing his life with a wife whom he treats in a slave-like manner? Moreover, if you should suffer something on her behalf, never blame it on her, even if it was the result of her possible carelessness. For Christ behaved in the same exemplary manner towards the Church: *And gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it.* (Eph 5:25-26). Thus, the Church (its people) was filthy, had defects, was ugly and despicable.

It is for these reasons that you must not seek of your wife what is not hers. You see that everything the Church became, She received it from our Lord. He alone turned Her into Her glorious and brilliant self. Never, ever must you feel any type of aversion towards your wife because she might not be as beautiful as you might want her to be. Hear what the Bible says:

*The bee is little among such as fly; but her fruit is the chief of sweet things.* (Sir 11:3). Your wife is God's creation and any type of disdain or disgust you exemplify towards her, you offend not her, but the Creator Himself! Which one of her possessions is her own? Absolutely none—God has given her everything. Be advised that even the most beautiful woman is not to be admired or praised, for admiration towards one woman and contempt towards another one exemplifies the presence of a debauched and lecherous man. Seek beauty of the soul and imitate the Bridegroom of the Church. Physical beauty, apart from being full of arrogance, causes jealousy, and at times even baseless suspicions. Does a wife's physical beauty, though, not grant the husband pleasure? For a while yes, for a month or two, a year at most; never any longer than that. Why this short? Because the continuation of its presence becomes a daily habit and as such no longer impresses your senses, albeit physical beauty retains its arrogance. This, however, is never the case for a woman who possesses internal rather than external beauty. In such a case, the love and continued pleasure of the husband remains from the beginning to the end unabated, because such love and pleasure arise from the beauty of her soul and not of her body.

When God created the stars, the angels were full of astonishment. Likewise, you equally observe and admire God's creation, but never as much as when you first saw it all. That is the result of your human habitual nature; it reduces sur-

prise, and in turn admiration and attraction. Now think how much more this is the case as you daily live with your wife. If physical beauty is all that your attraction is based upon, then God forbid she gets ill—all admiration and attraction shall be lost at once. That is why we must seek in our wife kindness, humility, openness and honesty. These are the traits of spiritual beauty. We must never seek or ask for physical beauty. Surely, you must be fully aware of the countless cases whereby men wed exclusively beautiful wives, only to see their lives become miserable and often destroyed. And others, those who pursued spiritual rather than physical beauty, all of them experience long and blissful married lives.

Neither should you ever seek a wealthy wife. Let no one be deceived that he shall become rich through marriage. Such enrichment is vile and despicable. Moreover, as the Holy Apostle says, *they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.* (1 Tim 6:9). Seek virtues of your prospective wife, never money and wealth. Doing otherwise would mean to disregard the important and instead seek the trivial.

Unfortunately, however, we all choose to behave in ways that do not follow such spiritual logic. Thus, even when God blesses us with a child, we are less concerned with whether he will grow up to be a good man and instead

tirelessly aim to secure him wealth and other worldly "virtues." Our focus remains on wealth and not on spiritual health. This further extends to our vocation/profession, whereby again, we seek the acquisition of money and positions rather than focusing upon the honest exercise of our profession.

All that we do, all that we think, is for money—the love of money has us conquered and as such, we are always self-guided towards disaster and spiritual destruction...



It is by faith that all things, both human and spiritual are sustained. For without faith neither does the farmer cut his furrow, nor does the merchant commit his life to the raging waves of the sea on a small piece of wood, nor are marriages contracted, nor any other step in life taken.

St. John Damascene



## CHRIST'S PRAYER IN THE GARDEN

By Saint John (Maximovitch).



Having celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples and given them His precepts, the Lord *walked with them to the Mount of Olives* (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26; Lk 22:39). On the way, He continued with His final instructions. Then He turned to the Heavenly Father with a prayer for His disciples and for those who would come to believe in

Him through their word. (Jn 17).

Crossing the brook Cedron, the Lord and His disciples entered *the garden of Gethsemane* where they frequently used to gather (Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32; Jn 18:1-2). Then He left His disciples, asking them to sit there while He went off to pray. Accompanied only by Peter, John and James, He went a little further. He needed to be alone, but knowing all that should come to pass, He began feeling sorrowful, sad and heavy, and He said to those with Him, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with Me.* (Mt 26:38). And, having gone a little further, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed.

Twice the Lord interrupted His prayer and walked up to Peter and the sons of Zebedee. Alas! They were still there, but they were overcome by sleep. In vain did their divine Teacher persuade them to watch and pray, so as not to enter into temptation: *The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak!* (Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38). The disciples fell asleep again as soon as the Saviour left them to continue His prayer, which ended only when the hour drew near that the Son of Man was to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. The agony of Jesus' prayer reached its climax, and His sweat was, as it were, *great drops of blood* falling down to the ground. (Lk 22:44).

What was Jesus praying about so fervently? What was He entreating the Heavenly Father, thrice falling with His face to the ground? *Abba, my Father, all things are possible to Thee. Oh, if Thou wouldst deign to take this cup away from Me! If possible let this cup pass by Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt, not My will but Thine be done. My Father, if this cup cannot bypass me, so that I will not have to drink of it, Thy will be done.*

The Lord Jesus Christ was the God-Man. Both the Divine and the human nature, undergoing neither change nor fusion, *without confusion, without division* (dogma of the Council of Chalcedon) united in Him in one Person.

In conformity to the two natures, the Lord also had two wills. As God, Jesus Christ was of one essence with God the Father and of one will with Him and the Holy Spirit. However, being perfect man, with a body and soul, the Lord also had human feelings and will. His human will was totally submitted to the Divine will.

The Lord submitted His human will to that of God and sought only to do *the will of His Heavenly Father.* (Jn 5:30); His spiritual food was to do *the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work.* (Jn 4:34). And He had to accomplish a task equal to none, a task which was to astonish even insensible, inanimate nature. He was to redeem mankind from sin and death, and to reestablish man's union with God. The sinless Saviour was to lift upon Himself all of mankind's sin, so that He, Who had no sins of His own, would feel the burden of the sins of all mankind and would experience such sorrow over it, as can only perfect sanctity, which clearly senses even the slightest deviation from the commandments and will of God. In His holy and sinless humanity, He in Whom Divinity and humanity were hypostatically united was to experience all the horror of man's separation from his Creator, of sinful humanity's alienation from God, the source of sanctity and light. At this moment, the depth of mankind's fall was to become exposed.

The man who refused to obey God in Paradise but heeded the devil who defamed Him, was now about to rise against his Divine Saviour, to slander Him, and, having declared Him unworthy of life on earth, to hang Him on a tree between the earth and the sky, thus bringing Him under the curse of the God-given law. (Deut 21:22-23). The sinless Holy One, rejected by the sinful world for which and from which He suffered, was to forgive mankind this evil deed and to raise His prayer to the Heavenly Father, imploring the Divine Truth to likewise forgive mankind, which had been blinded by the devil, for this rejection of their Creator and Saviour. Such a holy prayer could not remain unheard, such power of love could not but unite the source of love, God, with those who, at least now, would become aware of this love and, having understood how far their ways were from the ways of God, would now resolve to return to God the Father through the incarnate Creator.

Now came the hour when all this was to come to pass. In a few hours, the Son of Man, lifted up on the Cross, would draw everyone to Himself through His self-sacrifice. Compelled by His love, sinful human hearts would not be able to resist Him. The love of the God-Man would break the stone within men's hearts. They would become aware of their impurity and darkness, of their insignificance. Only stubborn God-haters would not wish to be illumined by the light of Divine greatness and mercy. But all those who did not turn away from the Divine call, illumined by the light of the God-Man's love, would become aware of their separa-

tion from the loving Creator and would crave to be united with Him. The greatest mystery would take place: mankind would return to their Creator, and the merciful Lord would joyfully receive those who leave the slandering devil and hasten to the One in Whose image they were created. The wall of enmity has been destroyed. **Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace, have kissed each other - righteousness looks down from Heaven, for Truth incarnate shines forth from the Cross on earth.** The hour had come when all this was to happen.

The world was as yet unaware of the greatness of the coming day. But before the eyes of the God-Man all that should come to pass was revealed. He was sacrificing Himself voluntarily for the salvation of the human race. And now He has come for the last time to pray alone to His Heavenly Father. He will offer here the sacrifice that will save mankind—He will voluntarily give Himself to suffering and commit Himself to the power of darkness.

However, this sacrifice will bring no salvation if He is to experience only His personal suffering. He has to be tormented by the painful wounds of sin which afflict mankind. The heart of the God-Man fills with inexpressible grief. All human sins, beginning with Adam's transgression and finishing with those to be



committed at the sound of the last trumpet, all the great and small sins of all people appear before His mental eyes. As God, He always had them before Him, *all things are manifest before Him*, but now His human nature, too, experiences all their burden and abomination. The holy, sinless soul fills with horror. His suffering surpasses that of the sinners themselves, whose hardened hearts are not aware to what extent sin defiles a man and alienates him from the Creator. His sufferings are more acute because He sees this hardening of hearts. He sees that people have blinded their eyes so as not to see, and that they do not want to hear with their ears and to *turn to Him to be healed*. (Isa 6:10). He sees that even now the whole world is turning away from God, Who has come to it in the form of a man. *The hour has cometh* (Jn 16:32) when even those would disperse who only recently assured Him of their readiness to die for Him. The God-Man will hang on the Cross, alone, ridiculed by the people who come to see this spectacle. Only a few souls would remain faithful to Him, but even they, with their silent grief and helplessness, will only increase

the suffering of the loving heart of the Virgin's Son. No help from anywhere...

True, even in these moments He is not alone because His *Father is always with Him*. (Jn 8:29; 10:30). But in order to feel the full weight of the consequences of sin, **the Son of God voluntarily allows His human nature to feel the horror of estrangement from God** as well. This awful moment will be unbearable for the holy and sinless One. A loud cry will escape Him: *My God my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* (Mt 27:46). Foreseeing this hour, the holy soul is filled with horror and indignation.

Earlier, when certain Greeks came to see Jesus, He allowed His human nature to experience the approach of this dreadful hour. When these *sheep from another fold* arrived, the God-Man knew that the hour was near when people would come to see Him raised up on the Cross. His human nature shuddered, His soul was filled with indignation. But Jesus

knew that without His sufferings the salvation of men was impossible, without them His life's work on earth would be as fruitless as a grain of wheat that had been lying on the earth until dried out by the sun. Therefore, He entreated the Father not to allow human weakness to take hold of the thoughts and desires of His human nature: *Now is My soul*

*troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour.* As if heartened by the remembrance of the purpose of His sojourn on earth, Christ prayed for God's will to be done—for the salvation of mankind: *Father, glorify Thy name; glorify it on the earth, among men. Show Thyself not only as the Creator, but also as the Saviour* (St Basil, "Against Eunomius," Bk 4). *And the voice from heaven said, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again* (Jn 11:27-28), thus announcing that the time had come for the fulfillment of God's mystery which *hath been hid from the ages*. (1 Col 1:26; Eph 1:9, 3:9).

And now this time has come. If even earlier Christ's human nature had shuddered and felt indignation at the thought of what was to come, what was He feeling now, when, waiting for the arrival of His enemies and His betrayer, He prayed privately to God for the last time? The Lord knew that *any prayer of His would be heard*. (Jn 11:42). He knew that if He were to entreat His Father to deliver Him from torments and death, *more than twelve legions of angels* (Mt 26:53) would appear to defend Him. But is this why He

came? To refuse, in the last moment, to fulfill that which was foretold by the Scriptures?

*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Even now Jesus' spirit was aflame, desiring only one thing: To accomplish God's will. But as a man, in His human nature, He would have turned away from suffering and death. ( *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 3:18, 20, 23, 24; Blessed Theophylact; St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, ch. 6, "On Remembrance of Death"). The Son of God had voluntarily adopted this weak human nature. Therefore, He now offers Himself to death for the salvation of the world. And He is victorious, although overcome by the feeling of an approaching fear of death and loathing of sufferings (Climacus, *Ibid.*; Blessed Augustine; *Exact Exposition*, 3:24). Now these sufferings will be particularly terrible, terrible not as such, but because the soul of the God-Man is shaken to its very depths.

Man's sins, which Jesus has taken upon Himself, are inexpressibly burdensome. They press heavily upon Him, making the imminent sufferings unbearable.

Christ knows that when these sufferings reach their utmost intensity, He will be all alone. Not only will there be no human being capable of alleviating them—I waited for one to grieve with Me, but there was none; and for one to comfort Me, but I found none (Pss

68:21; Isa 63:5)—but in order to feel the full burden of sins, He would be made to experience the torment of separation from the Heavenly Father. At this moment, His human will might wish to avoid the sufferings. However, let it not be! May His human will not depart from God's will even for a moment. This is what the God-Man prays for to His Father. If it is possible for mankind to reestablish its union with God without this dreadful new crime against the Son of God (St. Basil the Great, *Ibid.*), may this hour be averted. However, if this is the only way for mankind to be brought to its Creator, let God's will be fulfilled. Let His will be done and may Jesus' human nature in these terrible moments desire nothing but the fulfillment of God's will, the accomplishment of the Divine economy. This, then, is what Christ prayed for in the Garden of Gethsemane, *in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and*

*supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death.* (Heb 6:7).

Indeed, He offered up prayers and supplications to the One capable of saving Him from death, but He did not pray to be delivered from death. The Lord Jesus Christ was saying, as it were, to His Divine Father, *Abba, My Father, the Father of the One whom Thou sent to unite the people of Israel and the scattered children of God, the heathens, in order to create out of two peoples a new people, and to reconcile them both with Thyself through the Cross. Everything is possible for Thee, everything that corresponds to Thy boundless perfection. Thou knowest that it is characteristic of human nature to turn away from sufferings, that man always wants to see good days.* (I Pet 3:10). *But whoever loves Thee with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind, desires only that which is pleasing to Thy good and perfect will. I, Who came*

*down to earth for the fulfillment of Thy wise will and for this purpose became clothed in flesh and blood and took upon Myself human nature with all its weaknesses except sin, I, too, would wish to escape sufferings, but only under one condition—that this be in accordance with Thy holy will. If it is possible for Thine economy to be accomplished without this horrendous crime of men; if it is possible for Me not to experience these sufferings of the soul, to which in a few*

*hours will be added the terrible agony of the body; if this is possible, then deliver Me from these present sufferings and the impending trials and temptations. Spare Me the necessity of suffering the consequences of Adam's transgression. However, this entreaty is being suggested to Me by the weakness of My human nature. But let it be as it is pleasing to Thee. Let not the will of weak human nature prevail, but rather Our common pre-eternal counsel. My Father! If according to Thy wise economy it is necessary that I offer this sacrifice, I do not refuse to do so. I pray for one thing only: May Thy will be fulfilled. May Thy will be done always and in everything. Just as in Heaven, both Thou and I, Thine Only-begotten Son, have one will, so let also My human will here on earth not for one moment desire anything contrary to Our common will. May that be fulfilled which We decided upon before the creation of the world, may the salvation of mankind be accomplished.*



*May the sons of men be delivered from their enslavement to the devil, redeemed at a high price—by the sufferings and selflessness of the God-Man. And let not the burden of men's sins, which I am taking upon Myself, as well as the added torments of soul and body, make my human will waver in its desire to fulfill Thy holy will. May I comply joyfully with Thy will. Thy will be done.*

*Thou hast prayed that the voluntary cup of the redeeming Passion be removed as if it were not voluntary* (Sunday Matins, Tone 5, Canticle 8 of the canon), thus demonstrating two desires of two natures and asking God the Father to render His human will unwavering in its submission to God's will (*Exact Exposition*, 3:24). *And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him* [His human nature] (Lk 22:43). Nevertheless, while offering His self-sacrifice, Jesus prayed with increased fervor, until He became bathed in a bloody sweat. And for His reverence and His constant submission to His Father's will, the Son of Man was heard.

Thus strengthened and encouraged, Jesus rose from His prayer. (*Exact Exposition*, lbid.). Now He was sure that His human nature would not waver any more, that soon the burden of human sins would be lifted from Him, and that, through His obedience to God the Father, He would bring to Him errant human nature. He walked up to His disciples and said, *Sleep on now, and take your rest. Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me* (Mt 26:45-46), *rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.* (Lk 22:46).

Going forth to meet those who came after Him, the Lord voluntarily gave Himself into their hands. When Peter, anxious to defend his Teacher, struck the chief priest's servant with a sword and cut off his ear, the Lord healed the latter and reminded Peter that He is giving Himself into their hands voluntarily: *Sheathe your sword, He said Am I not to drink of the cup which My Father gave Me? Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?* (Mt. 26:53). And, having voluntarily emptied the cup of sufferings of body and soul, Christ glorified God on the earth; He accomplished the task no lesser than the creation of the world itself. He restored fallen human nature, reconciled God and mankind, and *made men partakers of the Divine nature.* (2 Pet 1:4).

Having accomplished the work which His Father had given Him to do, Christ was glorified also in His human nature with that glory which, as God, He had *before the world was* (Jn 17:5), and with His human nature He *sat down on the right hand of God the Father from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool.* (Heb. 10:13).

Having become the *author of eternal salvation for all who obey Him* (Heb 5:9), even after His Ascension into Heaven He remains known *in two natures without confusion* (Sunday Dogmatikon, Tone 6), *For Thou hast borne two wills according to each of Thy two natures, O Thou Who art Christ forever.* (Sunday canon, Tone 5, canticle 8). However, His glorified body can no longer suffer and is in no need for anything, and likewise also His human will can in no wise depart from God's will. In this very body Christ will come on the last day *to judge the living and the dead*, after which, as King not only according to His divinity but also in His humanity, He will subject Himself with all His eternal kingdom to God the Father, *that God may be all in all* (1 Cor 15:28). Amen!



**O**n no account, beloved, must you flee from what may be a chance for acquiring virtue. On the contrary, whenever such a chance offers itself, you should accept it with joy, regarding as best and most welcome such things as are unpleasant to your heart and evoke no sympathy in you.

You should realize that the opportunities for virtue you meet with are the best means you can have for acquiring it, given you by God in answer to your prayer. Having formed a desire to gain virtue, you have, of course, prayed God to grant it to you; and in praying for it, you could not avoid praying also for the methods and means of acquiring this gift. But God does not give, for instance, the virtue of patience without afflictions, nor the virtue of humility without humbling occasions of degradation and dishonor. So, after your prayer about these virtues, He sends you corresponding opportunities. What are you doing, then, in running away and avoiding them?

So decide to welcome gladly the chances you meet for virtue, and the more gladly, the more difficulties they offer. For in such cases our virtuous actions evoke great courage and reveal great moral strength; and through this we make each time a considerable step forward on the path of virtue, which alone should be our constant aim.

**St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain**

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## BEHOLD THE MAN WHO IS GOD!

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic.



In the same way that the Lord Jesus hungered and thirsted as a man, that He was wearied as a man, that He ate and slept as a man, walked and spoke, wept and rejoiced, so He suffered as a man. Let none of us, then, say “it was easy for Him to suffer—He was God!” but how shall I cope with suffering? Such words are empty words, that stem from ignorance and lassitude of spirit.

Christ did not find suffering easy, for He suffered, not as God, but as man. And furthermore, suffering was harder for Him, the innocent and Sinless One, than for us, who are guilty and sinful. Let us never forget that, when we suffer, we are suffering for our sins. The Lord Jesus did not suffer because of Himself or for Himself, but because of men and for men, for many men and for all men’s sins.

When one sin brought death to Adam; when one sin placed an eternal mark of shame on Cain’s forehead; when, for two or three sins, David suffered so much; when, for many sins, Jerusalem was destroyed and Israel taken off into captivity - you can imagine the suffering that He had to endure, when great mountains of the sins of all people in all ages were heaped upon Him! These

were terrible sins: sins because of which the earth opened up and swallowed men and cattle; sins because of which whole cities and peoples were destroyed; sins because of which the Flood came, and famine and drought and pestilence and grasshoppers and caterpillars; sins that brought about wars between nations, wastes and destruction; sins that opened the gates of the human soul to invasion by mad spirits; sins because of which the sun was darkened, the sea was troubled and the rivers dried up.

What is the use of counting them? Can the sand in the sea or the grass in the meadow be counted? All these sins, each one of which is as mortal as the venom from the most poisonous snake—for *the wages of sin is death* (Rom 6:23)—every single one was heaped upon the innocent Man Jesus. He took our sins upon Him. Is it, then, strange that sweat falls from His brow as it were great drops of blood? Is it strange that He should plead: *Remove this cup from Me?* Lo, *scarcely for a righteous man will one die ... but ... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* (Rom 5:7-8).

Imagine yourself being taken to the scaffold for the sake of one righteous man, and think how difficult it would be. And imagine yourself on the scaffold for a criminal—and at that, one who has committed a crime against you. Think of your being condemned to death for his salvation! Sweat will pour from you at the very thought! Only then will you have some idea of Christ’s bloody sweat. And then you will, terrified, amazed and driven to the edge of sanity, cry aloud: ***Behold the Man who is God!***



# Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

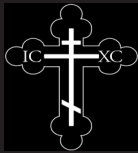
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## In This Issue:

- Conversation with a Noble (p. 5)
- Spiritual Study (p. 6)
- The Jesus Prayer (p. 9)
- The Orthodox Therapist (p. 11)
- On the Holy Mother of God (p. 21)
- Have Your Mind On God! (p. 22)
- On True Repentance and the Angelic Life (p. 25)
- Dogma & Mystery (p. 27)
- On God-Created Inequality (p. 28)



- Ἡ Κοίμησις τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτοκου (σελ. 13)
- Παπα-Γιάννης ὁ Ἐξορκιστῆς (σελ. 14)
- Διδάγματα ἀπὸ τὴν Κοίμησις τῆς Θεοτόκου (σελ. 17)
- Ἰωάννης Καποδίστριας: Πρότυπο Χριστιανοῦ Ἠγέτη (σελ. 19)



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## THE HOLY THEOTOKOS AND THE CHURCH

Source: "The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos," published by the Holy Apostles Convent and Dormition Skete, Buena Vista, CO (1989), pp. 495-501.

The Holy Virgin Mary is more than an example of piety. She is more than a saint. She is *All-holy, Ever-Virgin* and *Mother of God*. She is the Church's greatest theologian. She is the one human—body and soul resurrected, united and complete—and now deified person who is *more honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim*. In her the whole mystery of the divine economy is personified, writes St. John of Damascus (c.676-c.750).

As we have seen, the Scriptures say more about the Theotokos than most people perceive, albeit, in a hidden manner, revealed only to the faithful through Holy Tradition and the writings of the holy Fathers. If there was a general silence about her in the early Church, it was intentional, to avoid comparisons with the pagan religions which provide anti-typical divine, mother and child similarities, such as the Egyptian Isis and Serapis or the Oriental Cybele and Attis. Only later, during the fourth and fifth centuries, did circumstances demand an elucidation of the Virgin Mary's role in the plan of salvation.

Since Mary Theotokos is one flesh with her divine Son, she is, therefore, necessarily the Mother of those baptized, into His body, the Church. Not without purpose does St. Epiphanius of Cyprus (c.315-403) write that she is *the holy Jerusalem, Virgin of Christ, His Bride*; for what is granted in the flesh to the Virgin is granted spiritually to the Church. Let us see how, in the writ-

ings of the holy Fathers, the Theotokos is, among other things, portrayed as the Church; for as St. Andrew of Crete (c.660-740) chants, she is *the living city of the King and God, in which Christ has dwelt, and worked our salvation*.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria (+444), in his famous litany of praise spoken after the Council at Ephesus, where he was a dominant figure, ends with these words: *Let us give glory to Mary, Ever-Virgin, that is to the holy Church, and her Son and Immaculate Spouse; to Him be glory forever and ever*.

Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215) points to the Mary-Church parallel, saying, *O mysterious wonder! There is only one Father of all, only one Word of all, and the Holy Spirit is also one and He is everywhere. There is but one Virgin Mother. I like to call her the Church... she is both Virgin and Mother—immaculate as a Virgin and loving as a Mother. She calls her children and feeds them with holy milk: the Word, a child*.

Therefore, in giving birth to the body of Christ, Mary gave birth to the Church, the unity of all that are incorporated into Christ. She is the progenitress of the Christian race, that is, the historical Church that is forever united to divinity.

Saint Ildefonsus (+667), Archbishop of Toledo, affirms that *the form of our Mother the Church is according to the form of the Lord's Mother*. The mysteries of the Virgin's life are daily renewed in the Church; for, as one wedded, she is at the same time immaculate. As a Virgin, she conceives us by the Spirit, yet brings us forth without pain, so the venerable Bede (c.673-735) was to write. The influence of Saint Ambrose (339-397) is also evident here. *Mary is truly espoused but a Virgin, because she is a type of the Church which is immaculate but wedded*. And, *What was prophesied*

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of Mary was as a type of the Church. In another place, he writes: *How beautiful are those things which have been prophesied of Mary under the figure of the Church.* In other words, she is the Church because she is the Mother of Christ, even as she is Mother to all Orthodox, His *brethren*.

Since Mary Theotokos is the Church, the *perpetual virginity* of Mary also signifies the *perpetual virginity* of the Church, that is, her inviolate fidelity to Christ. Deny the one, and one must deny the other: the Church and the Theotokos stand together; ecclesiology and Mariology safeguard each other. Thus, too, the Orthodox Church insists upon the *all-holiness* of the Virgin Mary, for the same reason that she speaks of the Church as *holy*. She is Panaghia or *All-holy*, because she is the Church.

The types of the Virgin are everywhere associated with the types of the Church. It may seem strange that she, the Virgin, is sometimes cast in the role of Mother, Sister, Daughter, Bride and Child of Christ, but those are the relationships found in old Israel between God and His people. This explains why the Church (the Virgin), the new Israel, is depicted as the *Bride of Christ* while, at the same time, His body.

Saint Paulinus (353-431), Bishop of Nola (near Naples) writes: *What a great mystery was this, by which the Church*

*became wedded to Christ and became at once the Lord's Bride and His Sister! The Bride with the status of Spouse is a Sister... So she continues as Mother through the seed of the eternal Word, alike conceiving and bringing forth nations. She is Sister and Spouse because Her intercourse is not physical but mental, and her Husband is not man but God. The children of this Mother comprise equally old and infants; this offspring has no age or sex. For this is the blessed progeny of God which springs from no human seed but from a heavenly race.*

He continues: *This is why the teacher Paul says that "there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" [Gal. 3:28] and "there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called on one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism". [Eph. 4-5]. For all of us who acknowledge Christ as Head of our body [Col. 1:18] are one body, and are all Christ's limbs. [I Cor 12:27]. Because we have now all put on Christ" and stripped off Adam, we are at once advancing towards the shape of angels. Hence for all born in baptism there is the one task; both sexes must incorporate the perfect man, and Christ as all in all [Eph. 4:13] must be our common Head, our King Who hands over His limbs to the Father in the Kingdom. Once all are endowed with immortal bodies, the frail condition of human lives forgoes marriage between men and women. [Mt. 22:30].*



### The Woman in the Twelfth Chapter of the Apocalypse of St. John

A most difficult passage in a difficult book, the Apocalypse of St. John (Revelation): *And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.* [Rev. 12:1-2]. The word *woman* was given a collective meaning by most ancient writers as describing the people of God by a female figure. There are many though who identify the *woman* as being the Virgin Mary, who shows herself forth as an image of the Holy Church. As she remained Virgin bringing forth a Son, so the Church at all times would bring forth members (sons and daughters) without losing her virginity (i.e., pure Orthodoxy). The pains the Church suffers refers to her spiritual motherhood, for neither the Church of the Old Testament or the New Testament *cried out in pangs of birth... and brought forth a male child—Christ*. Israel, as a community, did not give birth by natural generation to the Messiah—but it did issue the Virgin-Mother. A woman was at the heart of the mystery and, at the essential moment, the transition of Israel to a new and final destiny would be conveyed by the figure of a woman. This woman was the Virgin Mary who, without pain, gave birth to Christ.

The outstanding commentator and noted father, Hippolytos, (c.170-c.236), clearly states, that the Evangelist meant *the Church, endued with the Father's Word, Whose brightness is above the sun. And by "the moon under her feet" he referred to her being adorned, like the moon, with heavenly glory. And the words, "upon her head a crown of twelve stars," refer to the twelve apostles by whom the Church was founded. And that "she, being with child, cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered," means that the Church will not cease to bear from her heart the Word that is persecuted by the unbelieving world. "And she brought forth," he says, "a man child" [Rev. 12:5], a man child of God, who is declared to be God and man, who becomes the instructor of all the nations.*



Saint Methodios, Bishop of Tyre (+311) also sees the *woman* in a collective sense, the Church. He writes about the significance of the moon, saying, *and her standing on the moon... refers by way of allegory to the faith of them that have been purified from corruption by baptism... for all moist substances depend on the moon... She labors and brings forth natural men as spiritual, and under this aspect is she indeed their Mother. For just as the woman receives the unformed seed of her husband and after a period of time brings forth a perfect human being, so too the Church, one might say, is constantly conceiving those who take refuge in the Word, and shaping them according to the likeness and form of Christ, after a certain time makes them citizens of that blessed age. Hence it is necessary that she stand upon the laver, as the Mother of those who are washed. The function that she exercises over the laver is called the moon because those who are thus reborn and renewed shine with a new glow, that is, with a new light... Hence, they are designated by the expression "the newly enlightened." She continues to reveal to them the spiritual full moon in her periodic presentation of His Passion, until the full glow and light of the great day shall appear.*

He then continues speaking of the *man child*, saying, *Remember that the mystery of the incarnation of the Word was fulfilled long before the Apocalypse, whereas John's prophetic message has to do with the present and the future. Christ was not the "child who was caught up unto God, and to His throne" [Rev. 12:5] for fear lest he be injured by the serpent; rather, He descended from the throne of His Father and was begotten precisely that He might stay and check the dragon's assault on the flesh.*

Then St. Methodios brings forward the Prophet Isaias, saying, *Before she that travailed brought forth, before the travail-pain came on, she escaped it and brought forth a male. Who has heard such a thing? And who has seen after this manner? [Isa 66:7-8].* Yet, it is obvious that such a prophecy could only be applied to the Virgin who experienced no pain in birthing.

Saint Methodios then represents *the Church... to bring forth a man child, because the enlightened spiritually receive the features and image of Christ. The likeness of the Word is stamped*

on them and is begotten within them by perfect knowledge and faith, and thus Christ is spiritually begotten in each one. Thus the Church is with child and labors until Christ is formed and born within us, so that each of the saints by sharing in Christ is born again as Christ... Those who are baptized in Christ become, as it were, other "christs" by a communication of the Spirit, and here it is that the Church effects this transformation into a clear image of the Word.

Therefore, St. Methodios believes that the Woman who has brought forth continues to bring forth a male child, the Word, in the hearts of the faithful; and this same Woman went forth into the desert undefiled and unharmed by the wrath of the beast. This Woman is our Mother, the Church. He then explains that the seven heads of the dragon, the devil, signify the seven vices.

Saint Andrew of Caesarea explains that the Church is pained for each one who is reborn by water and the Spirit until Christ shall be formed in them. The same also writes that the devil always arms himself against the Church and increasingly strives to make those reborn by her his food. Concerning the man-child, St. Andrew concurs with St. Methodios, that *in the person of those who are baptized, the Church ceaselessly gives birth to Christ; just as, according to the Apostle, we come "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* [Eph. 4:13].

Saint Ambrose writes that most authors seem to interpret the moon, as representing the Church when referring to certain passages [Pss 135:8-9; Pss 103:21]. The Church, like the moon would have her seasons, namely of persecution and peace. Though the moon seems to lose light, she does not. She can be cast in a shadow, but she cannot lose her light. The Church, for example, is weakened by the desertion of some in time of persecution, but is replenished by the witness of Her martyrs. In fact, the moon undergoes a diminution of its light, not, however, of its mass... so that it may borrow from the sun.

Who was clad with Christ, the Sun of righteousness? Who had the moon as a footstool? Who was crowned on the head with the twelve stars? Who else but the most holy Mother, the Virgin Mary. This is the Virgin woman whom the beloved disciple saw clad with the Sun, and crowned by twelve stars, namely, the Apostles, and under her feet the moon, the sacred Church of God, imploring her intercessions for the salvation of her children.

If we examine the work of the hymn-writers of the two Akathist Hymns for the Dormition of the Mother of God, they see in the Evangelist's divine revelation the holy Theotokos at the right of her Son as a great sign in heaven.

The twenty-four stanzas of the Akathist written in commemoration of her Dormition, as celebrated on the Holy Mountain, explain St. John's vision as a type of her glory: *The heavenly sign was a type of thy glory, O Mother, which I*

*beheld in the Revelation; for thou didst then appear unto me as a woman clad with the intellectual Sun, Who illumines and enlightens all, crying unto thee: Rejoice, thou who art clad with the Lord. Rejoice, thou that art embroidered before Him. Rejoice, thou that bearest the twelve-star crown on thy head. Rejoice, thou that hast the moon as a disk by thy feet. Rejoice, thou Mother of Christians.*

Arethas Caesaria writes: *That woman some accepted as the Mother of the Lord... others, too, say she is the Church, clothed in the Sun of righteousness, and of the moon, the synagogue... under her feet.*

Thus, in icons depicting the Apocalypse of St. John, the Painter's Manual or *Ifermeneia* illustrates the twelfth chapter of the Revelation with the Virgin upon clouds, wearing a purple robe and with angel's wings; around her crown are twelve stars and the rays of the sun surround her from her head to her feet. Under her feet is the moon, and before her is a red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and wearing seven crowns; out of its mouth pours water, like a river, and the land opens up and swallows the river. Behind it is a mass of stars, and above the Virgin are two angels holding the child Christ in a veil; many clouds surround them. [refer to the icon depicted in the previous page, *Ed.*]

† † †

***Rejoice, thou who art clothed in the Sun, who dost irradiate grace and glory upon all the universe.***

[Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokosin Honor of Her Dormition, *Ekos* 12]



**H**ail, Thou that art full of grace, the Lord is with Thee! Thus does the holy Church invoke the most holy Virgin, the Mother of God. But the Lord is also with every pious soul that believes in Him. The Lord's abiding with the Virgin Mary before she conceived the Saviour is not a particularity proper to the most pure Virgin alone. The Lord is with every believing soul: *The Lord is with thee.* These words may be said to every one who keeps the Lord's commandments. And the Lord is near unto all; only men themselves are far from Him by their hearts, by their thoughts, their intentions, and the inclinations of their hearts, as well as by their words and deeds, which are contrary to the law of God. *Behold, I am with you all days,* says our Lord, Who was born of the most holy Virgin, *even to the consummation of the world;* that is, with every one of us, at every time, throughout all generations, all ages, upon the whole space of the earth, unto the end of the world.

St. John of Kronstadt—"My Life in Christ"

## CONVERSATION WITH A NOBLE

Source: "Stories, Sermons, and Prayers of St. Nephon: An Ascetic Bishop," pp. 122-125.



One day when blessed Nephon was resting in his cell, a noble came and said to him:

—I came, Father, to profit some by your holiness. For my soul is grieved with a thought whose origin I do not know.

—Satan has deceived you, the saint answered him. He told you that you are not going to receive any reward from God for all the children you have baptized.

But, indeed, whoever baptizes children is blessed. The Lord says in the Gospels, *He who receives you receives Me* (Mt 10:40), and, *He took a child and put him by His side, and said to them, Whoever receives this child in My name, receives Me, and whoever receives Me, receives Him Who sent Me.* (Lk 9:47-48).

—Who then is more blessed than you, who through children receive Christ, and through Christ His Father? Go, my son, and do good as you have up to now. Your work is pleasing to God. Know that all the children you have received from the baptismal font, at the Second Coming will walk before your soul to the gate of Heaven. That will be a great glory for you and great disgrace for the evil spirits in the air. Angels holding candles equal in number to the children you have baptized will direct you to the throne of God, and from there to the place of your rest. They will honor you, in other words, in the same way you also received and honored Christ in the person of these children. The baptismal font is like another Virgin who holds Christ in her arms. Then, you become like Simeon who will receive the Divine Babe in the person of the newly illumined babies.

The man stood with his mouth open before the gift of the discerning insight of the saint; before he could repeat his thought, the saint had revealed it to him. When the first shock passed, the stranger again said to the saint:

—Please, Father, since you know all my inner world, tell me where that unpleasant thought originated. Did it come from me, or from somewhere else?

—It was born of the devil, my son, the saint answered, for he wanted to distort your right thinking. But you were right in revealing it before it penetrated your heart and became difficult to uproot. Because, to be sure, man has good thoughts, but also depraved ones. Therefore, if he

examines his thoughts which go in and out of his mind, he can separate what the enemy sows and send it away.

—However, if man's mind is dimmed by the cares and pleasures of life, then he will incline toward evil, for he will not distinguish the stone from the bread. Such a man never understands what his deeds are, nor does he know whether he does good or evil. The devil clouds his mind, so that he cannot distinguish between the sweet and the bitter, but mixes absinthe and honey. Who can eat such a concoction?

Then the visitor wondered:

—But if that is the way it is, Father, who can be saved?

—On our own, this is impossible, the righteous one answered. God, however, can do everything for our salvation. Many offer gifts and honors to the earthly king, and in this way they get what they want. Others again are helped by the king; because he favors them, even if they do not offer him anything. It is the same with God: He glorifies some for their deeds, to others He is merciful because of their deep repentance, and He is compassionate to others because of the prayers of His saints. Then, again, He tries some here, and in the other world He grants them eternal good, provided they endure the sorrows patiently.

—Tell me, Father, the stranger asked again, why is it that even though some waste their bodies with abstinence, nevertheless they are seized by passions? For example, anger, enmity, resentment, envy, and worst of all, cruelty and miserliness? Conversely, there are many virtuous who both eat everything and drink wine, and nonetheless you cannot find even a trace of sin in them. How does this happen?

—As it seems to me, the saint said, all who fast a lot and do not improve at all, are not going to improve because of their tongue. For whoever does not have a stopper for his mouth, even if he fasts all year, he will profit nothing. Does the devil incite you to anger? Do not speak at all and you control the passion. Or does he urge you to envy? Do not judge and you will beat the evil one because, naturally, judgment is the fruit of envy. If again the malicious one incites the Christian to immorality, let him not open his mouth to speak to a woman nor to eat or drink a lot, and surely he will turn him to flight. Let him also take a small stick to hit himself, and the pain will chase away the warfare. It is in your interest to lose one of your members and not have your whole body thrown into the Gehenna of fire.

—If someone insults you or harms you in a similar way, remember that sinful people spat on Christ, the Son of God, mocked Him, and hit Him with a reed. Then think that you are unworthy even to live. Therefore, ignore him who insults you.

—If someone poor asks you for something he needs from the perishable goods of the world, do not be too stingy to give it to him, so that you may not be denied the immortal

and eternal goods which *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.* (1 Cor 2:9).

—If the treacherous enemy brings you vainglory, conceit, arrogance, glance at the older generations and see: did any arrogant people ever prosper? All of them had God as an enemy and were thoroughly crushed. It says: *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.* (Prov 3:34, Jas 4:6, 1 Pet 5:5) And elsewhere: *All my people, your leaders mislead you, and confuse the course of your paths.* (Isa 3:12.) And elsewhere: *I have seen the ungodly man highly exalted and lifting himself up like the cedars of Lebanon. But I passed by, and lo, he was not; and I sought him, and his place was not to be found.* (Pss 36:35-36). Whisper these words unceasingly to your soul and you will remain humble.

—If the *wild boar* (Pss 79:13) opens your appetite for sumptuous food, go to the bathroom and smell their stench. As for the virtuous who eat everything and drink wine, be very careful, my son, they are brave soldiers. They trampled on the passions and sins, and now are masters of themselves, because they received the gift of dispassion. You must know that the gifts of God are stable. For this reason those who have them, even if they eat and drink, they do everything without passion. For, having first exercised self-control and discretion, they are now clothed with the armor of God and there is no one anymore who can defeat them.

—Fasting is a great weapon of the soul, but it needs unceasing prayer, quiet and silence. And all these require meditation: *If Thy law had not been my meditation, then should I have perished in my humiliation.* (Pss 118:92). Go therefore, my son, and struggle to receive the gift of dispassion with continence. Then, whether you eat or drink, you will be free from passions. In addition, know that the saints do this only in front of others, while when they are by themselves, they carry out the rules of piety. And so in their cells they make up the fast they broke in front of people...

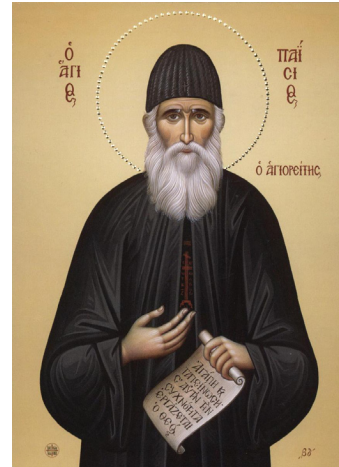


These are the works of righteousness: fasting, alms, vigil, holiness, and the rest of such works performed with the body. Love for one's neighbor, humility of heart, forgiving those who have sinned, recollection of good things, investigation of the mysteries concealed in the holy Scriptures, the mind's occupation with good works, the bridling of the soul's passions, and the rest of such virtues, are performed in the soul. All these require knowledge, for knowledge guards them and teaches their order.

St. Isaac the Syrian

## SPIRITUAL STUDY

Source: "Epistles," by St. Paisios the Athonite, published by the Holy Monastery of the Evangelist John the Theologian, Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece (2002), pp. 74-80.



Read the Lives of Saints as much as possible for these stress repentance and you can be helped by them.

Do not start reading dogmatic books because they are not suitable for beginners. If you are not educated do not read them at all, even at a later stage, for in the same way that someone who is uneducated falls into delusion from the *Philokalia* and misunderstands it, so too can dogmatic

books lead such a one into deception. The deception from the *Philokalia* will bring him a devilish calmness that he is only a bit inferior (out of humility) to Saint Gregory of Sinai. The interpretation of dogma by the uneducated will make him think he is Saint Mark of Ephesus, when in actuality he is a wild animal with dreadful obstinacy.

Of course, the novice's appointed reading is the Elder's responsibility, but I simply wish to express this thought of mine. To begin with, a chapter from the Gospel also is necessary for our sanctification, as it drives away all evil. Likewise, the works of the Holy Fathers are necessary in order to understand the Gospel, for all Patristic texts are as streams issuing forth from the Gospel. When we follow the streams, therefore, we find the source and are not led into delusion like the Protestants in the ravines. The *Synaxarion* (The Lives of Saints) is very helpful, because one can find whatever vitamin his soul is in need of in these books. The Life of the Saint of the day is also beneficial. The book of Saint John of the Ladder (the original) is a requirement for every monk, as well the *Evergetinos* or the *Gerontikon* (Sayings of the Desert Fathers), *Lausiac History*, *Leimonarion*, *Saint Ephraim* and *Unseen Warfare*. (The *Leimonarion*, compiled by the Monk John Moscos (545-619), relates instructive stories and incidents from the lives of monk and laity who lived before and during the sixth century. *Ed.*)

If you are learned you can also read the *Philokalia*, except for volume 4, "On the Jesus Prayer," because you require personal experience in order to understand it, and education is not enough (except for the experienced instructor, who is definitely necessary). For the fear is, as I said, that one confuses his own cheap tears with the precious tears of the Holy Fathers and falls into delusion, something even more treacherous for sentimental temperaments.

The same, but an even greater danger is possible in reading Saint Symeon the New Theologian, since, apart from tears, one may confuse the divine love (*eros*) of the Saint with his own sentiments. In addition, he might also associate the pure love of the Saint for his Elder with his own sentimental and, many times, unhealthy love, which is full of spiritual toxins and difficult to discern.

Particular attention is needed that women, on account of their temperament, not read Saint Symeon the New Theologian if their souls have not yet acquired a manly spirit. They need help as much from their abbess to distill their love and become spiritually manly as from themselves, in order to direct their entire struggle against the softness that creates “moldiness.” Without a doubt, toil (asceticism) is the medicine, as well as limiting oneself to only the most necessary washing and bathing. From bodily toil (done with knowledge and discernment) will arise a double health, and out of this health are born divine pleasures.

Therefore, my brother, no matter how much it may hurt, do not hesitate to cut off everything that becomes the cause of your separation from Christ. We must know that Christ will consider this martyrdom, and when we are in greater pain, with certainty we are considered great martyrs and confessors, for we confess in practice our holy faith and observe the holy commandments of Christ.

In addition to everything that I have mentioned so far, you will be greatly assisted by Abba Isaac of Syria, because he helps us understand the deepest meaning of life. Furthermore, he helps the man who believes in God to drive away every kind of complex, great or small. A little studying of Abba Isaac transforms the soul with its many spiritual vitamins.

It is true that some Elders do not recommend Abba Isaac so that their monks do not withdraw into the desert. However, Abba Isaac does not recommend to elementary students or to those still in high school to attend the university. For this reason, the Elder should assist the disciples to understand the Saint and be greatly benefited by his God-inspired book.

When a beginner presents such symptoms (i.e., he wants to leave for the desert), while not yet having graduated from spiritual high school, it means he has an empty head. When I say “empty” I do not mean completely empty, because he has a very high idea of himself inside his empty head. That

is why he needs help to realize this and to get rid of it, so that God can approach him and give him His own divine ideas, for only one single idea about ourselves hinders all of God’s divine ideas from approaching us. So what does the cunning enemy do? He examines the beginner, as if he were a physician, to find out where he hurts and also knocks on his head. If he hears that his head is hollow, he inserts his syringe, fills the head with air until it is puffed up, and lifts it up into the air. Then the novice struggles hard, but in vain, beating the air, only to be beaten by the air.

Therefore, before we begin any spiritual work, we should throw our own opinion in the trash, after having despised it; otherwise, we will interpret everything we do with our “ego-lexicon” adding fat to our fleshly self and, layered with this thick “pig skin,” we will continually increase our spiritual insensitivity. In other words, even though the Elder will severely criticize his novice for his serious mistakes, the novice

will remain indifferent, thinking that his Elder is doing it in order to test him since he has arrived at the level of sainthood.

The devil does this kind of refined work to those to whom I referred, and sooner or later they fall into great temptation.

We should be disgusted with ourselves and work only on our wretched self so we can first be reconciled with God. After-

wards, great love comes to the humble servant, and this divine love ignites the fire of his own love (as much towards God as towards his neighbor), and he casts his entire self into the service of others, believing that he is nothing but fertilizer, rejoicing that others will produce fruit.

This state is greatly facilitated when one is closed up in his cell, and has no contact with others, for then it is that he considers everyone to be as saints. Try, my brother, to love your cell and see to it that all the objects inside it are of an ascetic kind—a mat, a simple stool, planks, a sackcloth for tablecloth or a black cloth—that they may transport you to *Thebaid* and *Nitria* (ancient monastic sites in Egypt, *Ed.*) and remind you of the ethereal Holy Fathers. Do not use armchairs and formica or plastic for they will steal your mind away to the world continually and bring much to your memory and they will pollute your thoughts. It is very helpful, especially before you pray, to read a small section from the *Gerontikon* in the ascetic atmosphere of your cell, in order to warm your heart and quell all the cares of your monastic tasks, so that you can pray without distraction.



### Asceticism

I would like to offer a few words of advice to beginners who are usually very enthusiastic—and so they should be—so that they do not harm themselves abruptly from non-discerning asceticism. They are often like a torrent, which abruptly pours out all of its waters all at once and then does not have even one drop for himself or a passerby. Apart from this, whatever plant has sprouted up on its shores will also dry out. It is also possible that the beginner will lose his patience and gripe in the event that his health is undermined. That is why we should always look for the greatest spiritual profit and struggle with discernment.

Because our body is connected to our soul and the purpose of our flesh is to be subdued to our spirit and to prudently offer its services for the rehabilitation of our soul, I will mention a few things which are a kind of “practical medicine” and a diet more for the body, from which we require only some of its strength, and not its disorder. That is why the care of the little donkey (the flesh) must be done with discernment, with the right amount of barley, so we can restrain it with the reins so as to not buck and kick us and even—God forbid—throw us off a precipice. The bad thing is that the flesh can throw our soul into hell, while the worse a donkey can do is throw his rider down a precipice, without, however, harming its master’s soul.

Many times the following happens: even though our flesh is emaciated, it still bucks (acts disorderly). In order to humble it, we decrease our food and double our struggles; nevertheless, our flesh continues to act like a wild beast. In such cases, we suffer the lot of the foolish villager who, because his donkey kicks constantly, he starves it and overloads it in order to tame it. However, the miserable animal is not to blame, but rather the saddle has wounded his back. For often times it is egotism, pride and judging of others with a lack of love which drives God’s Grace away, and the devil draws near and lights a fire even on our dry emaciated bones. Thus, we increase our fasting, spiritual endeavors, our prostrations, etc., in order to humble our flesh, but to no avail, for our flesh is not humbled, and our soul lacks humility and love.

Therefore, when war with the flesh approaches, if we have done a little fasting and vigil with prayer, and the war does not subside, then we must realize that the problem is elsewhere. We should immediately fall prostrate before Christ and ask for His forgiveness in advance and beg Him, at the same time, to enlighten us so we can realize our fault and who it was that we’ve hurt or wronged, and to ask his forgiveness. As soon as we humbly ask forgiveness from Christ, immediately the carnal flame departs and we recall the cause, which, in turn, helps us even more to be humble. Then God’s grace comes in abundance.

Thus, in this case, we are the cause and not our flesh, that we did not feel compassion for our brother who stumbled

and did not put ourselves in his position, so as to sympathize with him even more; rather, we judged him harshly. That is why God withdrew His Grace from us, putting His spiritual laws into operation, and then we also fell into the hands of the evil one who roasted our flesh on his spit and simultaneously sullied our soul. On the contrary, the natural war of the flesh in young people goes away immediately with a little *ascesis*, since Christ is moved by his struggling children and helps them immediately, not wanting His beloved creatures to be oppressed. He Himself told us in the Holy Gospel that *my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*. (Mt 11:29). We should also, however, be *mEEK and lowly in heart*. (Mt 11:30).

Undoubtedly, the question will be born in many young people: “Why does God allow for us to be fought by the demon of fornication when we have other passions inside us (pride, etc.) and when other demons exist as well?”

I have the impression that, since virginity comes before our two other vows, poverty and obedience, and since pride is the greatest of sins and judging of others is tantamount to a lack of love (which we do not yet comprehend), a young man usually observes his spiritual condition in terms of his carnal temptations. If a young man has dispassion (i.e., no carnal enticements), he thinks he is doing well, when, in fact, he may be found in such a state of lethargy so that he will not be able to discern his other passions that lie in hiding. God then allows for the demon of fornication to humble him involuntarily and, thus, through humility God approaches him again. To put it succinctly, the demon of fornication, with the shock that he gives the young man, makes him realize that something has gone wrong.



The Devil is the enemy, and your soul is the abode that he seeks to defile. The Enemy, therefore, does not cease throwing within the abode of your soul whatever he can come up with—littering it with every sort of filth. But you are responsible if you grow negligent and do not throw out the filth littered in your soul by the Devil. If you do not immediately attend to this work of cleansing, then the inner abode of your soul will be filled with every kind of filth; and no one will be able to enter and abide therein, on account of the unbearable stench. If, however, you straightway resolve to take out the first batch of filth the Devil throws in, then God, rewarding your intention, will preserve—in cleanliness, by His Grace—the inner abode of your soul.

By an Unknown Elder  
From “The Evergetinos”



## THE JESUS PRAYER

### IT IS NECESSARY FOR CLERGY AS WELL AS LAYMEN WHO LIVE IN THE WORLD

*By Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, from "A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain," pp. 152-158.*

You must realize the necessity of purification from passions. You should not only want to make others well but you should believe that you, too, like all of us, are full of passions. Each passion is a hell. You should also know that, according to what we have said, the Jesus prayer is a remedy which cures the soul and purifies it. That does not mean that the Jesus prayer is a panacea but rather it is the means by which man is united with God, who is the only one Who purifies and illumines the soul. He is the physician of our soul and body. He is *the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world.* (Jn 1:9). As eye salve cleanses the vision and enables already existing objects to be seen, similarly, each person must will to be purified and transformed and seek, through prayer, illumination which comes from God.

—Do you believe that we, who work in the world, can do what the monks do concerning this divine work of prayer?

—Even if you cannot do exactly what they do, still you can achieve many things. It must be made clear, however, that noetic prayer is one thing and praying the Jesus prayer another. Noetic prayer, as some hesychasts practice it, requires a life without distraction. It requires quietness and many other things. If you cannot practice noetic prayer in the world—and this is very difficult—you must pray with the Jesus prayer at set times or say it whenever you can. It will do you great good.

—Can you suggest to me some useful and practical ways?

—Apart from church services, you should also designate a certain hour for the practice of the Jesus prayer, for meditation on the name of Jesus. You should start the practice of the Jesus prayer gradually and proceed according to your thirst and the grace you feel. One can start by saying the prayer for half an hour in the morning before sunrise, and half an hour in the evening, after the compline, before sleep. It is necessary for there to be a fixed hour for prayer which should not be changed for any reason, not even for good works. It is possible, for example, that somebody may come for confession at that particular time. If he is not ill or if it is not very urgent, you should not postpone the time you have set aside for the Jesus prayer. The same should happen concerning good works. A peaceful and quiet room where no noises are heard

is also necessary for one to start the work of the Jesus prayer, in the way we mentioned before. That is, in the beginning, we should warm our heart or read a book of the Fathers, which creates in us a feeling of compunction, and then we should say the Jesus prayer with either the lips, the mind or the heart, according to our spiritual progress. Little by little the time devoted to the Jesus prayer will increase and it will sweeten our hearts, and we shall long for it. But, I repeat, in the beginning we need to force ourselves to say the prayer even for a short time. It will do us great good.

—Is it enough, this short period of time?

—It is not enough but when there is a good disposition and humility, God fills up what is lacking in prayer. Since God is so sympathetic to our downfalls, will He not be extremely merciful to us in the struggle for our transformation? He fills up whatever is lacking. He takes into account even the special circumstances of each one of us. It may be that one hour of your prayer will be more blessed than the many hours of a monk, because you are also busy with other works.

I admired the discretion of this Athonite monk, of this incarnate angel. He distinguishes all problems with admirable ability and puts everything in its proper perspective.

—You should know, however, he went on, that the devil will expose you to many temptations during prayer, as I said previously. Many incidents will come up to make you stop praying. But you should also know that God is testing you through these trials to determine if you really want to practice the Jesus prayer. In such

a case, if you persevere, God will come to your aid and drive away all difficulties.

—But, Geronda, if, while praying, thoughts come to my mind of preparing a speech or a sermon; of doing something for the love of my brother, must I abandon them?

—Yes, you must abandon them. For, even when good thoughts come during prayer (I refer to the set times of prayer), the devil exploits them to obstruct us from prayer. If the devil realizes that we are ready to give up the Jesus prayer for such things, he will send us many thoughts of the same kind even at the restored set time. But in this case, neither do we pray, nor are we purified nor have our brethren really benefited. For the preparation of a sermon, which has replaced prayer, is without fruit. It will not benefit the brethren.

—It happens sometimes that we return to our cell exhausted, after having spent a lot of our strength, and then we cannot pray our usual rule. What should we do in these cases?

—We should not give up the Jesus prayer even then. St. Symeon recommends that serving our brothers should never



be the cause for us to be deprived of the Jesus prayer, because we then lose many things. We should never find excuses to avoid prayer: *Labor in service according to your strength; and in your cell, persevere in prayer with contrition, vigilance and continuous tears; and do not have it in your mind; I have labored exceedingly today, let me diminish the time of prayer because of physical tiredness. For, I tell you that no matter how much you work beyond your strength in serving others, if you deprive yourself of prayer, be sure that you have lost something very great.* Half an hour of the Jesus prayer is worth as much as three hours of deep sleep. The prolonged Jesus prayer rests and calms us. So, even from this point of view, it is an invigorating physiological remedy.

He continued:

—My dear father, wrap up all your works in the golden mantle of the Jesus prayer. It is because they work much with their brain and not with their heart, that many of the brethren have tribulations and are in anguish in their spiritual endeavor. They become tired by thinking what to say, whereas when they live in grace, then the thoughts come, they literally spring forth like a rushing river. It is because they do not have a good link with the Jesus prayer that the brethren quarrel among themselves, do not have peace, are afflicted by unjust attacks and do not rejoice over them, according to the commandment of Christ. St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, being guided by a long tradition of several centuries, suggests that the Bishop should be elected from the rank of the monks. Having a monastic consciousness, he will not be troubled by persecutions, slander, accusations or the anger of men, since he himself is the first to recognize his own sinfulness and to accuse himself. Thus, he acquires all the fruits we mentioned before—mainly love, which flows from much grace, and freedom from falling into sin, as the Fathers say.

—What do you mean, father, by monastic consciousness?

—I mean obedience, humility, self-condemnation and an insatiable thirst for the Jesus prayer—obedience to the Geronda and the spiritual father. The monk should be humble toward all people and his humility should be connected with the struggle for purification from passions. We should not undertake many works, because, unfortunately, we are influenced in this matter by other heresies. The greatest work is to acquire humility and holiness. Then we are truly rich. The Church is not a ministry of social services, but it is the treasury of divine grace. Priests are not social workers but those who guide the people of God. And this cannot be done unless they have humility and holiness. Without holiness and humility the greatest social work is soon obliterated, whereas when we have humility and holiness of life, even the smallest social work acquires extraordinary dimensions.

—Humility, he went on, should be connected with self-condemnation, too, that is with self-accusation. We should be the first to accuse ourselves. We should attach the respect that

the others show us to our priesthood and not to ourselves. We should attribute the accusations of others to our own sinful state and not to our priesthood. We will then experience peace and much grace from God, and will drive out every cause that makes us hate our brother. There must also be insatiable thirst for the Jesus prayer. We should not consider the Jesus prayer an opportunity, but we should consider it as life itself. We should move within prayer. Our theology and our preaching should be born within its holy atmosphere. We should also have our rule and do it every day. When we live in this way the world is then benefited beyond measure. Whoever one may be, either priest or bishop, he should always have one concern: not to lose his monastic consciousness. It is written in the “Sayings of the Desert Fathers:”

*It was related of Abba Netras, the disciple of Abba Sylvanus, that when he dwelt in his cell on Mount Sinai, he treated himself prudently, with regard to the needs of his body, but when he became bishop at Pharan, he curbed himself with great austerities. His disciple said to him, “Abba, when we were in the desert, you did not practice such asceticism.” The old man said to him, “There in the desert I had interior peace and poverty and I wished to manage my body so as not to be ill and not to need what I did not have. But now I am in the world and among its cares, and even if I am ill here, there will be someone to look after me and so I do this in order not to destroy the monk in me.”* (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, trans. by Sr. Benedicta Ward SLG, Oxford, 1975).

—Thus, those who have the consciousness of a monk feel the need to receive a blessing for whatever work they do. They entrust it to the Bishop and to an experienced spiritual father to check it and correct it during its course and at its end. They do not want praises for what they do, because he who is honored or praised more than he deserves loses much. Wherever you are, in the street, or in the car, you should say the Jesus prayer; *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me* and *Most Holy Mother of God save me*. We should often attend the Divine Liturgy with the proper preparation and participate in the undefiled Mysteries. All creation praises and glorifies God. A priest who does not offer the Divine Liturgy is in discord in this wonderful praise. It would be good to chant from time to time the Canon to our Lord Jesus Christ which is found in the Book of Hours. You should also chant the special prayers addressed to our Lord Jesus Christ and found at the end of the book “The Unseen Warfare,” composed by St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite. He urges us to evoke often, the most sweet, joy-producing and the cause of all good, saving name of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only with our lips, but also with our heart and mind.

—You should also pray for others, too, because God has entrusted his own people to you. Therefore it is your duty to withdraw and pray for peace and illumination of his people. As great Moses did...

## THE ORTHODOX THERAPIST

Source: "Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Fathers," by Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, *Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery, Levadia, Greece (1997)*, pp. 57-62.

So far, I hope we have established the truth that Christianity is mainly a therapeutic science. It is seeking the spiritual healing of man. Yet the right practice of medicine requires a good physician, a professional physician, and this applies to spiritual healing as well. There has to be a good doctor. He is the bishop and the priest.

As we have noted before, people today feel that the priest's function is to enable them to take part in the holy sacraments. They feel that he has been commanded by God, as His servant and deacon, so that they may confess their sins and have spiritual relief. They feel him to be the deacon of God, called to pray to Him that their labors may be blessed, and so forth. Certainly no one can deny that the priest will do such work as well. However, people usually seem to regard the priest rather as a magician (if I may be forgiven for using this expression). For when we look at the life of worship apart from curing, then it does rather appear as magic-like!

We repeat, however, in order to make it clear, that the priest is properly a spiritual physician who cures people's sicknesses. Worship and sacraments must be placed within the therapeutic method and treatment.

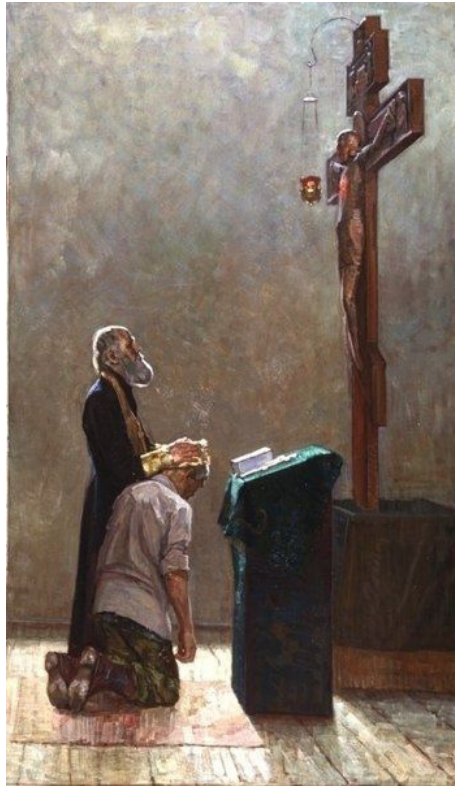
Even as a confessor the priest is mainly a therapist. The sacrament of confession is not simply a formal absolution, especially of the Western type, as if God were angry and demanded expiation. It is something more. It is a part of the therapeutic treatment. There are numerous Christians who make confession over a period of many years but are not healed of their spiritual ills. Ignorance on the part of both the people and the pastors contributes to this.

The task of the bishop, priest or confessor is to lead the people out of Egypt into the promised land, like another Moses. This guidance requires toil and labor, privation and anguish. It is mainly therapeutic supervision. The Fathers are very insistent upon this truth. Let us take St. John of the Ladder as an example. He advises that *those of us who wish to get away from Egypt and the Pharaoh need an intermediary with God, to stand between praxis and theoria and stretch out his arms to God, that those led by him may cross the sea of sin and put to flight the Amelek of the passions.*

The saint goes on to say that *those who rely on their own powers and claim to have no need of a guide are deceiving themselves.* (Ladder Step 1). From the Old Testament story we know what Moses endured and how he guided that stiff-necked people.

This spiritual Moses is a physician. Furthermore, all of us are sick and have need of therapy and the physician.

St. Symeon the New Theologian, speaking to monks, makes this truth clear. As we know from the Orthodox Tradition, the monasteries are properly hospitals. It would be better to claim that they are medical schools. As sick people we are cured and after that we learn how to cure. That is why the early Church took priests from the monasteries, which are medical schools, to place them at the observation post of bishop.



Therefore, in speaking to monks, St. Symeon does not hesitate to say that we are all poor and needy. He then tells how all of us who are in the cells are injured and affected by different illnesses; therefore we can do nothing but cry out day and night for the doctor of souls and bodies to heal our wounded hearts and give us spiritual health. The saint writes: *And that is not all: (apart from being poor and naked) we lie pitifully wounded, affected with various illnesses, or move with difficulty in our cells or monasteries as if in so many hospitals and homes for the aged. We cry out and groan and weep and call upon Him who is the physician of souls and bodies—at least in so far as we are aware of the pain of our wounds and ailments, for there are those who do not even know that they have a disease or an ailment—that He should come and cure our wounded hearts and give health to our souls that lie in the bed of sin and death. For all of us have sinned, as the holy Apostle said, and we have need of His mercy and grace.*

We have quoted this whole text because the mission of monasticism and the Church, as well as the work of the pastors, is shown clearly. It is chiefly a therapeutic task. We are sick in the bed of sin and death. Any who do not sense this truth are "mad." Therefore, the Christians who do not remain in the Church in order to be healed or who feel that they are well, are mad.

According to St. Symeon the New Theologian, the priest is a physician: a person comes to the *spiritual doctor ravaged with passion, his mind all distraught...* The "expert doctor, who is human and compassionate, understands his brother's weakness, the inflammation caused by the ailment, the tumor; he sees the

sick person wholly in the power of death. Then the saint describes the way in which the spiritual and expert physician approaches the sickness, and how it is to be cured.

We have previously mentioned two basic images which characterize the pastor's work: that he is a Moses who leads his spiritual children, and he is at the same time both a scientist and a sympathetic physician. Both these qualities are contained in one of St. Symeon's poems describing his own healing by his spiritual father, his "personal" Moses. He applies to his life the journey of the Israelite people and the guidance by Moses. He writes:

*He came down and found me to be a slave and a stranger,  
and he said: Come, my child, I will take you towards God!*

He asked his Moses for "assurances" that he could do such a thing.

*He brought me close, he clasped me tight  
and again he kissed me with a holy kiss;  
and there was a scent of immortality all about him.  
I believed, I loved to go with him  
and I longed to serve him alone...*

*He took me by the hand and walked before me  
and in this way we began to travel the road.*

And after a long journey in which, through the intervention of his spiritual father, he has succeeded in confronting the passions and being freed from slavery to them, St. Symeon begs his spiritual father:

*Come, I said, my lord, I will not part from you  
I will not disobey your commands but will keep them all.*

However, in order for a person to be an Orthodox therapist and cure the spiritual ills of his spiritual children he himself must previously have been healed as far as possible; he must stand *in the middle between praxis and theoria*. How can one heal without having previously been healed or without having tasted the beginning of healing? Therefore, St Symeon accuses those who regard themselves as spiritual directors before being imbued with the Holy Spirit, rashly receiving others' confessions and daring to rule monasteries or occupy other positions of authority, *pushing themselves forward shamelessly by a thousand intrigues to be made metropolitans or bishops to guide the Lord's people... before they have seen the bridegroom in the bridal chamber and become sons of light and sons of the day*.

All this has been put matchlessly by St. Gregory the Theologian who writes: *It is necessary first to be purified, then to purify; to be made wise, then to make wise; to become light, then to enlighten; to approach God, then to bring others to him; to be sanctified, then to sanctify...*

St. John Chrysostom, who has been hailed as an expert on the priesthood, writes in a famous passage in which he seeks to justify his refusal to be made a bishop, that he is aware of the weakness and smallness of his soul as well as

the importance and difficulty of guiding the people: *I know how weak and puny my own soul is. I know the importance of that ministry and the great difficulty of it.*

In his discussion with St. Basil he asks him to have no doubt about what he has said, that while he loves Christ, he is afraid of provoking scandal by taking up the spiritual ministry *since the infirmity of my spirit makes me unfit for this ministry*. The great purity of his thoughts and feelings caused him to feel that the weakness of his soul made him unfit for this great ministry. For indeed, unhealed passions prevent a priest from helping to heal his spiritual children.

If the therapist has not previously been cured, he is "commonplace." "They simply take commonplace men and put them in charge of those things..." ("On the Priesthood," III, 17, p. 91).

All these things to which we have already referred point to the great truth that the priests who wish to cure the illnesses of the people must themselves have previously been cured of these illnesses, or at least have begun to be cured, and must feel the value and possibility of healing.

What is to follow (i.e., within the source text, in the study of "Orthodox Psychotherapy," Ed.) will also be placed in this context. We should make it quite clear that we are not planning to look at the whole spectrum of the priesthood or the role of priests. It is not our purpose to explain the value and importance of the priesthood, but to look at this great and responsible office from the point of view that it is a therapeutic science whose main work is to cure men. If at some points we seem to be trying to undermine the value of the priesthood, we do it solely in order to look at this side which we wish to emphasize here.



The Holy Spirit acts mystically through the spiritual father, and then when you go out from your spiritual father, the soul feels her renewal. But if you leave your spiritual father in a state of confusion, this means that you did not confess purely and did not forgive your brother all of his sins from your heart.

St. Silouan the Athonite



**We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.**

## Ἡ Κοίμησις τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου

Ὀμιλία τοῦ ἀειμνήστου Κυθήριου Ἀγιορείτου Ἡγουμένου π. Γεωργίου Καψάνη.

Ὅτι ἑορτὲς τῆς Παναγίας μας, οἱ Θεομητορικὲς Ἑορτὲς καὶ μέσα σ' αὐτὲς ἡ μεγαλύτερη εἶναι ἡ ἑορτὴ τῆς Κοιμήσεως τῆς Θεοτόκου, ἓνα Πάσχα μικρό, ἓνα Πάσχα μέσ τὸ καλοκαίρι, μᾶς δίνει τὴν εὐκαιρία νὰ ἐκφράσωμε τὴν βαθειά μας εὐγνωμοσύνη πρὸς τὴν Μητέρα τοῦ Λυτρωτοῦ μας καὶ δική μας Μητέρα γιὰ ὅτι ἔχει κάνει γιὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινο γένος καὶ γιὰ τὸν κάθε ἓνα ἀπὸ μᾶς. Διότι, χωρὶς τὴ δική της συνέργεια καὶ προσφορὰ εἰς τὸν Ἅγιον Τριαδικὸν Θεὸν δὲν θα ἐνσαρκουτο ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Περίμενε ὁ Θεὸς νὰ βρεθεῖ μία τέτοια ἀγία ψυχή, πανάσπιλη, παναγνή, ἡ ὁποία θὰ προσέφερε ὅλη τὴν ἐλευθερία της εἰς τὸν Θεόν, ὥστε καὶ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ προσφερθῇ ὁλόκληρος σ' Αὐτήν.

Κι αὐτὴ ἦταν ἡ εὐλογημένη Μαρία, ἡ ταπεινὴ κόρη τῆς Ναζαρέτ· τὴν εὐγνωμονοῦμε. Μᾶς ἔδωσε ὅτι

κυρία Θεοτόκος ἔτεκε Θεὸν ἐνανθρωπήσαντα. Ὅμως ἡ Ἐκκλησία διετράνωσε τὴν πίστι της ὅτι ἡ κυρία Θεοτόκος ἐγέννησε Θεὸν ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, τὸν Λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὅτι ἐγίνε τὸ ἐργαστήριον τῆς ἀπορρήτου ἐνώσεως τῶν δύο φύσεων, τῆς Θείας καὶ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης. Διότι, μέσα εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν κοιλίαν της ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα τῆς συλλήψεως τοῦ Μονογενοῦς της Υἱοῦ ἠνώθη ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη μετὰ τὴν Θεία φύσι καὶ ἐκνοφορήθη ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Χριστός. Γι' αὐτὸ λοιπὸν καὶ χαρακτηρίζεται ἐργαστήριον τῆς ἀπορρήτου ἐνώσεως τῶν δύο φύσεων. καὶ αὐτὰ ὅλα δὲν πρέπει νὰ τὰ ξεχνᾶμε, δὲν τὰ ξεχνᾶει ποτε ἡ Ἐκκλησία· γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁσάκις ἡ Ἐκκλησία δοξάζει τὸν Μονογενὴ της Υἱόν, δοξάζει καὶ τὸ πρόσωπο τῆς Παναγίας.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει Ἀκολουθία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, σὺνάξι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ποὺ νὰ μὴν καλεῖται καὶ ἡ Κυρία Θεοτόκος νὰ παρίσταται κι ἐκεῖνη καὶ μᾶλλον καὶ νὰ προϊσταται τῆς Συνάξεως τοῦ λαοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὅπως καὶ προϊστατο τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων, κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιο Γρηγόριο τὸν Παλαμᾶ. Διότι, ὅταν ἀνελήφθη ὁ Κύριος εἰς τοὺς



πολυτιμότερο ἔχουμε στὴ ζωὴ μας τὸν Σωτῆρα μας. Τι θὰ εἶμαστε χωρὶς τὸν Σωτῆρα Χριστόν; Οἱ ἀπελπισμένοι κατάδικοι τοῦ θανάτου. Οἱ αἰώνιοι αἰχμάλωτοι τοῦ διαβόλου χωρὶς ἐλπίδα. Ἐάν λοιπὸν ἔχουμε Σωτῆρα καὶ Λυτρωτὴ καὶ Θεὸν τὸν Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν Θεὸν ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, αὐτὸ τὸ ὀφείλουμε εἰς τὴν Κυρίαν Θεοτόκον. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ ἔπαινος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι παντοτινός. Οἱ ὕμνοι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι παντοτινοὶ κι ἀνεξάντλητοι πρὸς τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς Κυρίας Θεοτόκου. Κανένα πρόσωπο ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς δὲν ἐτιμήθη μετὰ τόσους ὕμνους, μετὰ τόσες δοξολογίες, μετὰ τόσες διακοσμητικὲς ἐκφράσεις μετὰ ὅσες ἡ Παναγία μας.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἤδη ἀπὸ τὴν 3<sup>η</sup> Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδο τῆς ἔδωσε τὸν τίτλο Θεοτόκος, ὁ ὁποῖος ὄρος «Θεοτόκος» κατὰ τοὺς ἀγίους Πατέρες, τὸν Ἅγιο Γρηγόριο τὸν Θεολόγο περικλείει ὅλο τὸ μυστήριον τῆς σωτηρίας καὶ τῆς εὐσεβείας. Διότι ἠρνοῦντο οἱ αἰρετικοὶ ὅτι ἡ

οὐρανοὺς ἡ Κυρία Θεοτόκος ἐνεψύχωνε, ἐνεθάρρυνε, ἐδίδασκε, καθοδηγοῦσε τοὺς ἀγίους Ἀποστόλους. Ἦταν τρόπον τινὰ ἡ Γερόντισσά τους καὶ ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ εἶναι ἡ Γερόντισσα, ἡ πνευματικὴ Μητέρα ὅλων τῶν Χριστιανῶν, ὅσων Ὀρθοδόξως πιστεύουν εἰς τὸν Τριαδικὸν Θεόν. Καὶ ἰδιαίτερος νὰ εἶναι ἡ Γερόντισσα καὶ ἡ Μητέρα τῶν Μοναχῶν καὶ διὰ τῶν Ἀγιορείτων.

Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἔκανε τὴν Παναγία μας καὶ τὴν ἀνέδειξε εἶναι ὄχι ἀπλῶς ὅτι ἐγέννησε παθητικὰ τὸν Θεόν, τὸν Θεάνθρωπον Χριστόν, ἀλλὰ συνήργησε εἰς τὴν Γέννησιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ εἰς τὴν κνοφορίαν τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ συνήργησε διότι, ὅπως λέγει τὸ σχετικὸν Ἀποστολικὸν Ἀνάγνωσμα, τῆς πρὸς Φιλιππησίους ἐπιστολῆς, συμμετεῖχε κι αὐτὴ εἰς τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἡ ἄκρα ταπείνωσις, ἡ κένωσις, ἡ θυσία, ἡ προσφορὰ στὸ ἀνθρώπινο γένος. Κι αὐτὸ ἦταν καὶ τὸ φρόνημα τῆς Παναγίας μας.

Δὲν μπορούσε ἐκεῖνη ἢ ὁποῖα ἐβάσταξε εἰς τοὺς κόλπους τῆς τὸν Θεὸν νὰ μὴν εἶχε τὸ ἴδιο φρόνημα μὲ Ἐκεῖνον, τὸν ὁποῖον κυφοροῦσε. Αὐτὸ τὸ φρόνημα ποὺ εἶχε ὁ Σαρκωθεὶς Κύριος καὶ ἔνεκα τοῦ ὁποῖου ἐνεσαρκώθη καὶ ἐταπεινώθη καὶ ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτόν, αὐτὸ τὸ φρόνημα εἶχε καὶ ἡ ταπεινὴ κόρη τῆς Ναζαρέτ. Κι αὐτὴ ἐκένωσε τὸν ἑαυτό της, προσέφερε τὸν ἑαυτό της, τελείαν προσφορὰν, δὲν κράτησε τίποτα γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό της. Καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ φρόνημα ζητάει καὶ ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἡ Κυρία Θεοτόκος ἀπὸ μᾶς τοὺς Χριστιανούς, τὰ παιδιά τῆς Παναγίας μας, τὰ τέκνα τῆς Παναγίας μας.

Τὸ ἀκήρατον σκήνωμά της νοερώς τὸ περιπτυσσόμεθα, τὸ ἀσπαζόμεθα καὶ τρόπον τινα καὶ μεις μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων συμμετέχουμεν εἰς τὴν πάνσεπτον κηδεῖαν της, ἢ ὁποῖα ὅμως κηδεῖα δὲν ἦταν παρὰ τὸ μεταίχιμο τῆς ἀναβάσεώς της εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς. **Διότι ἡ Κυρία Θεοτόκος**, χάριτι καὶ φιλανθρωπία τοῦ Μονογενοῦς της Υἱοῦ, ἐξεδήμησε καὶ σωματικῶς πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἀνήλθεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, διότι δὲν μπορούσε ἐκεῖνο τὸ Πανάγιο Σῶμα, τὸ ὁποῖον ἐκυοφόρησε τὸν Θεὸν νὰ τὸ φᾶνε τὰ σκουλήκια μέσα στὴ γῆ. Ἔπρεπε δεδοξαμένον νὰ ἀναστηθῆ καὶ νὰ καθῆσθαι στὰ δεξιά τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ νὰ πρεσβεύη γιὰ ὅλη τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα. Καὶ ἄλλοτε τὸ ἔχουμε πεῖ, τὸ λέω καὶ γιὰ ὅσους δὲν τὸ ἄκουσαν, τοὺς ἀδελφούς προσκυνητάς, ἡ Παναγία μας εἶναι τὸ πρῶτο πρόσωπο τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης τὸ ὁποῖον ἀνέστη, ἐκρίθη, ἐδικαιώθη, ἐδοξάσθη καὶ κάθεται εἰς τὰ δεξιά τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πρεσβεύουσα ὑπὲρ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. Συνεπῶς τὴν Δευτέρα Παρουσία, ὅταν ὅλοι θὰ ἀναστηθοῦμε καὶ θὰ βρεθοῦμε μπροστὰ στὸ Βῆμα τοῦ Κυρίου θὰ ἔχουμε τὴν Παναγία μας μεσίτρια καὶ προστασία καὶ βοήθεια.

Γιὰ ὅλα αὐτὰ λοιπὸν τὴν εὐγνωμονοῦμε καὶ τὴν παρακαλοῦμε νὰ μᾶς φωτίσει νὰ μὴν εἴμεθα ἀνάξια παιδιά της, ἀλλὰ νὰ κάνουμε τὸν ἀγῶνα μας τὸν καθημερινὸ καὶ νὰ ἔχουμε τὸ φρόνημά της, αὐτὸ τὸ φρόνημα ποὺ εἶχε καὶ ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, τὸ φρόνημα τὸ ταπεινὸ, τὸ θυσιαστικὸ, τὸ φρόνημα τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς θυσίας. Βοήθειά μας ἡ Παναγία καὶ καλὴ δύναμι στὸν ἀγῶνα ποὺ ἔχει ὁ καθένας ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς διὰ πρεσβειῶν τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου.



**Ο**ἱ ἐμπειρίες τῆς θεώσεως εἶναι ἀνάλογες μὲ τὴν κάθαρση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ὅσο περισσότερο καθαρῶς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, τόσο ἀνώτερη ἐμπειρία λαμβάνει τοῦ Θεοῦ, βλέπει τὸν Θεό, κατὰ τὸ «*Μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῆ καρδία, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν Θεὸν ὄψονται.*» (Ματθ. 5:8).

**Ἀρχ. Γεώργιος Καψάνης**

## Παπα-Γιάννης ὁ Ἐξορκιστὴς

*Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Ἀσκητὲς Μέσα στὸν κόσμον», Ἅγιον Ὅρος (2008), Γ. Ησυχαστήριον Ἁγ. Ἰωάννης ὁ Πρόδρομος, Μεταμόρφωσις Χαλκιδικῆς.*



**Ο**ταν τὸ 1917 στὴν Ρωσία ἐγένετο ἡ ἐπανάσταση τῶν Μπολσεβίκων, συνέλαβαν στὴν Ὀδησσοῦ 17 ἱερεῖς γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ἐκτελέσουν. Ἐνας ἀπ' αὐτοὺς κρύφθηκε στὰ δάση καὶ σώ-

θηκε· μετὰ βρῆκε τὰ δύο του παιδιά, ἓνα ἀγόρι καὶ ἓνα κορίτσι, τὰ ὁποῖα εἶχαν κρύψει οἱ γείτονές του καὶ γλύτωσαν ἀπὸ τοὺς κομμουνιστές. Τὴν πρεσβυτέρα του ὅμως τὴν συνέλαβαν καὶ τὴν ἐκτέλεσαν.

Ὁ ἱερέας αὐτὸς ὀνομαζόταν παπα-Γιάννης καὶ ἦταν Ἕλληνας. Πῆρε λοιπὸν τὰ δύο του παιδιά καὶ περιπλανώμενος ἀπὸ τόπου εἰς τόπον, πεζοπορώντας τὸ περισσότερο διάστημα, ἦρθε μέσω Ρουμανίας καὶ Βουλγαρίας στὴν Ἑλλάδα, τὴν πατρίδα του. Ἔκανε ἐφημέριος στὴν Μακεδονία καὶ στὴν Θράκη. Ἐπειτα ἦρθε στὸ χωριὸ Σκουτερὰ Ἀργινίου, διότι ἦταν κενὴ ἡ θέση τοῦ ἐφημερίου.

Ὁ παπα-Γιάννης ἦταν ρακένδυτος. Φοροῦσε ἓνα τριμμένο ρᾶσο μὲ ἓνα ξυλάκι ἀπὸ ρεῖκι γιὰ κουμπὶ καὶ στὸ λαϊμὸ του εἶχε κρεμασμένο μὲ μαῦρο κορδόνι ἓνα ξύλινο Σταυρὸ. Ἐμοιαζε μὲ τὸν ἅγιο Κοσμά τὸν Αἰτωλό. Ἀπὸ τὴ νηστεία καὶ τὶς ταλαιπωρίες εἶχε ὄψη ἐξαυλωμένη, ἦταν «πετσὶ καὶ κόκκαλο»...

Τὸ χωριὸ Σκουτερὰ τὸν καλοδέχτηκε καὶ τὸν βοήθησε στίς ἀνάγκες του. Ἔμενε σ' ἓνα δωμάτιο μαζὶ μὲ τὰ δύο του παιδιά, τὸ κορίτσι δέκα ἐτῶν καὶ τὸ ἀγόρι ὀκτῶ ἐτῶν. Ἄρχισε λοιπὸν ὁ παπα-Γιάννης νὰ λειτουργεῖ τακτικά, νὰ κηρύττει τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ, νὰ ἐξομολογεῖ καὶ νὰ κοινωνεῖ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Ἐτρεχε νὰ βοηθᾷ πνευματικὰ ὅπου τὸν καλοῦσαν, νὰ διαβάξει εὐχὲς σὲ ἀρρώστους καὶ σὲ ἄρρωστα κτήνη ποὺ ἀμέσως θεραπεύονταν.

Μία νέα ἀπὸ τὴν Σκουτερὰ εἶχε παντρευτεῖ στὴν Σταμνὰ. Ὅταν ἐπισκέφθηκε τὸ χωριὸ της ἄκουσε νὰ μιλοῦν μὲ θαυμασμὸ γιὰ τὸν παπα-Γιάννη. Τῆς εἶπαν: «Μᾶς ἔστειλαν ἓναν παπά, λὲς καὶ εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός, τόσο καλὸς εἶναι».

Ἡ νέα εἶπε ὅτι στὴν Σταμνὰ ὑπάρχει μία γυναίκα δαιμονισμένη ἐπὶ δεκαοκτῶ χρόνια. Οἱ συγγενεῖς της τὴν γύρισαν σὲ γιατροὺς καὶ σὲ πολλὰ Μοναστήρια, τρέξανε σ' ὅλη τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ δὲν θεραπεύτηκε. Ζήτησε καὶ εἶδε ἡ ἴδια τὸν παπα-Γιάννη καὶ τὸν

παρακάλεσε να θεραπεύσει την πάσχουσα. Αὐτὸς ζήτησε νὰ δῆ πρώτα τὴν δαμονισμένη. Ἔκανε προσευχὴ καὶ ἀποφάσισε νὰ τὴν ἀναλάβει.

Τὴν Κυριακὴ στὸ τέλος τῆς θείας Λειτουργίας ὁ παπα-Γιάννης ἀνακοίνωσε τὰ ἐξῆς στὸ ἐκκλησίασμα: «Χριστιανοί, θὰ κάνουμε ἕναν ἀγώνα γιὰ νὰ θεραπευτῆ ἡ γυναίκα ποὺ τὴν βασανίζει ὁ σατανᾶς ἐπὶ 18 χρόνια. Θὰ νηστεύουμε 40 μέρες, θὰ κάνουμε κάθε μέρα Λειτουργία. Θὰ ἐξομολογηθοῦμε, θὰ κοινωνήσουμε, θὰ φέρνουμε τὴν γυναίκα κάθε βράδυ στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ θὰ κάνουμε Παράκληση. Στὴν Λειτουργία δὲν θὰ τὴν φέρνουμε ἐδῶ, διότι ὁ σατανᾶς θὰ δημιουργήσει φασαρία. Θὰ εἰδοποιήσουμε καὶ τὰ γύρω χωριὰ ὅποιος θέλει νὰ ἔρθει».

Τὴν Κυριακὴ το βράδυ ἔφεραν τὴν γυναίκα στὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ ἁγίου Νικολάου. Μαζεύτηκε πολλὸς κόσμος. Στὴν Ἐκκλησία δὲν ἤθελε νὰ μπεῖ μὲ κανένα τρόπο. Τὸ δαμόνιο μούγκριζε, ἔβριζε τοὺς πάντες, ἀπειλοῦσε ὅτι θὰ κάψει τὴν Ἐκκλησία, καὶ ἔβγαζε ἀφροὺς ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τῆς. Τὴν ἐπίασαν μερικοὶ δυνατοὶ ἄντρες καὶ τὴν ἔφεραν κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν πολυέλαιο.

Ὁ παπα-Γιάννης κρατώντας τὸν Σταυρὸ διάβαζε ἀπὸ τὸ Εὐχολόγιο τοὺς ἐξορκισμοὺς καὶ τὴν σταύρωνε. Κρατοῦσε τὸν Σταυρὸ πάνω στὸ κεφάλι τῆς καὶ ἐκείνη φώναζε: «Πάρε αὐτὸ τὸ σφυρὶ ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι μου, μὲ πληγώνεις· δὲν ὑποφέρω αὐτὸ τὸ σφυρὶ». Τὸ πλῆθος τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἔκαναν μετάνοιες καὶ ἔλεγαν τὸ «Κύριε ἐλέησον».

Ὁ παπα-Γιάννης ἔλεγε στὸν κόσμος: «Χριστιανοί, κάνετε ὑπομονή, θὰ τὸν ἐξοντώσουμε τὸν σατανᾶ».

Εἶχε πει καὶ στὸν Δάσκαλο ὁ παπᾶς νὰ φέρνει ὅλα τα παιδιά τοῦ Σχολείου, ποὺ ἔλεγαν κι αὐτὰ τὸ «Κύριε ἐλέησον» καὶ ἔκαναν μετάνοιες. Αὐτὸ γινόταν κάθε μέρα. Ὁ διάβολος μὲ τὸ στόμα τῆς δαμονισμένης ἔλεγε στὰ παιδιά τοῦ Σχολείου: «Πηγαίνετε ἔξω παιδάκια, σᾶς κοροϊδεύει αὐτὸς ὁ παλιο-παπᾶς ποὺ βρωμᾶνε τὰ χνώτα του ἀπὸ τὴ νηστεία. Μία ὥραία νύφη περνᾶ, πηγαίνετε ἔξω, περμιένη ἢ μαμά σας μὲ μία φέτα καθάριο ψωμὶ μὲ ζάχαρη πάνω στὸ ψωμὶ». Δηλαδή ἔλεγε ὅτι ζήλευαν καὶ ἐπιθυμοῦσαν νὰ ἔχουν τὰ παιδιά τότε, μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ τὰ βγάλει ἔξω.

Ἐρχονταν καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ γύρω χωριὰ κόσμος. Μία μέρα μπῆκε μέσα κάποιος καὶ τοῦ λέγει ὁ διάβολος μὲ τὸ στόμα τῆς δαμονισμένης: «Καλῶς τὸν φίλο μου τὸν τάδε, ἐσὺ εἶσαι ποὺ τὴν τάδε μέρα ἔκανες αὐτὸ καὶ αὐτό, ἦρθες καὶ ἐσὺ νὰ προσευχηθεῖς γιὰ νὰ μὲ βασανίσεις;»

Ὅντως ἦταν ἀλήθεια αὐτὰ καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος αὐτὸς ἔφυγε καταντροπιασμένος, δὲν ἄναψε οὔτε κερί. Τὸ παράδοξο εἶναι ὅτι ἡ δαμονισμένη ἔβλεπε πρὸς τὸ Ἱερό, δὲν γύρισε νὰ δῆ πίσω τῆς, ποὺ ἦταν πολλὸς κόσμος, ἀλλὰ τὸν εἶδε μὲ ἄλλο τρόπο καὶ τοῦ ἀποκάλυψε τὶς ἀνεξομολόγητες ἁμαρτίες του.

Κάποιο βράδυ, ἐνῶ εἶχε μαζευτεῖ πολλὸς κόσμος καὶ ὁ παπα-Γιάννης διάβαζε τὴν δαμονισμένη, εἶπε κάποιος στὸν διπλανό του: «Κάνε καλὰ τὸν σταυρό σου. Σταυρὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ κάνεις, λὲς καὶ παίζεις μαντολίνο». Ἀκούστηκε τότε ἡ φωνὴ τῆς δαμονισμένης νὰ λέει: «Ἄφησε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, καλὰ κάνει τὸν σταυρό του».

Ἡ δαμονισμένη φώναζε κάποτε: «Στείλτε νὰ φέρετε τὸν φίλο μου τὸν τάδε παπᾶ». Ἦταν ἕνας παπᾶς σὲ κάποιον χωριὸ ποὺ ἡ ζωὴ του δὲν ἦταν καλὴ. Αὐτὸς ὁ παπᾶς δὲν τόλμησε νὰ ἔρθει στὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Ὁ ἀγώνας τοῦ παπα-Γιάννη συνεχίστηκε γιὰ νὰ βγάλει τὸ δαμόνιο ἀπὸ τὴν γυναίκα. Σ' αὐτὸ τὸ διάστημα πληροφορήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ ἴδιο τὸ δαμόνιο ποὺ ἦταν μέσα στὴν γυναίκα, ὅτι εἶναι ὁ Ἐωσφόρος, ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τῶν δαμόνων. Μπῆκε μέσα τῆς κατὰ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ τηγάνιζε ψάρια, ἐπειδὴ ὁ ἀδελφός τῆς, ἀγανακτισμένος ἀπὸ κάποια ἀφορμὴ, τῆς εἶπε νὰ μπεῖ ὁ διάβολος μέσα τῆς. Ἀπὸ ἐκείνη τὴν στιγμή δαμονίστηκε ἡ γυναίκα. (Γι' αὐτὸ ποτὲ δὲν πρέπει νὰ στέλνουμε στὸν «ἔξαποδῶ» τοὺς ἄλλους, καὶ μάλιστα τὴν γυναίκα μας καὶ τὰ παιδιά μας, εἶναι πολὺ μεγάλη ἁμαρτία!)

Ὁ ἀγώνας τώρα γιὰ τὸν παπα-Γιάννη ἦταν σκληρός. Ὁ διάβολος τὸν ἔβριζε, τὸν ἀπειλοῦσε λέγοντας ὅτι θὰ γκρεμίσει τὴν Ἐκκλησία, θὰ κάψει τὸ χωριό, «θὰ βγῶ ἀπ' αὐτὴ τὴν σκύλα», ἔλεγε, «καὶ θὰ μπῶ στὴν κόρη καὶ στὸν γιό σου».

Ὁ παπα-Γιάννης τοῦ ἀπαντοῦσε: «Δὲν ἔχεις δικαίωμα νὰ μπεῖς πουθενά, μόνο στὴν ἄβυσσο ἔχεις δικαίωμα νὰ πᾶς».

Μετὰ ἀπὸ ἕνα μῆνα, ἕνα βράδυ, ἀφοῦ τελείωσε ἡ Παράκληση καὶ ἔφυγε ὁ κόσμος μαζί καὶ ἡ δαμονισμένη, ὁ παπα-Γιάννης ἔκλεισε τὴν πόρτα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, γονάτισε μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ προσεύχεται μὲ δάκρυα γιὰ νὰ ἐλευθερωθεῖ ἡ βασανισμένη ψυχὴ ἀπὸ τὸ δαμόνιο.

Ἀπὸ τὶς ὀκτῶ τὸ βράδυ μέχρι τὶς τρεῖς το πρωὶ προσευχόταν συνεχῶς. Ἀνησύχησαν οἱ χωριανοὶ γιὰ τὸν παπα-Γιάννη ποὺ δὲν ἐπέστρεψε σπίτι του, κοντὰ στὰ



παιδιά του πού τὸν περιέμεναν. Πήγαν μαζί με τὰ παιδιά του καὶ τὸν βρῆκαν γονατιστὸ νὰ προσεύχεται. Ἡ κόρη του πού ἤξερε ἀπὸ ἄλλες φορές, εἶπε: «Ἀφήστε τον νὰ προσευχηθεῖ». Ὅταν συνήλθε ὁ παπα-Γιάννης ἀπὸ τὴν προσευχὴ πού εἶχε ἀπορροφηθεῖ, πῆγε στὸ σπίτι του νὰ κοιμηθεῖ. Στὸν ὕπνο του ἄκουσε φωνὴ πού τοῦ εἶπε: «Παπα-Γιάννη, ἡ γυναῖκα μετὰ τὶς τριάντα ἐννιά μέρες, ἀφοῦ περάσει ἢ 12<sup>η</sup> ὥρα, τὰ μεσάνυχτα, θὰ ἐλευθερωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν σατανᾶ».

Τὴν τελευταία ἡμέρα εἶπε ὁ σατανᾶς στὸν παπα-Γιάννη: «Παπα-Γιάννη με ἐξόντωσε». Καὶ πράγματι τὴν 40<sup>η</sup> ἡμέρα βγήκε ἀπὸ τὴν γυναῖκα ἡ ὁποία ἐλευθερώθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ μαρτύριο καὶ ἔζησε ἔκτοτε ὑγιῆς πολλὰ χρόνια.

Ὁ παπα-Γιάννης στὸ δωμάτιο πού κοιμόταν με τὰ παιδιά του, δὲν εἶχε σχεδὸν τίποτε ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ δύο «τσόλια» (σκεπάσματα, κουβέρτες), τὰ ὁποῖα εἶχαν δώσει οἱ γυναῖκες τοῦ χωριοῦ. Στὸ ἓνα κοιμόνταν τὰ παιδιά του καὶ στὸ ἄλλο αὐτός. Ἔστρωνε τὸ μισὸ κάτω στὸ πάτωμα καὶ μετὰ τὸ ἄλλο μισὸ σκεπαζόταν. Εἶχε μεγάλη πίστη στὸν παντοδύναμο Κύριο. Αἰσθανόταν ὅτι ἡ προσευχὴ του εἰσακούεται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ γι' αὐτὸ γίνονται θαύματα. Ἔλεγε: «Ὅταν ζητήσω ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ νὰ ἰσοπεδώσῃ τὸ βουνὸ διὰ τῆς προσευχῆς, τῆς νηστείας καὶ τῆς ἐλεημοσύνης, θὰ ἰσοπεδωθεῖ. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὅταν τηρήσει αὐτὰ τὰ τρία εἶναι ἀπὸ τώρα στὸν Παράδεισο».

Εἶχε πολὺ μεγάλη φτώχεια ὁ παπα-Γιάννης γιατί ὅσα τοῦ ἔδιναν τὰ μοίραζε ἐλεημοσύνη. Κάποιος τὸ πρῶτο Πάσχα πού ἔκανε στὸ χωριό, τοῦ χάρισε μία γίδα μετὰ τὸ μικρὸ της κατσικάκι. Τὸ κατσικάκι νὰ τὸ σφάξει γιὰ νὰ γιορτάσῃ τὸ Πάσχα, καὶ τὴν γίδα νὰ τὴν ἔχει νὰ πίνουν λίγο γάλα, ὅταν δὲν ἔχει νηστεία. Ὁ παπα-Γιάννης δὲν κράτησε τὴν γίδα καὶ τὸ κατσικάκι. Τα πούλησε καὶ μετὰ τὰ χρήματα ἀγόρασε ροῦχα γιὰ τὰ ὄρφανά του χωριοῦ, νὰ χαροῦν κι αὐτὰ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως.

Ἦταν ἐπίσης μεγάλος νηστευτής. Τὴν Σαρακοστή νήστευε ἐξήντα μέρες ἀπὸ λάδι, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ στὸ χωριὸ τὴν Σαρακοστή τὴν ἔλεγαν Ἐξηντάρρα.

Ὁ παπα-Γιάννης ἓνα βράδυ εἶδε στὸν ὕπνο τοῦ ἓνα σπίτι σὲ μία ἄγνωστη τοποθεσία καὶ τὸν νοικοκύρη τοῦ σπιτιοῦ νὰ τρώγει ἓνα ψόφιο σκυλί. Ρώτησε πού βρίσκεται αὐτὸ τὸ σπίτι μετὰ τὰ συγκεκριμένα χαρακτηριστικὰ καὶ τὸν κατατόπισαν. Πῆγε ὁ παπα-Γιάννης με συνοδεία, βρῆκε τὸ σπίτι, χτύπησε τὴν πόρτα καὶ τοῦ ἀνοιξε ἡ γυναῖκα.

Μαζί της ἦταν καὶ τὸ παιδί της. Ὁ ἄνδρας της ἔλειπε στὰ κτήματα. Πάντως ὅταν τὸν εἰδοποίησαν ἤρθε τρέχοντας, πλύθηκε, τοῦ ἔβαλε ἐδαφιαία μετάνοια καὶ τοῦ φίλησε τὸ χέρι. Εἶχε ἀκούσει γιὰ τὴν ἀγιότητα τοῦ παπα-Γιάννη καὶ τὴν θεραπεία τῆς δαιμονισμέ-

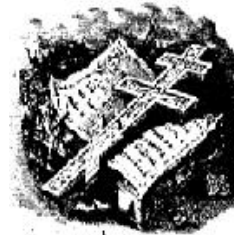
νης, ἀλλὰ δὲν τολμοῦσε νὰ τὸν συναντήσῃ, διότι ἡ συνειδησὴ του ἦταν βεβαρημένη. Στὴν ἐκκλησία δὲν πήγαινε, κρεοφαγοῦσε στὶς νηστείες, βλασφημοῦσε καὶ μετὰ τὴν γυναῖκα του ζοῦσε παράνομα γιατί ἦταν ἀστεφάνωτοι. Εἶχε ὅμως καλὴ διάθεση. Ζήτησε καὶ ἐξομολογήθηκε ἀμέσως. Μετὰ στεφανώθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν παπα-Γιάννη καὶ ἔζησε ὡς καλὸς Χριστιανός.

Ὁ παπα-Γιάννης, ὁ χαριτωμένος λειτουργὸς τοῦ Ὑψίστου μετὰ τὴν ἀσκητικὴν του ζωὴν, τὴν ἀκτημοσύνην του καὶ τὴν ἀδιάλειπτην προσευχὴν, εἶχε γίνῃ γνωστὸς σ' ὅλην τὴν γύρω περιοχὴν. Ἔρχονταν οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ τὸν συμβουλευτοῦν καὶ νὰ τοὺς διαβάσει εὐχὴν νὰ γίνουν καλά. Τὸν θεωροῦσαν μεγάλο Προφήτη καὶ θαυματουργό. Ἔρχονταν ἐπίσης ἄγνωστοι ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ διάφορα μέρη καὶ αὐτὸς ἔλεγε: «Ἐσὺ εἶσαι ὁ τάδε καὶ ἦρθες ἐδῶ γι' αὐτὸ καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγον».

Διηγεῖται κάποιος ἀπὸ τὴν Σκουτερὰ πού στὸ πατρικὸν τοῦ σπίτι ἔμενε ὁ παπα-Γιάννης, ὅτι εἶχε πεῖ κάποτε: «Μία ἡμέρα θὰ ἀποκαλυφθεῖ τὸ λείψανον ἑνὸς Ἁγίου στὸ μοναστήρι τῆς Παναγίας τῆς Λυκουρσιωτίσσης καὶ ὑστέρᾳ τοῦ Μοναστηρίου θὰ πάρει μεγάλη φήμη».

Ἀλλὰ τὸ χωριὸν τοῦ πού τὸν λάτρευε δὲν τὸν χάριξε πολὺ, γιατί τὸν πῆραν γιὰ ἐφημέριον στὸ χωριὸν Καινούργιον. Μετὰ τὸν ζήτησαν καὶ τὸν πῆραν στὴν Πελοπόννησον. Ἐκτοτε ἀγνοοῦνται τὰ ἔχνη του καὶ τώρα σίγουρα θὰ ἔχει κοιμηθεῖ.

Αἰωνία του ἡ μνήμη. Τὴν εὐχὴν του νὰ ἔχουμε. Ἀμήν.



**Ἔ**χουμε οικονομικὸ πρόβλημα γιατί εἴμαστε ἄπληστοι. Ἄν ἡμεθα ὀλιγαρκεῖς, δὲν θὰ ὑπῆρχε τέτοιο πρόβλημα. Ἡ πλεονεξία δημιουργεῖ τὸ οικονομικὸ ἀδιέξοδο. Δὲν μᾶς ἀρκοῦν αὐτὰ πού ἔχουμε. Θέλουμε ὅλο καὶ περισσότερα. Ποιὰ ἄλλη καλύτερη λύσις τοῦ οικονομικοῦ προβλήματος ὑπάρχει, ἀπὸ τὴν ὀλιγαρκεία; Κυνηγᾶμε τὸ περισσότερον. Νὰ μάθουμε νὰ εἴμαστε ὀλιγαρκεῖς. Δύο μέτρα χῶμα εἶναι ἡ κατάληξις ὅλων μας. Καὶ ἂν εἶναι κάποιος πλούσιος καὶ δυνάστης καὶ μεγάλος καὶ τρανός, τί θὰ κερδίσῃ παραπάνω ἀπὸ δύο μέτρα χῶμα; Τὸ πολὺ-πολύ, νὰ τοῦ κάνουν ἓνα ὠραῖο τάφο. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ κέρδος του! Ἄν ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὑπήκουαν σὲ αὐτὸ πού λέγει ὁ Ἄπ. Παῦλος καὶ ἤρχοῦντο στὰ ἀπολύτως ἀπαραίτητα καὶ δὲν ἤθελαν ἓνα σωρὸ περιττά, δὲν θὰ ὑπῆρχε οικονομικὸ πρόβλημα.

**Πρ. Ἐπιφάνιος Θεοδωρόπουλος (+1989)**



## Διδάγματα από την Κοίμηση τῆς Θεοτόκου

Τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης Ἀγιοσύνη Καντιώτου (+2010), ἐκφωνήθηκε στήν Ἀθήνα, πρό τοῦ 1967, σέ ἀγρυπνία τήν παραμονή τῆς ἑορτῆς.

**Π**οιά διδάγματα, ἀγαπητοί μου, ἀποκομίζουμε ἀπό τήν ἑορτή τῆς Κοιμήσεως; Ὅσα θά σᾶς πῶ, τὰ ἀντλοῦμε ὄχι ἀπό τήν Καινή Διαθήκη, ἀλλ' ἀπό τήν ἄλλη πηγὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, τὴν Ἱερὰ Παράδοσι. Τί λέει λοιπὸν ἡ Ἱερὰ Παράδοσις γιὰ τὴν Κοίμηση τῆς Θεοτόκου;

Μετὰ τὴν ἀνάληψη τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ Παναγία ζοῦσε μὲ τὶς ἀναμνήσεις τοῦ μονογενοῦς Υἱοῦ της, καὶ εἶχε συνήθεια νὰ ἐπισκέπτεται τὸν τόπο τῆς προσευχῆς Του, τὴ Γεθσημανῆ. Πολλὲς φορὲς πῆγε ἐκεῖ. Ἀλλὰ

κάποια μέρα πῆγε ἐκεῖ γιὰ τελευταία φορὰ. Τότε συνέβη κάτι ἔκτακτο. Καὶ ἄς μὴν τὸ πιστεύουν οἱ ἄπιστοι, ἐμεῖς πιστεύουμε. Στὸ πέρας τῆς Θεοτόκου, καὶ μάλιστα ὅταν γονάτισε νὰ προσευχηθεῖ, τὰ δέντρα ἔγειραν, λύγισαν τὶς κορυφές των πρὸς τὰ κάτω. Σὰν νὰ ἔκαναν μετάνοια νὰ τὴν προσκυνήσουν. Καί, ὅπως στὸν Εὐαγγελισμό, ἦρθε



πάλι ὁ ἀρχάγγελος Γαβριήλ. Κρατοῦσε ἓνα κλάδο φοίνικος, τὸ σύμβολο νίκης κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου. Χαιρέτισε τὴν Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο καὶ τὴν εἰδοποίησε, ὅτι σὲ λίγο φεύγει πλέον ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ γιὰ νὰ συναντήσῃ τὸν Υἱό της.

Γεμάτη ἱερὰ συγκίνηση, ἡ Θεοτόκος κατέβηκε ἀπὸ τὸ λόφο τῆς Γεθσημανῆ καὶ ἦλθε στὸ φτωχικὸ της σπίτι. Γνωρίζοντας ὅτι ἔφθασε τὸ τέλος τῆς ἐπιγείου ζωῆς της σκούπισε, ὅπως λέει ἡ Ἱερὰ Παράδοσις, καὶ εὐτρέπισε μὲ τὰ χέρια της τὸν οἰκίσκο, ἔτοιμη νὰ ὑποδεχθεῖ τὸν Κύριο, ποὺ ἐρχόταν νὰ τὴν παραλάβει. Κάλεσε καὶ δύο γειτόνισσές της, χῆρες μὲ ὄρφανά, καὶ τοὺς μοίρασε τὸν φτωχικὸ της ἱματισμό. Μετὰ ἀνήγγειλε στὸ περιβάλλον της, ὅτι σὲ τρεῖς ἡμέρες ἀπέρχεται ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ. Τέλος ξάπλωσε στὴν κλίνη της, σταύρωσε τὰ ἅγια χέρια της, καὶ βυθίστηκε σὲ προσευχή.

Τὸ ὅτι ἡ Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκος προετοιμάστηκε γιὰ τὸν θάνατό της πόσο μᾶς διδάσκει!

Εἶναι εὐλογία τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ εἰδοποιῶνται γιὰ τὸ θάνατό τους. Ὅταν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ζοῦσαν μὲ ἀφοσίωση στὸ Θεό, προαισθάνονταν τὸ θάνατό τους. Καὶ ὅπως αὐτὸς ποὺ πρόκειται νὰ ταξιδέψῃ ἐτοιμάζεται ἀπὸ μέρες, ἔτσι καὶ οἱ εὐλαβεῖς ψυχὲς προετοιμάζονται γιὰ τὸ αἰώνιο ταξίδι.

Εἶναι κακὸ ὁ αἰφνίδιος θάνατος. Ἀκούσατε τί λέει ἡ Ἐκκλησία; Νὰ μᾶς φυλάξῃ ὁ Θεὸς ἀπὸ πολλὰ δεινὰ. Ποιά δεινὰ; «Ἀπὸ λοιμοῦ, λιμοῦ, σεισμοῦ...» καὶ «... ἀπὸ αἰφνιδίου θανάτου». Γιατί εἶναι κακὸ; Διότι δὲν δίνει στὸν ἄνθρωπο οὔτε λεπτό. Μοιάζει μὲ τὸ γεράκι. Οἱ κότες βοσκοῦν στὸ γρασίδι, καὶ νομίζουν ὅτι θὰ ἐπιστρέψουν στὸ κοττέτσι. Ἄμ' δὲν θὰ ἐπιστρέψουν. Ἀπὸ πάνω, ξαφνικά, τὸ γεράκι πέφτει μὲ ὀρμὴ κι ἀρπάξει τὴν ὀρνιθα. Σὰν γεράκι καὶ ὁ θάνατος φτερου-

γίζει ὀρμητικὸς καὶ πέφτει στὸ δρόμο, στὸ πεζοδρόμιο, στὸ ἀεροπλάνο, στὸ γραφεῖο..., ὅπου νὰ ἔναι. Ἀρπάξει τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ τοῦ λέει, Ὅλα ἔδω!... δὲν τὸν ἀφήνει νὰ πεῖ τὸ «Μνήσθητί μου...».

Ἀλλὰ προσέξτε κάτι ἀκόμη. Πρέπει ὁ Χριστιανὸς, προαισθανόμενος τὸ θάνατό του, νὰ κάνει καὶ τοῦτο. Βλέπετε, ὅτι μεγά-

λωσες πλέον, τὰ χιόνια ἔπεσαν πάνω στὸ κεφάλι σου. Ο ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς ἔλεγε: «Τὰ σπαρτά, ἅμα ἀσπρίζουνε, τί περιμένουν; Περιμένουν τὸ δρεπάνι». Κι ὅταν ἀσπρίζουν τὰ μαλλιά, τί περιμένουμε, ἀδέλφια μου; Τὸ δρεπάνι τοῦ ἀρχαγγέλου. Προτοῦ λοιπὸν φτάσει τὸ δρεπάνι, οἱ μητέρες καὶ οἱ πατέρες ποὺ ἔχουν παιδιά νὰ τακτοποιήσουν τὰ τοῦ σπιτιοῦ των. Ὅ,τι ἔχουν, νὰ τὰ μοιράσουν μὲ δικαιοσύνη στὰ παιδιά τους. Νὰ μὴν ἀφήσουν ἐκκρεμότητες. Ἄν ἀγαπᾶτε τὰ παιδιά σας, μιμηθεῖτε τὸ παράδειγμα τῆς ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου, ποὺ ζωντανὴ μοίρασε ὅ,τι εἶχε. Διότι μετὰ τὸ θάνατό σας, ἐὰν ἀφήσετε ἐκκρεμότητες, τὰ παιδιά σας θὰ τρέχουν στὰ δικαστήρια!

Ἀκόμη ἡ ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκος μᾶς διδάσκει καὶ τοῦτο. Τὴν ἐλεημοσύνη μὴν τὴν κάνετε μετὰ θάνατον. Ὅσο ζεῖτε, ὅσο τὰ χέρια αὐτὰ μποροῦν καὶ κινοῦνται καὶ μπαίνουν στὸ πορτοφόλι, τότε ἡ ἐλεημοσύνη ἔχει μεγάλη ἀξία. Διότι μετὰ θάνατον δὲν λέγεται πλέον ἐλεημοσύνη· εἶναι χρήματα ποὺ δὲν ὀφείλονται σ'

έσας. Άκοϋς, ότι ένα φιλανθρωπικό ίδρυμα τὸ ἔκτισαν μετὰ θάνατον. Άπήλυσαν δηλαδή τὰ χρήματά τους ἐν ζωῇ, τὰ γλέντησαν ὅσο ζοῦσαν, καὶ μετὰ τὸ θάνατο πλέον κάνουν τὴν ἐλεημοσύνη. Γι' αὐτὸ νὰ κάνουμε τὴν ἐλεημοσύνη ὅπως τὴν ἔκανε ἡ Παναγία.

Άλλὰ προχωροῦμε. Ἦλθε καὶ γιὰ τὴ Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ θάνατος. Ἡ ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκος εἶναι πλέον τώρα νεκρὰ ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης της. Νεκρὰ ἐκεῖνη, πὸν ἐγέννησε τὸν ἀρχηγὸ τῆς ζωῆς. Ποιοὶ τώρα θὰ τὴν κηδεύσουν; Τὰ παιδιά κηδεύουν τοὺς γονεῖς. Άλλ' ἐκεῖνη εἶχε παιδιά; Εἶχε. Τί παιδιά; Κατὰ σάρκα ἕνα καὶ μόνο Υἱὸν εἶχε, τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, καὶ δὲν παραδεχόμεθα τὴν βέβηλο καὶ ἀνίερο σκέψη τῶν αἰρετικῶν ὅτι εἶχε κι ἄλλα τέκνα. Άλλ' ἐνῶ δὲν εἶχε κατὰ σάρκα τέκνα, εἶχε πνευματικούς υἱούς. Καὶ πνευματικά της παιδιά ἦταν οἱ δώδεκα ἀπόστολοι.

Ποῦ ἦταν ὅμως κατὰ τὴν κοίμησή της οἱ ἀπόστολοι; Ἔλειπαν μακριά. Ὁ Πέτρος στὴ Ρώμη, ὁ Παῦλος πρὸς τὴ Μακεδονία, ὁ Ἄνδρέας στὴν Πάτρα, ὁ Θωμᾶς στὴς Ἰνδίες, ὁ Ἰωάννης στὴν Ἐφεσο... Ἔλειπαν ὅλοι στὴν διασπορά. Πῶς νὰ τοὺς εἰδοποιήσουν; Αὐτὸ ἀπορεῖτε; Πιστεύετε. Καὶ ἐὰν πιστεύετε, τότε θὰ πιστεύσετε καὶ αὐτὸ πὸν ἔγινε στὴν κοίμησι τῆς Θεοτόκου. Φτερωτοὶ ἄγγελοι πέταξαν σ' ὅλα τὰ σημεῖα τῆς ὑδρογείου καὶ ἔσπευσαν νὰ εἰδοποιήσουν τοὺς ἀποστόλους.

Καὶ νά. Ἐπάνω στὸν οὐρανὸ, σὰν τὰ περιστέρια, σὲ φωτεινὲς νεφέλες ὡς ἐπὶ ἵππων, νὰ καὶ ἔρχεται ὁ Πέτρος, νὰ καὶ ἔρχεται ὁ Παῦλος, ὁ Ἰωάννης καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ἀπόστολοι. Ἦρθαν κοντὰ της. Καὶ πάνω στὴν Παράδοσι αὐτὴ στηρίζεται τὸ γλυκύτατο καὶ ὠραιότατο ἐκεῖνο ἄσμα, «*Ἀπόστολοι ἐκ περάτων συναθροισθέντες ἐνθάδε...*».

Ναί, μαζεύτηκαν οἱ ἀπόστολοι. Καὶ τί μᾶς διδάσκει αὐτό; Ὅτι ὅταν πεθαίνει κάποιος γνωστός μας, πρέπει νὰ διακόπτουμε κάθε ἐργασία. Τὸ πρῶτο καθήκον εἶναι νὰ πᾶμε στὸ νεκρὸ, γιὰ νὰ ἐκπληρώσουμε ἕνα χρέος ἱερό. Πρῶτον μὲν πρὸς ἐκεῖνον πὸν ἔφυγε. Ἐπειτα πρὸς τοὺς συγγενεῖς, πὸν παρηγοροῦνται μὲ τὴν παρουσία μας. Πρὸ παντὸς ὅμως πρὸς τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας νὰ τοῦ ὑπενθυμίσουμε δηλαδή τὴν αἰωνιότητα. Ὅταν βλέπεις νεκρὸ αὐτὸν πὸν μέχρι χθὲς ἦταν μαζί σου, αὐτὸ σοῦ φωνάζει: «*Ματαιότης ματαιότητων, τὰ πάντα ματαιότης*» (Ἐκκλ. 1:2). Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ἔλεγε: «Ὅταν πεθαίνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος, νὰ μὴ τὸν

θάβετε ἀμέσως, ὄχι νὰ τὸν κρατᾶτε εἰκοσιτέσσερις ὧρες, καὶ νὰ μαζεύετε γύρω του, νὰ τὸν βλέπετε καὶ νὰ προσεύχεσθε· γιατί καλύτερος ἱεροκήρυκας ἀπὸ τὸ νεκρὸ δὲν ὑπάρχει.»

Μαζεύτηκανε, λοιπὸν, οἱ ἀπόστολοι. Κρατοῦσαν τὸ φέρετρο καὶ τὸ μετέφεραν ἐκτὸς τῆς πόλεως. Ἐκεῖνη ὅμως τὴ στιγμή τί συνέβη; Μία ὄχι, ἕνας Ἐβραῖος, ἄπλωσε τὸ βρωμερὸ του χέρι στὸ φέρετρο. Άλλ' ἀμέσως, ἀστραπιαίως, κόπηκε τὸ χέρι του κ' ἔμεινε ἐκεῖ κρεμασμένο, ὅπως φαίνεται στὶς εἰκόνες.

Αὐτὸ εἶναι, ἀδελφοί, μὲ λίγες λέξεις τὸ ἱστορικὸ τῆς ἐορτῆς τῆς Κοιμήσεως. Καὶ ἀκούγεται ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ νὰ μᾶς λέει: Μανάδες, ἐλάτε κοντὰ στὸ Πρότυπο τῶν μητέρων. Παιδιά καὶ πρὸ παντὸς τὰ ὄρφανά, ἐλάτε κοντὰ στὴ γλυκεῖα Μάνα τοῦ κόσμου. Ὅσοι εἶστε παρθένοι, ἐλάτε κοντὰ στὴν Παρθένο, καὶ φυλάξτε «*τὴν ὠραιότητα τῆς παρθενίας*». Ὅσοι εἶστε ἀγράμματοι, ἐλάτε στὴν Παναγία γιὰ νὰ μάθετε τὴ μεγαλύτερη φιλοσοφία. Ὅσοι εἶστε σοφοί, ἐλάτε στὴν Παναγία γιὰ νὰ μάθετε, ὅτι σοφία εἶναι ἡ ταπείνωση. Ὅσοι εἴμεθα ἀμαρτωλοὶ, ἄς ἔλθουμε στὴν Θεοτόκο, γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ὀδηγήσει κοντὰ στὸ Χριστό. Ἡ Κοίμησις αὐτὰ μᾶς διδάσκει.

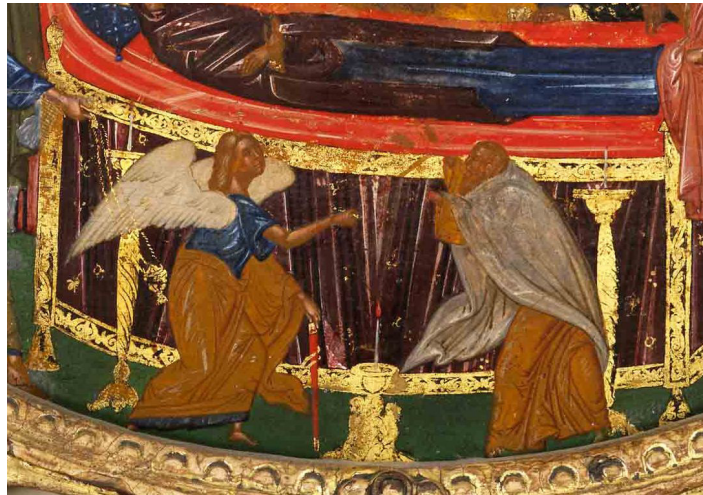
Τὸ σπουδαιότερο ὅμως μάθημα εἶναι, ὅτι ὁ θάνατος ἄλλαξε ὄνομα. Ἄφ' ὅτου σταυρώθηκε ὁ Χριστός, ὁ θάνατος δὲν

ἐμπνέει πλέον φόβο, ὅπως πρὶν. Στὸ ἐξῆς δὲν λέμε, ὅπως πρὸ Χριστοῦ, ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Σωκράτους, τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους, τοῦ Πλάτωνος. Άλλὰ τί λέμε; Θάνατος ἴσον κοίμησις. Γι' αὐτὸ δὲν λέμε, ὁ «θάνατος τῆς Θεοτόκου», ἀλλὰ λέμε, ἡ «Κοίμησις τῆς Θεοτόκου». Ἄν πιστεύεις στὸ Χριστό, πὸν εἶπε «*Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ*» (Ἰωάν. 11,25), ὁ θάνατος εἶναι κοίμησις· ὄχι, δὲν εἶναι ψέμα. Οἱ νεκροὶ θ' ἀναστηθοῦν. Γι' αὐτὸ τὰ νεκροταφεῖα πρέπει νὰ λέγωνται κοιμητήρια.

Αὐτὰ μᾶς διδάσκει ἡ ἐορτή. Λοιπὸν ἄς προετοιμάσουμε κ' ἐμεῖς τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας.

† † †

*Δεῦτε ἀνυμνήσωμεν λαοί, τὴν Παναγίαν Παρθένον ἁγνήν, ἐξ ἧς ἀρρήτως προῆλθε, σαρκωθεὶς ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Πατρὸς, κράζοντες καὶ λέγοντες, Εὐλογημένη σὺ ἐν γυναιξί, Μακαρία ἡ γαστήρ, ἡ χωρήσασα Χριστόν, Αὐτοῦ ταῖς ἁγίαις χερσί, τὴν ψυχὴν παραθεμένη, πρέσβευε ἄχραντε, σωθῆναι τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν.*



## Ἰωάννης Καποδίστριας: Τὸ Ἄγνὸ Πρότυπο κάθε Χριστιανοῦ Ἠγέτη (1776-1831)

Τοῦ π. Ἐμμανουήλ Ἀνδρέου Γιαννοῦλη, πρωτο-πρεσβυτέρου,  
πτυχ. Νομικῆς καὶ Θεολογίας Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν.



Ἡ Καποδίστριας εἶναι τὸ τέλειον παράδειγμα πολιτικοῦ ἀνδρὸς ὁ ὁποῖος ἀκολούθησε ἐκούσια καὶ συνειδητὰ στὴ ζωὴ του τὴν ὁδὸ τῆς θυσίας καὶ τῆς αὐταπαρνήσεως, ἀρετὲς ἀπόλυτα συμβατὲς μὲ τὴ Χριστιανικὴ διδασκαλία ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὴν ἰδέα τοῦ ἐθελοντισμοῦ.

Γεννήθηκε στὴν Κέρκυρα τὸ 1776. Ὑπῆρξε τὸ ἕκτο παιδί εὐσεβοῦς πολύτεκνης

οἰκογένειας, δύο μάλιστα ἀπὸ τὶς ἀδερφές του ἔγιναν μοναχές. Ὁ Καποδίστριας ὑπῆρξε μία συγκροτημένη καὶ ὀλοκληρωμένη προσωπικότητα. Ἐβίωσε τὴν Ὀρθόδοξη πίστη καὶ ὅλες του οἱ ἐνέργειες διαπνέονταν ἀπὸ τὶς ἠθικὲς ἀρχές καὶ τὰ φιλάδελφα αἰσθήματά του. Θαυμάζουμε τὴν ἀκεραιότητα τοῦ χαρακτήρα του καὶ μέσα ἀπὸ μία ἐπιστολὴ πρὸς τὸν πατέρα του. Ἐγραφε: «Εἶμαι εὐχαριστημένος... Ἀντιστάθηκα στὶς πιδὲ μεγάλες καὶ γοητευτικὲς προτάσεις... Μοῦ προσφέρθηκαν περισσότερες ἀπὸ μία ὠραῖες ἀποκαταστάσεις. Τὶς ἀρνήθηκα χωρὶς δυσαρέσκειαν. Θὰ εἶχα γίνεαι κροῖσος στὰ πλούτη, ἀλλὰ στοὺς ἀντίποδες. Θὰ εἶχα προχωρήσει κατὰ χίλια βήματα στὴ σταδιοδρομία μου, ἀλλὰ ἔξω ἀπὸ τὶς ἀρχές μου, ἀπὸ τὴν ἀτμόσφαιρά μας. Δὲν τὸ θέλησα καὶ οὔτε θὰ τὸ θελήσω ποτέ... Ἐλπίζω στὴ Θεϊκὴ προστασία».

Σὲ ὅλες τὶς φάσεις τῆς ζωῆς του παρέμεινε πάντα σταθερὸς στὶς οἰκογενειακὲς ἀρχές καὶ στὴν Ὀρθόδοξη πίστη του. Τὸ Πάσχα 1811 ἔγραψε στὸν πατέρα του: «Μεθαύριο, Μεγάλῃ Πέμπτῃ, θὰ ἐκκληρώσω τὰ Χριστιανικά μου καθήκοντα. Θὰ κοινωνήσω...».

Στὸ Συνέδριο τῆς Βιέννης τὸ 1815, ἐνῶ ὅλοι διασκέδαζαν, ἐκεῖνος ζοῦσε λιτὰ καὶ ὑπεύθυνα: «Οἱ Αὐτοκράτορες χορεύουν, οἱ Βασιλεῖς χορεύουν, ὁ Μέττερνιχ χορεύει, ὁ Καστελρέϊ χορεύει, ὅλος ὁ κόσμος χορεύει», γράφει ἐφημερίδα τῆς ἐποχῆς. Μόνον ὁ Καποδίστριας δὲν χορεύει. Σοβαρὸς καὶ μετρημένος ξενυχτοῦσε πάνω στὰ διπλωματικά του ἔγγραφα, σκεπτόμενος μὲ ποιὸν τρόπο θὰ μπορούσε νὰ βοηθήσει τὴ σκλαβωμένη πατρίδα του. Ἦταν τότε ποὺ προέτρεψε τὸν τσάρο Ἀλέξανδρο νὰ ἠγηθεῖ μιᾶς Συνομοσπονδίας Ὀρθοδόξων κρατῶν, στὰ ὁποῖα θὰ συγκαταλεγόταν βέβαια καὶ ἡ ὑπόδουλη τότε Ἑλλάδα, μὲ σκοπὸ τὴν

ἀποτίναξη τοῦ ὀθωμανικοῦ ζυγοῦ καὶ τὴν ὁμαλὴ ἐνσωμάτωσή της σὲ μία μεγάλη εὐρωπαϊκὴ οἰκογένεια «γύρω ἀπὸ μίαν κοινὴν Πατρίδα, τὴν Ἠνωμένην Εὐρώπην», ὅπως ἔγραψε. Αὐτὸ τὸ σχῆμα θὰ βασιζόταν πάνω στὶς Χριστιανικὲς ἀρχές τῆς ἀλληλεγγύης καὶ τῆς ἰσότητος καὶ θὰ περιελάμβανε καὶ τὰ μικρότερα κράτη, μὲ τὴν κατάθεση ἑνὸς ὑπομνήματος γιὰ μία πανευρωπαϊκὴ συνεργασία καὶ ἐνότητα.

Ἔτσι ὁ Καποδίστριας ἀναδεικνύεται ὡς ὁ **πρῶτος ὄραματιστὴς μιᾶς ἐνωμένης Χριστιανικῆς Εὐρώπης**. Τὸ ὄραμα τῆς ἐνωμένης Εὐρώπης πραγματοποιήθηκε, δυστυχῶς ὅμως ἡ Εὐρώπη σήμερα τείνει νὰ ἀρνηθεῖ τὴ Χριστιανικὴ καταγωγὴ της καὶ παρατηρεῖται μία μεγάλη ἀνισότητα ἀνάμεσα στὶς χώρες τοῦ Βορρᾶ καὶ τοῦ Νότου της...

Ὁ Καποδίστριας μόχθησε ὡσαύτως γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴ ἀναβάθμιση τῆς νεολαίας. Πίστευε πὼς ἡ ἀνόρθωση τοῦ Γένους συνδεόταν ἄμεσα μὲ τὴ μόρφωση τῶν Ἑλληνοπαίδων: «Χωρὶς πίστιν εἰς τὸν Θεόν, ἀγάπην εἰς τὴν Πατρίδα καὶ ἐκμάθησιν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσης, τὰ Ἑλληνοπούλα θὰ χαθοῦν στὶς ξένες χώρες. Φροντίστε, λοιπόν, νὰ διατηρεῖτε ἄσβεστες στὶς ψυχῆς τῶν μαθητῶν σας αὐτὲς τὶς ὑψιστὲς ἀξίες», ἔγραφε τότε πρὸς τοὺς διδασκάλους τοῦ ἐξωτερικοῦ. Μὲ τὴν συνεργασία τοῦ λογίου ἀρχιμανδρῆ Ἀνθίμου Γαζῆ ἴδρυσεν τὴ «Φιλόμουσον Ἐταιρείαν τῆς Βιέννης», μὲ σκοπὸ τὴ μόρφωση τῶν Ἑλληνοπαίδων. Διέθεσε μάλιστα σημαντικὰ ποσὰ γι' αὐτὸν τὸν σκοπὸ.

Τὸ 1817 ἐκκλησιαζόταν τακτικὰ τὶς Κυριακὲς στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ ἐκκλησία τῆς Μόσχας, ὅπου: «Αἰσθανόταν ἰδιαιτέραν χαρὰν, ἐπειδὴ εἶχεν τὴν εὐκαιρίαν νὰ ἀκροᾶται καὶ νὰ ἐννοεῖ τὴν γλώσσαν εἰς τὴν ὁποίαν δεόμεθα», δηλαδὴ τὴν ὠραιότητα καὶ συνεκτικὴ Ἑλληνικὴ γλώσσα, τὴν ὁποία ἐμεῖς σήμερα, δυστυχῶς, τόσο κακοποιοῦμε!

Ὁ ἔξοχος ἄνδρας ἔπραττε πάντα κατὰ συνείδησιν. Ὅταν διεπίστωσε τὴν ἀλλαγὴ πολιτικῆς τοῦ Τσάρου— ὑπὸ τὴν ἐπήρεια τοῦ Μέττερνιχ—πάνω στὸ Ἑλληνικὸ ζήτημα, τότε δὲν δίστασε νὰ ὑποβάλει εὐθαρσῶς τὴν παραίτησή του. Μάλιστα τοῦ ὑπενθύμισε τὰ λόγια του κατὰ τὴ στιγμὴ τῆς ἀναλήψεως τῶν ὑψηλῶν καθηκόντων του: «Μεγαλειότατε, ὡσὰκις εὐρεθῶ πρὸ τοῦ τραγικοῦ διλήμματος νὰ ὑποστηρίξω τὰ συμφέροντα τῆς σκλαβωμένης Πατρίδος μου ἢ τὰ συμφέροντα τῆς ἀχανοῦς Αὐτοκρατορίας Σας, δὲν θὰ διστάσω οὔτε στιγμὴ: θὰ τεθῶ μὲ τὸ μέρος τῆς πατρίδος μου. Εἶμαι Ἕλλην καὶ θὰ μείνω Ἕλλην γιὰ πάντα». Δὲν δίστασε νὰ θυσιάσει ἀκόμη καὶ τὸν ἀγνὸ ἔρωτά του πρὸς τὴν ἐκλεκτὴ Ἑλληνίδα Ρωξάνδρα Στούρτζα, ὅταν ἀπεφάσισε νὰ κατέβει πρὸς ἐκεῖνο τὸ «ἀπέραντο ἐρείπιον», τὴν ἀγαπημένην του Ἑλλάδα, ὕστερα ἀπὸ τὴν πρόσκληση τῆς Γ' Ἐθνοσυνελεύσεως τῶν Ἑλλήνων, τὸ 1827.

«Άγωνιώ να προγνωρίσω τί θέλω απογίνει και αν μου έχει όρισθει να σηκώσω τον ουρανόθεν επικαταβαίνοντα εις εμέ σταυρόν με την ψήφον της Συνελεύσεως της Τροιζήνος... Η κάθοδος μου εις την Ελλάδα σημαίνει άνοδον εις τον Γολγοθάν μου», έγραψε τότε προς τον έκλεκτό φίλο του Έλβετό τραπεζίτη Ιωάννη Έυνάρδο. Άποτελεί μοναδική ίσως περίπτωση πολιτικού άνδρος, ό όποιος ξεκίνησε τη σταδιοδρομία του με την αίσθηση πως δεν τον περίμεναν δόξες, τιμές και όφέλη, αλλά σταυρός και μαρτύριο! Σε αυτό το σημείο μάλιστα μιμήθηκε τον Κύριο Ιησού Χριστό, όπως άπεδείχθη από την μετέπειτα πορεία του.

Στις 12 Ιανουαρίου 1828 στον προαύλιο χώρο της εκκλησίας έγινε η πανηγυρική ύποδοχή του Κυβερνήτη από την—ένωμένη πλέον—Βουλή, την Αντικυβερνητική Έπιτροπή και έναν ένθουσιώντα—πλήν καταρημαγμένο—λαό. Μετά τη Δοξολογία, από το πλατύσκαλο του έξώστη προσεφώνησε τον Κυβερνήτη ό Θεόφιλος Κάιρης. Όπως ό ίδιος άπεκάλυψε άργότερα, η καρδιά του ράγισε άντικρίζοντας τη δυστυχία και τις όψεις των σκελετωμένων παιδιών!

Με την έγκατάστασή του στο Κυβερνείο άρχισε άμέσως το τιτάνιο έργο του, από το χάος να δημιουργήσει κράτος. Έστειλε δικούς του ανθρώπους και με δικά του χρήματα έξαγόρασε σημαντικό άριθμό παιδιών που είχαν αίχμαλωτισθεί και μεταφερθεί από τον Ίμπραήμ στην Άλεξάνδρεια.

Άς άναφεροϋμε έδώ μόνο στην κοινωνική μέριμνα του Κυβερνήτη, η όποία επεκτάθηκε μέχρι και στην ίδρυση Ύγειονομείων και λοιμοκαθατηρίων. Σ' ένα τεράστιο κτήριο έκτάσεως 4.000 τ.μ., που έκτισε το 1829 στην Αίγινα με τον πρωτοεμφανιζόμενο στην Ελλάδα ρυθμό της άπλης δωρικής άρχιτεκτονικής, λειτούργησε ούσιαστικά η πρώτη Σχολή Τεχνικής και Έπαγγελματικής Έκπαίδευσης στην Ελλάδα. Οι 500 τρόφοι του όρφανοτροφείου, άγόρια και κορίτσια, είχαν τη δυνατότητα να παρακολουθούν μαθήματα οίκοδομικής, ξυλουργικής, τορνευτικής, σιδηρουργικής, ώρολογιοποιίας, ραπτικής, ύποδηματοποιίας, βιβλιοδετικής και τυπογραφίας. Οι άποφοιτώντες έπαιρναν από το Κράτος ένα μικρό χρηματικό κεφάλαιο για την άγορά των όργάνων της τέχνης τους, δηλαδή έδώ βλέπουμε τη λειτουργία του κράτους προνοίας. Παράλληλα, εϋνοήθηκαν η καλλιέργεια πατάτας, σιταριού και η έκτροφή μεταξοσκωλήκων. Χορηγήθηκαν και καλλιεργητικά δάνεια στις κοινότητες για την καλλιέργεια της έλιάς και της σταφίδας. Ο Κυβερνήτης ζούσε πολύ άπλά. «Έμένα μου χρειάζονται 60 λεπτά για να ζήσω», έλεγε. Και ό Μακρυγιάννης: «Ο Κυβερνήτης έτρωγε επί τέσσερις μέρες μία κότα».

Είχε φοβερά άδυνατίσει. Στην παράκληση του ίατροϋ του η άπάντησή ήταν: «Τότε μονάχα θα βελτιώσω την

τροφήν μου, όταν θα είμαι βέβαιος ότι δεν ύπάρχει ούτε ένα Έλληνόπουλο που να πεινάει». Δεν επιθυμούσε να τον άποκαλούν «κόμη». Πολύ καλύτερα άποδεχόταν το «μπάρμπα-Γιάννης» του λαού. Ντυνόταν άπλά. Ο Νικόλαος Δραγούμης περιγράφει εκείνο το χαριτωμένο περιστατικό που συνέβη στην πρώτη περιοδεία του στην Κορινθία, όταν τον παρεκάλεσε ό Κολοκοτρώνης να άλλάξει στολή, έπειδή ό λαός ζητωκραύγαζε για Κυβερνήτη του τον προπορευόμενο ταχυδρομικό διανομέα Καρδαρά «ένδεδυμένον βελούδινον χρυσοκέντητον σεγκούνιον». Η στολή όμως που τελικά φόρεσε δεν διέφερε από εκείνη των δασονόμων της εποχής της Άντιβασιλείας επί Όθωνος (κοινώς του δραγάτη!). Ός άνθρωπος, βέβαια, ό Καποδίστριας δεν άπέφυγε τα λάθη στα 55 χρόνια της ζωής του. Τα άγνά κίνητρα, όμως, όπως και οι άρετές του δίκαια μπορούν να τον χαρακτηρίσουν πρότυπο Χριστιανού ήγέτη ιδεατό, με την έννοια ότι κάλλιστα μπορεί να άποτελέσει πρότυπο για άλλους.

Στη «Μεγάλη Έλληνική Έγκυκλοπαίδεια» διαβάζουμε: «Κατά την πρώτην δοξολογίαν θρόνος του Καποδίστρια ήταν ένα άπλούν ξύλινο στασίδι. Αυτό έχρησιμοποεί όταν τακτικώς εκκλησιάζετο τας Κυριακάς και έορτάς». Πρόκειται για τον «θρονίσκον Δεσποτικών» κατά τον Κασομούλη, που κατεσκεύασε η Αντικυβερνητική Έπιτροπή για την ήμέρα της ύποδοχής του.

Μέχρι σήμερα αυτό το κάθισμα βρίσκεται στην Έκκλησία, άπέναντι από το Δεσποτικό, μέσα στη «Μεγάλη Έκκλησία», κατά την έκφραση του ίδιου του Καποδίστρια μέσα σε κείμενό του, όπως στα χρόνια τα βυζαντινά ό θρόνος του Άυτοκράτορα βρισκόταν άπέναντι από του Πατριάρχη.

Ο Καποδίστριας ήθελε και με αυτόν τον τρόπο να καταδείξει τη συνέχεια αυτής της παράδοσης. Σκόπευε, μάλιστα, να εφαρμόσει το βυζαντινορωμαϊκό δίκαιο, το όποιο έξ άλλου δεν έπαυσε να ισχύει στον τόπο κατά την περίοδο της Τουρκοκρατίας με την «Έξάβιβλο» του Άρμενοπούλου. «Καθώς άντικρύζει κανείς το άδειο στασίδι του Καποδίστρια μέσα στη Μητρόπολη, είναι εύλογο να φαντάζεται και να διερωτάται: ποιά θα ήταν η μορφή της πατρίδας μας σήμερα, αν δεν είχε τόσο νωρίς μεσολαβήσει το τραγικό γεγονός της δολοφονίας του;». Το έρώτημα πάντως παραμένει: Σε ποιές άξίες άραγε βασίστηκαν οι σύγχρονοι πολιτικοί μας, ώστε να όδηγηθεί η χώρα στα σημερινά άδιέξοδα; Έχω τη γνώμη πως, αν δεν βρεθούν άνθρωποι που να διακατέχονται από τα ίδια με τον Καποδίστρια ιδανικά, πολύ δύσκολα θα προκύψει η επιθυμητή άπ' όλους μας άνάκαμψη...

Όπως έλεγε και ό Steven Runciman: «**Άν όλοι οι λαοί, για να προοδεύσουν, πρέπει να κοιτούν μπροστά, οι Έλληνες πρέπει να στραφοϋν πίσω, στις άξίες και στις παραδόσεις τους...**».

## ON THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

By Elder Sophrony, from "Saint Silouan the Athonite," St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY (1999), pp. 390-393.

When the soul abides in the love of God—how good and gracious and festive all things are! But even with God's love, sorrows continue and the greater the love, the greater the sorrow. Never by a single thought did the Mother of God sin, nor did she ever lose grace, yet vast were her sorrows; when she stood at the foot of the Cross her grief was as boundless as the ocean and her soul knew torment incomparably worse than Adam's when he was driven from Paradise, in that the measure of her love was beyond compare greater than the love which Adam felt when he was in Paradise. That she remained alive was only because the Lord's might sustained her, for it was His desire that she should behold His Resurrection, and live on after His Ascension to be the comfort and joy of the Apostles and the new Christian peoples.

We cannot attain to the full love of the Mother of God, and so we cannot thoroughly comprehend her grief. Her love was complete. She had an unlimited love for God and her Son but she loved the people, too, with a great love. What, then, must she have felt when those same people whom she loved so dearly, and whose salvation she desired with all her being, crucified her beloved Son? We cannot fathom such things, since there is little love in us for God and man. Just as the love of the Mother of God is boundless and passes our understanding, so is her grief boundless and beyond our understanding.

*O holy Virgin Mary, tell us, thy children, of thy love on earth for thy Son and God.*

*Tell us how thy spirit rejoiced in God thy Saviour.*

*Tell us of how thou didst look upon His fair countenance, and reflect that this was He Whom all the heavenly hosts wait upon in awe and love.*

*Tell us what thy soul felt when thou didst bear the wondrous Babe in thine arms.*

*Tell us of how thou didst rear Him, how, sick at heart, thou and Joseph sought Him three long days in Jerusalem.*

*Tell us of thine agony when the Lord was delivered up to be crucified, and lay dying on the Cross.*



*Tell us what joy was thine over the Resurrection.*

*Tell us how thy soul languished after the Lord's Ascension.*

*We long to know of thy life on earth with the Lord but thou was not minded to commit all these things to writing, and didst veil thy secret heart in silence.*

Many are the marvels and mercies that I have witnessed at the hands of the Lord and of the Mother of God but there is naught I can render in return for this love of theirs.

What could I give our most holy sovereign Lady for coming to me and bringing enlightenment, instead of turning away in loathing for my sin? I did not behold her with my eyes but the Holy Spirit gave me to know her through her words, which were filled with grace, and my spirit rejoices and my soul leaps to her in love, so that the mere invocation of her name is sweet to my heart.

Once, when I was a young novice, I was praying before an icon of the Mother of God, and the Jesus Prayer entered into my heart and there began to repeat itself of its own accord. Moreover, another time in church I was listening to a reading from the prophet Isaiah, and at the words, *Wash you, make you clean*, (Isa 1:16), I reflected, "Maybe the Mother of God sinned at one time or another, if only in thought." And, marvelous to relate, in unison with my prayer a voice sounded in my heart, saying clearly, *The Mother of God never sinned, even in thought.*

Thus did the Holy Spirit bear witness in my heart to her purity. However, during her earthly life, even she was not quite perfect and complete—she did make some "mistakes" that did not involve sin. We can see this from the Gospel when on the return from Jerusalem she did not know where her Son was, and together with Joseph sought Him for three days: *And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple.* (Lk 2:44-46).

My soul trembles and is afraid when I consider the glory of the Mother of God.

Small and of no account is my mind, poor and sickly my heart, but my soul rejoices and would fain set down if but a little concerning her.

My soul fears to touch upon this matter but love constrains me not to conceal my thankfulness for her compassion.

The Mother of God committed to writing neither her thoughts nor her love for God and her Son, nor her soul's suffering at the Crucifixion, because in any case we could not have understood, for her love for God is stronger and more ardent than the love of the Seraphim and Cherubim, and all the hosts of angels and archangels marvel at her.

And though the life of the Mother of God is hidden, as it were in a holy silence, our Lord allows our Orthodox Church to know that she embraces the whole world in this love of hers, and in the Holy Spirit sees all the peoples of the earth, and like her Son pities all men and has compassion on them.

O, if we might only know the love of the most holy Mother of God for all who keep the commandments of Christ, and how she pities and sorrows over sinners who do not reform! I had experience of this myself. Of a truth I say, speaking before God, *Whom my soul knoweth*: in spirit I know the Most Pure Virgin. I never beheld her but the Holy Spirit gave me to know her and her love for us. Were it not for her compassion I would have perished long ago but she was minded to come to me and enlighten me, so that I should not sin. This is what she said: *It is painful for me to look upon thee, at what thou doest.* And her words, soft, quiet and gentle, wrought upon my soul. Over forty years have gone by since then but my soul can never forget those sweet words, and I know not what return to make for such love towards my sinful self, nor how to give thanks to the good and forbearing Mother of God.

Verily she is our advocate before God, and alone the sound of her name rejoices the soul. But all heaven and earth, too, rejoice in her love.

Here is a wondrous thing, which passes understanding: she dwells in heaven and ever beholds the glory of God, yet she does not forget us, poor wretches that we are, and spreads her compassion over the whole earth, over all peoples.

And this most pure Mother of His, the Lord has bestowed on us. She is our joy and our expectation. She is our Mother in the spirit, and kin to us by nature, as a human being, and every Christian's soul leaps to her in love.

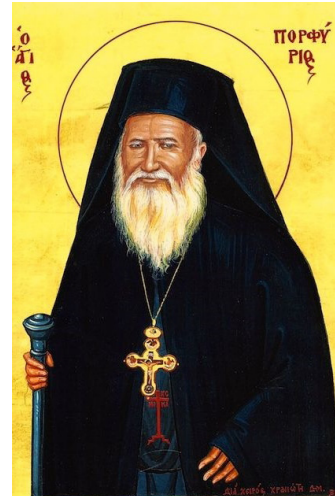


It was right that the eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word should see the Dormition of His Mother according to the flesh, even the final mystery concerning her: hence, they might be witnesses not only to the Ascension of the Saviour but also to the translation of her who gave Him birth. Assembled from all parts by divine power, they came to Sion, and sped on her way to heaven the Virgin who is higher than the Cherubim.

St. John of Damascus

## HAVE YOUR MIND ON GOD AND YOUR HEART WILL LEAP FOR JOY SPONTANEOUSLY

Source: "Wounded by Love: The Life and Wisdom of Elder Porphyrios," published by Denise Harvey, Limni, Evia, Greece (2005), pp. 122-126.



Listen and I'll tell you about something that happened to me a few days ago. A monk who practices the Jesus Prayer came here from the Holy Mountain and he asked me:

—How do you say the Jesus Prayer? Do you sit on a low stool? Do you lower your head and concentrate?

—No, I replied. I say, *Lord Jesus Christ...* clearly in my mind, giving attention to the words. *Lord Jesus Christ, have*

*mercy on me... Lord Jesus...* That's how I do it in my mind and pay attention only to the words.

—That's not right at all, Elder, he said. The way you describe it is quite erroneous, not to say deluded. The mind needs to be in the heart. That's why it's called "prayer of the heart."

—I'll tell you something else, I said to him. Sometimes when I would be facing some temptation, I would bring into my mind the image of Christ on the cross with his transfixed hands and feet dripping blood and with the crown of thorns piercing his brow and with myself kneeling before him and saying to Him, *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.*

—And you didn't bring your mind into your heart?' he interrupted.

—No, I replied.

—You are deluded, he said to me. The mind must be in the heart. Again, that's why it's called "prayer of the heart." Delusion!

He got up to leave.

—Elder! I said to him. Listen and I'll tell you something. When I am repeating the prayer in my mind, sometimes my joy becomes more and more intense. Moreover, when my joy becomes ever stronger with the words, *Lord Jesus Christ...*, I feel my mind leaping within me along with my heart. That is, I feel my mind plummeting into my heart and there I experience all this joy as I say the prayer. I begin with the mind and then my mind moves on its own when joy comes.

—So that's how you pray! That indeed is the way!' he said to me. Forgive me for accusing you of "delusion."

It is the mind that thinks. The heart does not think. Have your mind on God and your heart will leap for joy spontaneously. It will feel compunction. For Christ to enter your heart you must love Him. In order to love Him, He must first love you. God must first know you and then you Him. He will stoop to you, if you first seek Him. In order for Him to love you, you must be worthy. In order to be worthy, you must prepare yourself.

First, you must shun all self-interest. Prayer must be entirely selfless. Everything must happen mystically and without self-interest. That is, do not think that if you concentrate with your mind then grace will come into your heart also and you will experience that leap of joy. Do not pray with that motive, but with simplicity and humility. Aspire always to the glory of God. What did I tell you about the nightingale? It sings without anyone seeing. Be like that—selfless. Give yourself over to the worship of God in secret.

However, be careful! As we said, *do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.* (Mt 6:3). Do not let your malicious self know what is going on. Live in Paradise and do not let your evil self know and envy it. Do not forget that there exists the envy of the evil one.

Preparation is also to learn to keep the commandments of God. To expel the passions—condemnation, anger, etc.—in a subtle way. That is, do not strike at the evil directly, but, disdaining the passion, turn with love to God. Occupy yourself with singing hymns, the triumphant hymns of the saints and martyrs and the Psalms of David. Study Holy Scripture and the Church Fathers. In this way your soul will be softened, sanctified and assimilated to God. It will be ready to hear the disclosures of God. ‘

Gradually grace will visit you. You will enter into joy. You will begin to live in peace and then you will become stronger by virtue of the divine grace. You will not become angry, or irritated, you will not be offended, you will not judge others, but rather receive everyone with love. You will have that which Saint Paul describes: *Love does not boast... it does not behave in an unseemly manner... it does not rejoice in injustice, but rejoices in truth; it covers and protects all things, it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.* (1 Cor 13:4-8). The prayer purifies the soul and keeps the mind in check. The most perfect work is done in the depths of the human soul, which is hermetically sealed and known only to God. And so we witness something extraordinary: people who

are transformed into children of God, even though they had reached the very depths of their self-destructiveness.

And I, too, wretched and crooked-up fellow that I am, make this effort. I do not give myself over openly in prayer, but secretly I pray. Do you understand? The grace of God comes and overshadows you too. It brings a freshness and joy to you also as we live together, eat together, talk and pray and simply keep company with one another. Do you understand? Only someone who is thoughtless, someone who is “thick-skinned” and cannot be moved by prayer, remains a stranger to grace. Pray for God to reveal to you the *unseen* things. There is much that we do not know. Say to Christ, “Whatever You want. Whatever Your love desires.” He will lead you. Look to Him.

### Prayer of the Heart Is Impossible Without a Spiritual Guide

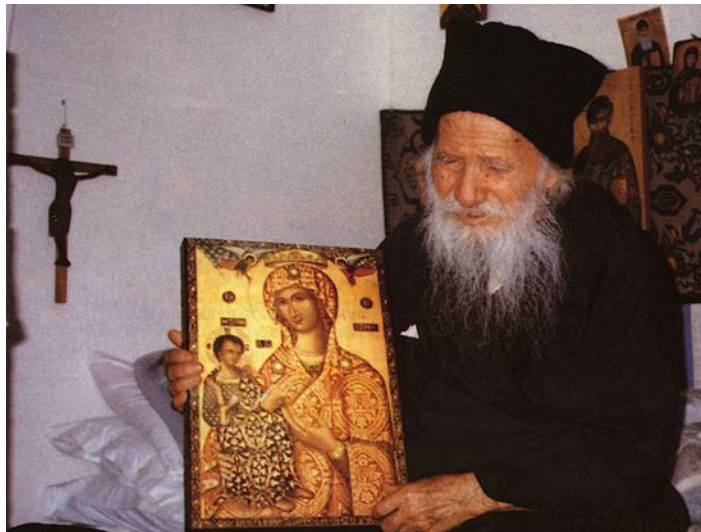
If you are going to occupy yourself with prayer of the heart exclusively you must have the guidance of a spiritual father. Prayer of the heart is impossible without a spiritual guide.

There is a danger of the soul being deluded. Care is needed. Your spiritual guide will teach you how to get into the right order for prayer, because if you do not get into the right order, there is a danger of your seeing the luciferic light, of living in delusion and being plunged into darkness, and then one becomes aggressive and changes character and so on. This is the splitting of the personality. Do you see how delusion is created? If, however, you

progress in prayer with the counsels of a spiritual father, you will see the true light.

The spiritual guide must be experienced in prayer of the heart. If he prays mechanically and has not experienced prayer with the grace of God, he is unable to tell someone else how to pray. Certainly, he will be able to say what he has read in books and what the Fathers say. Whole books have been written which talk about prayer. And so many people read them and none knows how to pray. “But,” you will object, “we read these books, we learn the method of prayer, we prepare ourselves and God gives His blessing and sends us His grace and we understand them.” That is all very well, but it is a mystery. Prayer is a mystery, and above all prayer of the heart is a mystery.

The most dreadful delusion can be created by spiritual prayer. Other prayers are prayed to a large extent by our mind. We simply say them and our ears hear them. They are said in a different way. But spiritual prayer is something else.



And if in this spiritual dimension desire is enkindled, not by your good self, but by the other self, the egotistical self, then undoubtedly you will begin to see lights, but not the light of Christ, and undoubtedly you will begin to experience a pseudo-joy. But in your outward life, in your relations with other people, you will be ever more aggressive and irascible, more quick-tempered and fretful. These are the signs of the person who is deluded. The person who is deluded does not accept that he is suffering from delusion. He is fanatical and does harm. This is what happens with zealots, those who act with a zeal that is not tempered by divine knowledge. Listen to an example of this:

Saint Makarios, the famous Desert Father, had decided to go to a church festival along with the monk who was subservient to him. The young monk had gone on ahead. He was a beginner and had a beginner's zeal. As he was walking along he met an idolater, a priest of a pagan temple. He spoke harshly to him and said:

—Where are you off to, you deluded soul?

The priest was enraged and attacked the novice, leaving him virtually unconscious.

A short time later the priest met the elder. When Abba Makarios, blessed as he was by divine grace, saw the man in a state of shock and aggravation, he said to him:

—Good man of God, where are you going to?

As soon as the priest heard these words his heart softened, he stopped in his tracks, and said:

—Your words have calmed me down.

—Yes, said Abba Makarios. I see you're in a hurry, only you don't know where you're hurrying to.

But he said it in a humble and brotherly tone of love.

—When you speak, said the idolater, your words open my heart, but a short time ago another monk spoke to me in a very different way and I gave him a good beating.

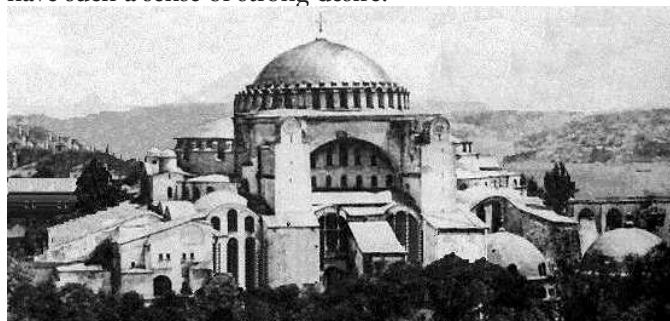
Abba Makarios spoke to him in such an inspired way, that the idolater gradually changed his beliefs, became a monk and was saved. With his good words and manners he communicated the good spirit. He communicated the uncreated energy and entered the soul of the idolater. The novice, on the contrary, communicated a spirit of anger and aggression from the spirit he had within him.

Do you see what delusion means? When you have a spiritual guide you are not in danger of delusion. When you have a good, God-inspired elder you learn the secrets of prayer. You pray with your elder and you gradually begin to enter into the spiritual life and to learn how the elder prays. He is not able to tell you, "Do this or do that." But you do what you see him do. When you go to your elder, certainly, he tells you about the prayer of the heart. You need to know, however, that if he does not experience the prayer of the heart himself, he will not be able to communicate anything. But when the elder has experienced (and continues to experience)

the prayer of the heart, something mysterious takes place. The mystery is that the novice hears his words, but more importantly, he sees the way his heart opens and how he speaks to God in his heart. His soul watches him. And not only this, but soul communicates with soul and the one soul senses the other. The novice feels how the whole "frame of mind" is created, how this state is created through divine grace.

This is not a simple matter. This is the teaching. We say that prayer cannot be taught, but in point of fact it can be taught when you live with someone who truly prays. When you take a book about prayer and read it, it may be that you do not understand anything. However, when you have an elder next to you who prays, whatever he tells you about prayer you understand and take to heart. You enter into his prayer, and you pray too without realizing it. You communicate. It's not the book or the knowledge, it's the sensation, it's the manner, it's the opening of the heart, it's the embrace of prayer.

And is not what we are doing now as I am speaking to you, is this too not a prayer? Am I not speaking from my heart and do we not feel that leaping sensation of joy and impellent desire? If this is not prayer, how can it be explained that we have such a sense of strong desire?



It is a great art to succeed in having your soul sanctified. A person can become a saint anywhere. He can become a saint in Omonia Square (the commercial center of Athens, also synonymous with vice and corruption), if he wants. At your work, whatever it may be, you can become a saint through meekness, patience, and love. Make a new start every day, with new resolution, with enthusiasm and love, prayer and silence — not with anxiety so that you get a pain in the chest.

Our religion is perfectly and profoundly conceived. What is simple is also what is most precious. Accordingly, in your spiritual life engage in your daily contest simply, easily, and without force. The soul is sanctified and purified through the study of the Fathers, through the memorization of the psalms and of portions of Scripture, through the singing of hymns and through the repetition of the Jesus Prayer. Devote your efforts, therefore, to these spiritual things and ignore all the other things.

**St. Porphyrios the Kapsokalivite (+1991)**



## ON TRUE REPENTANCE AND THE ANGELIC LIFE

By St. John Climacus, from "The Ladder of Divine Ascent," Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Massachusetts (2001), pp. 23-28.

Terrible indeed was the judgment of a good judge and shepherd which I once saw in a monastery. For while I was there, it happened that a thief sought for admission to the monastic life. And that most excellent pastor and physician ordered him to take seven days of complete rest, just to see the kind of life in the place. When the week had passed, the pastor called him and asked him privately:

— Would you like to live with us?

And when he saw that he agreed to this with all sincerity, he then asked him what evil he had done in the world. And when he saw that he readily confessed everything, he tried him still further, and said:

— I want you to tell this in the presence of all the brethren.

But he really did hate his sin, and, scorning all shame, without the least hesitation he promised to do it. — And if you like, he said, I will tell in the middle of the city of Alexandria.

And so, the shepherd gathered all his sheep in the church to the number of two hundred and thirty, and during divine service (for it was Sunday), after the reading of the Gospel he introduced the irreproachable convict. He was dragged by several of the brethren, who gave him moderate blows. His hands were tied behind his back, he was dressed in a hair shirt, his head was sprinkled with ashes. All were astonished at the sight. And immediately a woeful cry rang out; for no one knew what was happening. Then, when the thief appeared at the doors of the church, the holy superior who had such love for souls, said to him in a loud voice:

— Stop! You are not worthy to enter here. (*Orthodox churches are divided into the narthex, the nave and the sanctuary. In ancient times, the unbaptized were admitted to the narthex but not the nave. The thief was already in the narthex, He was halted not at the outer door, but at the doors of the nave.*)

Dumbfounded by the voice of the shepherd coming from the sanctuary (for he thought, as he afterwards assured us with oaths, that he had heard not a human voice, but thunder), he instantly fell on his face, trembling and shaking all over with fear. As he lay on the ground and moistened the floor

with his tears, this wonderful physician, using all means for his salvation, and wishing to give to all an example of saving and effectual humility, again exhorted him, in the presence of all to tell in detail what he had done. And with terror he confessed one after another, all his sins, which revolted every ear, not only sins of the flesh, natural and unnatural, with rational beings and with animals, but even poisoning, murder and many others which it not lawful to hear or commit to writing. And when he had finished his confession, the shepherd at once allowed him to be given the habit and numbered among the brethren.

Amazed by the Wisdom of that holy man, I asked him when we were alone:

— Why did you make such an extraordinary show.

That true physician replied:

— For two reasons: firstly in order to deliver the penitent himself from future shame by present shame; and it really did that, Brother John. For he did not rise from the floor until he was granted remission of all his sins. And do not doubt this, for one of the brethren who was there confided



to me, saying: "I saw someone terrible holding a pen and writing tablet, and as the prostrate man told each sin, he crossed it out with a pen." And this is likely, for it says: *I said, I will confess mine iniquities before the Lord against myself. And Thou forgavest the ungodliness of my heart* (Pss 31:5). Secondly, because there are others in the brotherhood who have unconfessed sins, and I want to induce them to confess too; for without

this no one will obtain forgiveness.

I saw much else too that was admirable and worth remembering with that ever-memorable pastor and his flock. And a large part of it I shall try to bring to your knowledge also. For I stayed a considerable time with him, following their manner of life, and was greatly astonished to see how those earth-dwellers were imitating the Heavenly beings.

In this flock, they were united by the indissoluble bond of love; and what was still more wonderful, it was free from all familiarity and idle talk. More than anything else, they tried not to wound a brother's conscience in any way. And if anyone ever showed hatred to another, the shepherd put him in the isolation monastery, like a convict. And once when one of the brethren spoke ill of his neighbor to the shepherd, the holy man at once ordered him to be driven out, saying:

—I cannot allow a visible as well as an invisible devil in the monastery.

I saw among these holy fathers things that were truly profitable and admirable. I saw a brotherhood gathered and united in the Lord, with a wonderful life of action and divine vision. For they were so occupied with divine thoughts, and they exercised themselves so much in good deeds, that there was scarcely any need for the superior to remind them of anything; but of their own good will they aroused one another to divine vigilance. For they had certain holy and divine exercises that were defined, studied and fixed. If in the absence of the superior one of them began to use abusive language or criticize people or simply talk idly, some other brother by a secret nod reminded him of this, and quietly put a stop to it. But if, by chance, the brother did not notice, then the one who reminded him would make a prostration and retire. And the incessant and ceaseless topic of their conversation (when it was necessary to say anything) was the remembrance of death and the thought of eternal judgment.

I must not omit to tell you about the wonderful achievement of the baker of that community. Seeing that he had attained to constant recollection (i.e., consciousness of God) and tears during his service, I asked him to tell me how he came to be granted such a grace. And when I pressed him, he replied:

—I have never thought that I was serving men but God. And having judged myself unworthy of all hesychastic rest (i.e., quiet, stillness, silence, peace...) by this visible fire (i.e., the bake-house over fire), I am unceasingly reminded of the future flame.

Let us hear about another surprising attainment of theirs. For not even in the refectory did they stop noetic activity (i.e., noetic prayer) but according to a certain custom, these blessed men reminded one another of interior prayer by secret signs and gestures. And they did this not only in the refectory, but at every gathering and every encounter.

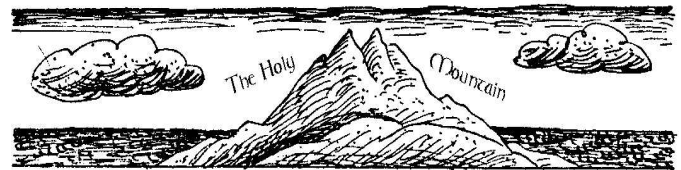
And if one of them committed a fault, he would receive many requests from the brothers to allow them to take the case to their shepherd and bear the responsibility and the punishment. That is why this great man, on learning that his disciples did this, inflicted lighter punishments, knowing that the one punished was innocent. And he did not even inquire who had actually sustained the fall.

Could any hint of idle talk and joking exist among them: If one of them began a dispute with his neighbor, then another, passing by, assumed the role of penitent and so dissolved the anger. However, if he noticed that the disputants were spiteful or revengeful, he would report the quarrel to the father occupying the second place after the superior, and prepare the ground for their mutual reconciliation before sundown. But if they continued obstinate, they would either be punished by being deprived of food until they were reconciled, or else be expelled from the monastery.

And it is not in vain that this laudable rigor is brought to perfection among them, for it bears and shows abundant fruit. And among these holy fathers, many become proficient both in active life and clairvoyance, both in discernment and humility. And there was to be seen among them an awful and angelic sight: venerable, sacred and white-haired men running about in obedience like children, and glorying in their humiliation. There I have seen men who had spent some fifty years in obedience. And when I asked them to tell me what consolation they had gained from so great a labor, some of them replied that they had attained to humility's abyss, by which they had permanently repelled every assault. Others said that they had obtained complete insensibility and freedom from pain in calumnies and insults.

I have seen others of those ever-memorable fathers with their angelic white hair attain of their own volition to the deepest innocence and to wise and divinely achieved simplicity. (Just as an evil man is somewhat double, one thing outwardly and another inwardly, so a simple person is not something double, but something of a unity.) Among them, there are none who are fatuous and foolish, like old men in the world who are commonly said to be "in their dotage." On the contrary, outwardly they are utterly gentle and kindly, radiant and sincere, and they have nothing hypocritical, affected or false about them, either in speech or character (a thing not found in many); and inwardly, in their soul, like innocent babes, they make God Himself and their superior their very breath, and the eye of their mind keeps a vigorous and strict watch for demons and passions.

The whole of my life, dear and reverend father and God-loving community, would be insufficient to describe the Heavenly life and virtue of those blessed monks. But yet it is better to adorn our treatise and rouse you to zeal in the love of God by their most laborious struggles than by my own paltry counsels; for without any contradiction, *the less is adorned the better*. (cf Heb 7:7). Only this I ask, that you should not imagine we are inventing what we write, for such a suspicion detracts from its value. But let us continue again what we were saying before...



It is only necessary to seek one thing: to be with Jesus. The man who remains with Jesus is rich, even if he is poor with regard to material things. Whoever desires the earthly more than the heavenly loses both the earthly and the heavenly. But whoever seeks the heavenly is lord of the whole world.

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

## DOGMA AND MYSTERY

*By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos (from the lectures of Fr. John Romanides)*

It is essential to make a distinction between dogma and mystery. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is experienced, to the extent that this is possible, by the glorified human being and is different from the dogma, which is the rational formulation concerning the mystery of the Holy Trinity or the revelation. This distinction is fundamental to Orthodox theology: *God is always a mystery. The mystery of the Holy Trinity must be separated from the dogma of the Holy Trinity. The dogma is not the same as the mystery.*

This means that the dogma can be understood rationally, but not the mystery. There is confusion on this issue among some contemporary theologians and a serious problem arises. For instance, when we speak about the Holy Trinity, we are referring to the dogma, the terminology concerning the Holy Trinity, as formulated by the holy Fathers of the Church (*essence, hypostases, hypostatic property*, and so on) and not to the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

There is so much confusion in recent theology, under the influence of Russian theology, that anyone would think that an expert on dogmatics or a theologian of the Orthodox Church is someone who reflects deeply and immerses himself in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and attempts to put it into words. The patristic tradition has absolutely no connection with this sort of perception of theology.

The names and concepts that a God-seeing saint formulates when necessary are one thing and the experience that he has acquired of this reality is another. The mystery remains a mystery. We do not put the mystery into words, but the dogma about the mystery. We speak about the dogma about the mystery of the Holy Trinity; not about the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

The same can be said of the distinction between Holy Scripture and God. Holy Scripture consists of the words and concepts expressing the experience of the mystery of God, and these words and concepts are not identical to God. God is not identified with the words and concepts. Identifying God with them leads to idolatry.

For this reason you must have a firm grasp of this distinction between the mystery and the dogma. They are not the same thing, because theology, dogma and noetic prayer will be abolished: they are temporary in character. It is idolatry for us to identify God with words and concepts about Him. From this point of view, you can take the existentialism of certain (at least in my opinion) pseudo-theologians and throw them all into the waste paper bin. Because the only correct existential philosophy from the Orthodox point of view is the atheistic one and not the theistic.

To say that we understand dogmas is foolishness. No one understands the dogma of the Holy Trinity, because the dogma

of the Holy Trinity is not intended to be understood. Anyone who gives the impression that he understands the dogma of the Holy Trinity is a fraud. This is the worst deception. It is possible to understand the purpose of the dogma, its origin and its history. But it is impossible for someone to understand the dogma itself, because understanding the dogma means understanding the mystery. The dogma and the mystery are different things. They must never be confused.

Dogma exists as man's guide. It is a signpost that shows him where he ought to be going. When, however, he reaches his destination, it is done away with. For that reason, dogma is a guide for those who are passing through purification, and carries on being a guide for those who continue in illumination. It is a guide and nothing more. But those who are at the stage of illumination know that one day dogma will be abolished. When someone reaches glorification, dogma is abolished. Dogma ceases to exist. Noetic prayer itself stops. Although the Spirit of God prays within man with psalms, hymns or phrases—the Spirit Himself prays with human words within man—when man attains to glorification even this noetic prayer of the Holy Spirit ceases.

This is what the Apostle Paul says: *When that which is perfect comes, then prophecies will cease*, in other words, theology will come to an end; *tongues will cease*, that is, the various kinds of noetic prayer will stop; and *knowledge will vanish away*, (cf. 1 Cor 13:8-13), in other words, what are nowadays called dogmas and theology. All these things come to an end in glorification. Certainly, when someone returns from glorification, when he ceases to have the vision of God, he continues praying once again with dogmas and the Spirit again prays within him as before. In this life the state of glorification is not permanent.

Neither the incarnation nor the dogma of the Holy Trinity can be understood. For that reason, even when God is revealed, then especially, He remains a mystery. The human nous cannot penetrate this mystery of uncreatedness, and how what is uncreated took flesh and is united with human nature. We only know, because it is clear from the experience of Pentecost and the Transfiguration and from St. John the Forerunner's experience of glorification at the Baptism, which is a revelation, the supreme revelation, of the Holy Trinity; that God remains a mystery.

As this is so, it is nonsensical for us to sit there asserting, like the Protestants and the Latins, that as time passes we have a deeper understanding of the dogmas of the Church. What does a deeper understanding mean, when, in the experience of glorification, of Pentecost, dogma has been abolished and the concepts and words that constitute dogmas have been done away with? The experience of glorification is not dogma. It is higher than dogma. Dogma is the expression of the mystery, but expressing the mystery is not the same as comprehending the mystery, because *it is impossible to express God and even more impossible to conceive Him.*

## ON GOD-CREATED INEQUALITY

*A homily on the Gospel on the Talents by St. Nikolai Velimirovic, bishop of Ochrid, from "Homilies, vol. Two: Sundays after Pentecost," Lazarica Press, Birmingham (1998).*



God creates inequality; men grumble at it. Are men wiser than God? When God creates inequality, it means that inequality is wiser and better than equality. God creates inequality for man's good, but men cannot see the good in their

inequality. God creates inequality because of the beauty of inequality, but men can see no beauty in it. God creates inequality out of love, that is aroused and sustained by inequality, but man can see no love in it.

This is a primitive human revolt of blindness against perception, of folly against wisdom, of evil against good, of ugliness against beauty, of malice against love. Eve and Adam gave themselves into Satan's power in order to become equal with God. Cain slew his brother Abel because their sacrifices were not equally righteous in God's sight. From then till now, sinful men have waged war on inequality. Before then, though, God created inequality, and it is still with us. Before then, we say, because God created the angels unequal.

It is God's desire that men be unequal in all externals: riches, power, status, learning, position and so forth, but He does not recommend any sort of competitiveness in this. *Sit not down in the highest room*, commanded the Lord Jesus. (Lk 14:8). God desires that men compete in the multiplying of the inner virtues: faith, goodness, charity, love, meekness and gentleness, humility and obedience. God gave both inward and outward gifts, although He considers outward gifts as lower and of less significance than inward ones. He gave outward gifts for the pleasure of animals as well as of humans, but He has scattered the rich treasury of inward, spiritual gifts only in men's souls. God has given to men something more than to the animals, and He therefore seeks more of men than of the animals. This extra that He has given consists in the spiritual gifts.

God does not regard what a man is in this world and what he has: how he is clad, fed, taught and respected by others; God looks on a man's heart. In other words, God does not look on the external status and position of a man, but on his inner progress, growth and enrichment in spirit and in truth. The Parable of the Talents speaks of this, or of the spiritual gifts that God has bestowed on the souls of all men, and shows the great inner inequality of men in their very nature. However, it shows much more than this. In its eagle-like ascent, this parable flies over the whole length of

the history of the human soul, from its beginning to its end. If a man were fully to understand just this one parable and its teaching, and fulfil it in his life, he would achieve eternal salvation in the Kingdom of God.

*The Kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one: to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.* The man must be understood as God omniscient, the Giver of all good gifts. The *servants* are angels and men. Going on a *journey* signifies God's long-suffering. The *talents* are the spiritual gifts with which God endows all His rational creatures. That all these gifts are great is seen from their specifically being called "talents," for a talent was a high-value coin, worth five hundred gold ducats. We reiterate that the Lord deliberately called God's gifts "talents" to show their greatness, to show that the most gentle Creator has richly endowed His creatures. These gifts are so great that he who receives one talent receives quite enough. The *man* also signifies the Lord Christ Himself, as is seen from Saint Luke's Gospel: *A certain nobleman*. (Lk 19:12). This nobleman is the Lord Christ Himself, the only-begotten Son of God, the Son of the Highest.

This is also clearly seen from other words in the same Gospel: *A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.* After His Ascension, the Lord Jesus went up to heaven to receive for Himself a Kingdom, promising the world that He would come back to earth as Judge. When we understand the man to be the Lord Jesus, then we see that His servants are the apostles, the bishops, the clergy and all the faithful. The Holy Spirit has poured out many good gifts (though differing and unequal) on each of them, so that the one should complement the other, and so that all together should come to moral perfection and spiritual growth. *There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal, and this same Spirit divides to every man severally as He will.* (1 Cor 12:4-7,11).

Through the mystery of baptism, all the faithful receive these gifts abundantly and, through the Church's other sacraments, they are strengthened and multiplied by God. By the *five talents*, commentators understand the five senses, by the *two talents* the soul and the body, and by the *one talent* man's unified being. The five bodily senses were given to man to serve his spirit and his salvation. It must be man's concern to serve God in body and soul, and to enrich himself with the knowledge of God and with good works. The whole man, as a unity, must be placed at God's disposal. In childhood, a man lives by his five senses, in a wholly sensual life; in greater

maturity, a man is aware of a duality in himself and a battle between body and spirit; and in full spiritual maturity a man feels himself to be a united spirit, overcoming the division of himself into five or into two. But it is precisely in this full maturity, when a man thinks that he is the victor, that he is threatened by the greatest danger from pride in himself, denigration of others and disobedience to God. Reaching the greatest heights, he then falls to the deepest destruction, and buries his talent in the earth.

God gives to each according to his strength: as much as each can carry and use. Of course, God gives His gifts to men also according to the plan of His dispensation, as the members of a household neither all have the same capacities nor do the same job, but one has a particular capacity and one another, and each works according to his capacity.

*And straightway took his journey.* These words signify the speed of God's creating. When the Creator created the world, He did it quickly. And when the Lord Jesus came on earth for the sake of the New Creation, for the renewing of the world, He quickly carried out His work: He revealed and handed out His gifts, and at once went His way.

What did the servants do with the gifts they had received? *Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them another five talents.*

*And likewise he that had received two, he also gained another two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.* All the application and commerce that exist among men is an image of that which exists, or should exist, in the kingdom of human souls. Of anyone who inherits lands it is expected that he extend them; of anyone who has acquired fields it is expected that he work them; of anyone who has learned a skill it is expected that he use it, both for his own profit and that of his neighbor; of anyone who has a craft it is expected that he pass it on to others; of anyone who has invested money in commerce it is expected that he increase it. Men move, work, beautify things, collect, exchange, buy and sell. Each strives to acquire what is necessary for bodily life, and each strives to improve his health, to take care of his daily needs and to ensure his physical well-being in the longer term. And this is only a rough sketch of what a man must do for his soul, for the soul is the more important. All our external needs are an

image of our spiritual needs, and a reminder and teaching that we must exert ourselves on behalf of the hungry and thirsty, the naked and sick, the impure and the miserable, both in body and soul.

Every one of us who has received from God five measures, or two, or one, of faith, wisdom, benevolence, fear of God, yearning for spiritual purity and strength, or meekness, or obedience to God; we must strive at least to double the measure, as the first and second servants did, and as men generally do when engaged in commerce or some craft. He who does not multiply the talent given him—whatever and however great this talent may be—will be cut down like a barren tree and burned. That which is done by a house-holder to every barren fruit tree, that he has vainly dug-about, grafted and fenced around, the great Householder of the universe, to whom men are most precious fruit-trees, will do.

*After a long time, the lord of these servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.* God

is never for a moment far away from men, let alone for a long time. His aid to men flows from day to day, like a river in flood, but His Judgment, His settling of His accounts with men, comes after a long time. Swift with aid to all who seek His help, God is slow to take revenge on those who anger Him, and who aimlessly squander His gifts. Here it is the Last



Judgment that is in question, when time shall come to an end and all the workers will be summoned to receive their pay.

*And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying: "Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more." His lord said unto him: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy lord." He also that had received two talents came and said: "Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them." His lord said unto him: "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy lord." One by one the stewards came before the Lord and presented their account of what they had received and what use they had made of it. We shall have to come, one by one before the Lord of heaven and earth, and present our accounts of what we have received and what we have made*

of it, before millions of witnesses. At that moment, nothing will be able to be hidden or set right. For the Lord will, with His light, illumine all who are present so that they will all know the truth about one another. If we have, in this life, succeeded in doubling our talent, we shall come before the Lord with bright faces and free hearts, like these two first good and faithful servants. We shall be illumined by the light of the Lord's countenance, and shall be made eternally alive by His words: *Thou good and faithful servant!* But woe to us if we come empty-handed before the Lord and His holy angels like this third, wicked and slothful servant.

What is the meaning of the words: *Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things?* It means that all the gifts that we receive from God in this world, however many they may be, are little compared with those blessings that await the faithful in the world to come. For it is written: *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.* (I Cor 2:9). The least effort, stemming from love for God, is rewarded by Him with rich and royal gifts. For that little that the faithful endure in this life out of obedience to God, and as a small effort for their souls, God will crown them with glory such as the kings of this world have neither known nor imagined.

What happens now to the wicked and unfaithful servant? *Then he which had received the one talent came and said: "Lord, I knew thee, that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth. Lo, there thou hast that is thine."* This is the justification for his wickedness and sloth that this third servant produced for his Lord! He was not, though, alone in this. How very many such are there among us, who impute the blame for their wickedness, carelessness, sloth and selfishness to God? Not acknowledging their own sinfulness, and being unaware of God's loving ways with man, they rail against God from their own weakness, sickness, poverty and failure.

Every word that the slothful servant addresses to his Lord is essentially false. Where does God reap where He has not sown? Where does He gather where He has not strawed? Is there any good seed in this world that is not of God's sow-

ing? Are there any goodly fruits in the whole universe that are not the result of God's labors?

The wicked and faithless complain, for example, when God takes their children from them: "See," they cry, "how He mercilessly takes our children before their time!" On what basis are they yours? Were they not His before you called them yours? And how before their time? Does not He who created time know when their right time has come? Not a single householder on earth waits until his entire forest has grown to maturity, and only then cuts it down, but he cuts it, old or young, as he needs it—both that which has been growing a long time and that which has just sprouted—to put to use in his house. Instead of railing against God and cursing Him on whom depends every breath they take, they

would have done better to say with righteous Job: *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* (Job 1:21). Then also the wicked and faithless rail against God when hail destroys their grain; or when their ships, laden with merchandise, are lost at sea; or when they fall into sickness or helplessness. They rail and cry out that God is harsh. However, they say this only because they do not remember their sins, or cannot draw teaching from this for the salvation of their souls.

The Lord replies to this false self-justification on the part of his servant: *Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own*

*with usury.* Usurers are money-changers. They are those who change one currency for another, and in so doing gain their usury. But all this also has its figurative meaning. We must, by the usurers, understand benefactors; by the money, we must understand God's gifts; and by the usury the salvation of men's souls. The Lord desires in this way to say to the slothful servant: *You have received a gift from God. You were not willing to use it for your salvation; why, though, did you at least not give it to some benefactor, some man of sensitivity, who would both wish and be able to hand this gift over to others who have need of it to aid in their own salvation? And I, when I come, would find more men on earth among the saved: more who are faithful, ennobled, compassionate and meek. Instead of this, you have buried your talent in the earth of your body,*



*that has rotted in the grave (for the Lord will say this at the Last Judgment) and that is now of no use to you.*

Oh, how clear and terrible a teaching this is for those who have great wealth and do not give to the poor; or great wisdom and keep it locked within themselves as in the grave; or any sort of goods and skills and show them to no one; or great power and do not protect the poor and miserable; or a great name or renown and will shed no ray of light on those in darkness! The best that could be said for them is that they are thieves; for they count God's gift as their own, taking what belongs to others and concealing what is given to them. They are not just thieves but also murderers, for they do not help those they could to salvation. Their sin is no less than that of the man who stood on a river bank with a rope and saw someone drowning, but did not throw him the rope to save himself. The Lord will indeed say to such men what He said in this parable about the wicked servant: *Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

It often happens in this life that the little that one man has is taken and given to a man who has much, and this is simply an image of what happens in the spiritual realm. Does not a father take money from a loose-living son and give it to a wise one who will know how to make use of it? Is not a gun taken from an unreliable soldier and given to a reliable one? God takes His gifts away from unfaithful servants even in this life; hard-hearted rich men generally become bankrupt and die in want; selfish sages end in imbecility or madness; saints puffed up with pride fall into sin and end as great sinners; violent rulers suffer ridicule, shame and loss of power; priests who have not taught others by word or example fall deeper and deeper into sin until, in great torment, they take leave of this life; hands that have not been willing to do what they were capable of doing begin to tremble or stiffen; tongues that would not speak the truth of which they are capable become swollen or dead; and all who conceal God's gifts end as empty-handed beggars.

This parable gives us clear teaching that not only will he that does evil be condemned but also he that does not do good. The Apostle James teaches: *To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.* (Jas 4:17). All of Christ's teaching, like His example, urges us to do good. Keeping ourselves from evil is the starting point; but the whole of a Christian's life-path must be strewn with good works like flowers. The doing of good works is of immeasurable help in keeping ourselves from evil works. It is hard for anyone to keep himself from evil if he does not, at the same time, do good, and to keep himself from sin without practicing benevolence.

This parable further confirms that God is impartially merciful to all, for some gift is given to every created man. It is true that some are given more and some less, but this in no way changes the situation, because God seeks more from him to whom much has been given, and less of him to whom little has been given. Enough, though, is given to everyone for his or her salvation, and to help in the salvation of others.

It would be a mistake to think that, in this parable, the Lord is speaking only about the rich—of one kind or another—in this world. No; He is speaking about all men without distinction. All are, without exception, sent into this world with some gift. The widow who, in the Temple in Jerusalem, gave her two last coins was very poor in terms of money, but was not poor in the gifts of sacrifice and fear of God. On the contrary; for her good use of these gifts—yes, for her gift of two poor pence—she was praised by the Lord Jesus Himself: *Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury.* (Mk 12:43).

Let us take an instance that is the most difficult and the most puzzling. Think of a blind man who is deaf and dumb, who has spent all his earthly life in this state, from birth to death. Someone will ask you: "What sort of gift has this man received from God? How can he be saved?" He has a gift, and that a great one. If he does not see others, others see him. If he does not give alms, he awakens almsgiving in others. If he cannot use words to speak of God, he serves as a living reminder to men. If he does not preach with words, he serves as a proof of preaching about God. He can indeed bring many to salvation, and through this himself be saved.

Thus inequality is placed in the very foundations of the created world. We must rejoice at this inequality, and not rebel against it, for it is placed there by Love, not by hatred, by Understanding, not by folly. Human life is not made ugly by the absence of equality, but by the absence of love and spiritual understanding in men. Let us have more divine love and spiritual understanding of life, and we shall see that twice as much inequality would in no way lessen the blessedness given to men.

This Parable of the Talents brings light, understanding and peace to our souls. It also urges us not to be tardy in carrying out the work for which we are sent by the Lord into the market place of this world. Time passes more quickly than the most swiftly-flowing river, and soon, I repeat, soon, the end of time will be upon us. No one will be able to come back from eternity to take what he has forgotten and do what he has left undone. Let us therefore hasten to make use of the gift we have been given, the talent lent to us by the Lord of lords. May glory and praise for this divine teaching, and for everything, be to the Lord Jesus, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity consubstantial and undivided, now and forever, through all time and all eternity. Amen.

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## THE VALUE OF A SPIRITUAL GUIDE

By Elder Ephraim of Arizona, from "My Elder Joseph the Hesychast," *St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, Florence, AZ, pp. 321-322.*



Geronda frequently spoke to us individually and taught us many things. What I heard, learned, and (above all) lived beside Geronda for twelve entire years, I will present simply in a few words. One of Geronda's primary teachings was the following:

*Here on the Holy Mountain, we see that some monks are doing well while others are not.*

*Do not be surprised by this. Both of them came with the same piety, the same self-denial, and the same zeal that we all had when we first came to monasticism. All of us left behind our father, our mother, our job, etc. That is no great accomplishment. What is a great accomplishment, however, is to find a real elder who will guide us, instruct us, and teach us what monasticism really is. The monks who are not doing well are those who did not find a real elder.*

Thus, Geronda made us realize that the learning and progress of a disciple depends on his finding a spiritual guide. If merely living in the wilderness granted noetic prayer, everyone would have it. Unfortunately, the reality is that there are very few monks who

are true workers of noetic prayer. Why is this? Because they lack an elder who can teach and guide them. Living in the wilderness helps, but it is not everything.

Even if one finds a spiritual guide and lives deep in the wilderness, he must still labor in order to inherit grace from his elder. After all, there were several great Athonite fathers in the early twentieth century who left no heirs. There was Fr. Savvas the Confessor, Fr. Kallinikos the Hesychast, that blind monk whose cell was fragrant when he prayed, Elder Daniel the Hesychast, etc. Even though they had disciples, their disciples did not inherit their elder's grace because they themselves did not labor properly. Geronda also said:

*You youngsters came here and found everything all set: you found an elder; you found the place clean of demons; you also found a ready schedule of prayer and asceticism. If you only knew what it was like to come and not find a guide! You would have had to search all over the place just to find someone who could tell you a few words about prayer and monasticism based on his own experience. You were fortunate to find a guide as soon as you left the world.*

Indeed, I found an elder with a lofty spiritual state, with the Light of Mt. Tabor (cf Mt 17:1-9), with prayer, with theoria, with revelations. This is the kind of elder I found. And I am so blameworthy because I have not approached his state in the least. But at least I can transmit to you what I have learned from him—and not from books—and can assure you that everything in the lives of the saints is true, since I have witnessed such things in my elder.



# Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

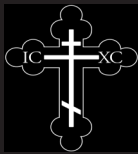
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## In This Issue:

- **Awakening the Sinner from the Sleep of Sin (p. 5)**
- **The Aroma of Reverence (p. 6)**
- **Gero-Arsenius (p. 9)**
- **Let Us Follow Him (p. 11)**
- **Old and New Testaments (p. 21)**
- **A Sermon on Faith (p. 25)**
- **On Kneeling and Sunday Church Prayers (p. 26)**
- **On Gratitude (p. 28)**



- **1<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου: Ἡ Ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου (σελ. 13)**
- **Ὁ Ἐγωισμὸς Ρεζιλεύει καὶ Θεατροῖζει (σελ. 14)**
- **Καλογερομαχισμὸς (σελ. 17)**
- **Τὸ Θεμέλιο τῆς Νέας Ζωῆς (σελ. 18)**
- **Ἡ Ἀνταμοιβὴ τῆς Εὐσπλαχνίας... (σελ. 19)**
- **Δυτικὰ «Πνευματικὰ Μικρόβια» (σελ. 20)**



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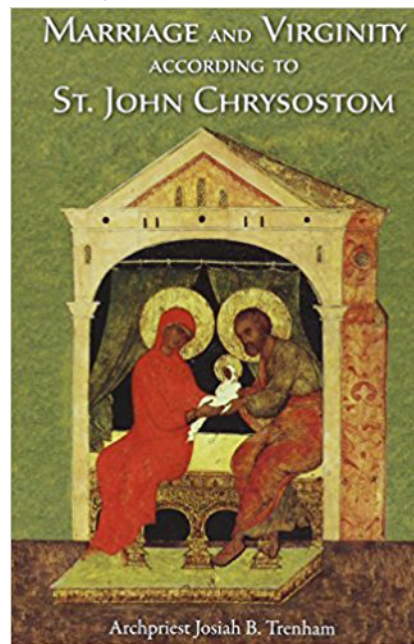
## PARADISAL UNION AND POST-FALL MARRIAGE

*Source: "Marriage and Virginity according to St. John Chrysostom," by Archbishop Josiah B. Trenham, St. Herman Alaska Brotherhood (2013), pp. 99-112, printed with permission by the author and publisher. NOTE: Footnotes' text and references hesitantly omitted to reduce the article's length, albeit they significantly add to the quality of the message; readers are encouraged to acquire the original book for a study of the subject in detail—it is a must for every Orthodox family's library.*

Marriage, as we commonly understand it in our fallen condition, is a God-given concession to man's weakness. It is a divine indulgence to man in his fallen condition, and thus had no relevance in Paradise. Therefore, St. John is careful neither to exalt it unduly (since it is for fallen man) nor to denigrate it (since it has a divine origin). However, just as there exists a paradisal virginity, so there exists a paradisal union of man and woman; and just as the substance of paradisal virginity differs greatly from that which exists outside of Paradise, the same may be said of the union of man and woman. Chrysostom uses the word "marriage" with reference to "earthly marriage," and does not employ the word when he is describing the union of man and woman in Christ in Paradise, and in the coming Kingdom. The paradisal

condition of Adam and Eve is a mysterious union of the first man with his unique and co-equal helpmate, divinely provided to him for conversation, consolation, and to "share the same being." Eve was formed from the rib of "her man." Their union did not involve the many aspects of earthly marriage commonly associated with that state in the fallen age.

When God had completed creating the entire cosmos, He fashioned man, for whom He had made everything. When man lived in Paradise "there was no need for marriage." Chrysostom is clear that in Paradise mankind lived "as in heaven" and was without marriage.



In fact, all of the classical by-products of marriage extolled through the ages in all great civilizations, such as large populations, developed cities, crafts, homes, etc., did not exist in Paradise, and yet this in no way diminished the happiness of that original state. These extolled realities are superfluous and ought not to be greatly valued by man as in any way belonging to the es-

sence of true happiness.

What then is the origin of earthly marriage? Marriage itself is the offspring of death, and is a mortal and slavish garment (τὸ θνητὸν καὶ δουλικὸν ἱμάτιον). Since mortality and slavery did not exist in Paradise, marriage did not exist. St. John carries the thought of St. Paul further. St. Paul explained that where there is sin, there is death. St. John carries

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this further by stating, “Where death is, there is marriage” (Ὁπου γὰρ θάνατος, ἐκεῖ γάμος). The pattern is as follows: sin=>death=>marriage. Each of the main components of marriage—such as sexual intercourse (μίξεως), conception (σύλληψις), labor (ὠδίνες), and childbirth (τόκοι)—is a form of corruption (εἶδος φθορᾶς).

Besides the essential connection of marriage to corruption, if one is joined to a wicked spouse, marriage becomes a hindrance on the road to salvation. A wife and one’s attention to her can be a great impediment to virtue (ὅσον πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἐμπόδιον). Woman was originally created to be a helper to man; but like Adam, Eve rejected God’s original intent, and she became a great source of temptation and treachery to man. To some degree, women in marriage provide help to men through child rearing and providing an outlet for men’s desire; but apart from that, a woman really provides no help. While many people foolishly rush into marriage as a lovely thing (ἐπέραστον πράγμα), it is really a prison. Marital problems are like thorns that stick to one’s clothes when climbing across a hedge. One turns to pick one out, and is caught by several more.

Despite such limitations, **marriage is honorable and blessed**. Marriage, is a good bestowed upon fallen mankind by God as a concession to human weakness. **It is in no way of equal honor with virginity**; for if one believed this, one might very well conclude that two wives were better than one. Rather, God gave marriage to man because his nature was totally out of control and unable to contain its violent passions.

Marriage was created as a harbor in the storm (λιμένα ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ζάλῃ) and to prevent unlawful unions (τῆς παρανόμου μίξεως). While married persons have this harbor,

the virgin “sails a harborless ocean” (πέλαγος πλεῖν ἀλίμενον). “Marriage is of much use to those who are still caught up in their passions, who desire to live the life of swine (χοίρων βίον), and ruin themselves in brothels (ἐν χαμαιτυποίοις φθείρεσθαι). It rescues them from that impure compulsion and keeps them holy and chaste.” Marriage provides one with the “freedom for intercourse” (τὴν τῆς μίξεως ἄδειαν). However, the virgin has no remedy to extinguish the flame. His only chance is to fight the fire so as not to be burnt. The virgin is called to walk on burning coals without being burnt. Marriage supports one who is about to fall. For those who are not tottering, it is no longer useful at all, but is actually an impediment to virtue. Sexual pleasure is an integral part of the consolation of marriage. For his time Chrysostom was bold in suggesting that the pleasure of sexual intercourse may actually solidify the marriage bond. This is as far as Chrysostom would go in “sanctifying” marital intercourse. In fact, in other places of his corpus, he explains away even the pleasure of sexual intercourse and suggests that the pleasure is really *no pleasure at all*.

Chrysostom is clear, however, that marriage is *not* the maintenance in itself of a small brothel, but is rather a means to remain in holiness and dignity (ἐν ἀγιασμῷ καὶ σεμνότητι). Marriage is not evil. The nobilities (τὰ σεμνὰ) of marriage must not be undermined. Marital intercourse itself presents “no hindrance” (μὴ κώλυμα) to the spiritual life. Marital intercourse may be a lawful union (νόμιμον συνοικέσιον) if it takes place according to God’s laws, with self-control and dignity, and in a context of marital harmony (ὁμονοία). The Chrysostomian corpus contains a large amount of positive material on marriage. For Chrysostom marriage is a “sweet ointment” (μύρον), and he is not ashamed to wax eloquent

on the beauty of marital intercourse. Chrysostom does not hesitate to assert that marital intercourse is a type of “spiritual intercourse” (συνουσία πνευματική) between Christ and the Church. Marital sex is a “mystery of love” (ἀγάπης μυστήριον): it demonstrates by procreation the immense power of union (πολλή τῆς ἐνώσεως ἢ ἰσχύς). Marriage is a perfect type of both an individual soul’s and the corporate Church’s union with Christ. Many are not able to endure the violence and the great battle of the passions entailed in the virginal state; marriage is the good that will save them. Marriage is preferable to fornication.

Marriage and sexual intercourse were also fashioned for procreation. Procreation through sexual intercourse became the “greatest consolation” to man following the Fall. In the generation of children, the “fearsome visage of death” (τοῦ θανάτου τὸ φοβερὸν προσωπεῖον) was reduced, and the Resurrection was foreshadowed. Marriage for the sake of raising a family was accepted as a legitimate desire by Chrysostom in his Old Testament commentaries. However, though this was an original divine intention for earthly marriage, it was always secondary to the “greater reason” of quenching the fiery passion of man’s nature.

This emphasis on quenching the passions is evident in St. Paul’s teaching that “in order to avoid immorality” each man should take a wife. This is St. Paul’s consistent theme in 1 Cor 7. Man and woman ought to come together not primarily for procreation, but so *that Satan may not tempt you* (1 Cor 7:5). Later St. Paul says that if the unmarried and widows cannot exercise self-control they should marry. According to Chrysostom this primary reason of marriage, to regulate man’s sexual passion (ὑπὲρ τοῦ σβέσαι τὴν τῆς φύσεως πύρρῳσιν), is the only one of the two original divine intentions that remains relevant in the New Covenant. Since the earth, sea, and the whole world have already been inhabited, there is no need to bear any more children. Procreation, the fruit of mortality and the quest for eternal memory, is, in fact, a reminder of human sin and the loss of the original glory of humanity. This is why St. Paul nowhere suggests procreation as a reason for marriage. In fact, for Chrysostom, procreation was “that specious and grand reason for marriage” (τῆς εὐπροσώπου καὶ σεμνῆς αἰτίας γάμου).

Thus man, the “terrestrial angel,” **was not originally designed for nor, oriented toward, sexual intercourse and**

**procreation, as post-Fall man is.** The sexual necessities of fallen nature and the tremendous sexual impulses, appetites, and drives of post-Fall man simply did not exist to trouble Adam and Eve. Sexual intercourse did not exist in the Garden. It was the result of the Fall, at which time mankind became “bestly” and “animal-like” and began to demonstrate this through copulation. St. John shared this fundamental assumption with virtually all of the Holy Fathers of the Christian Church.

Chrysostom drives home this understanding of the origin of sexual intercourse in several places. In answering detractors, who were even within the Church (which greatly offended the saint), Chrysostom argued that the original reproduction was not sexual in nature. “Tell me, what sort of marriage produced Adam? What kind of birth pains produced Eve? You could not say. Therefore why have groundless fears? Why tremble at the thought of the end of marriage, and thus the end of the human race?” He was not ignorant of the possible Scriptural objections to this view. He explained, for instance, that although Adam and Eve had received the commission from God to “be fruitful and multiply” this did not imply sexual intercourse, or, for that matter, marriage. The case of Abraham shows that even marriage is incapable of producing offspring if God is not willing; and if God is willing even virginity can produce children. Chrysostom utilizes this proposition to encourage infertile women, saying: “Let women not be distressed when they have no children; instead, let them give evidence of a thankful disposition and have recourse to the Creator and direct their request to Him, the Lord of nature, not attributing childbirth to the intercourse of the partners nor to any other source than the Creator of everything.”

Applying this perspective on God’s providence to the many examples of infertility among the pious women of the Old Covenant, Chrysostom poses and answers this question: “What is the meaning of this gallery of sterile people?” (Τι βούλεται τῶν στειρῶν τούτων ὁ χορὸς;). God’s providence so ordered these unusual turns of events involving long-sterile women who finally become mothers in order to prepare His people for the supreme “otherworldly” birth of Jesus Christ from His Virgin Mother. The unusual births of formerly infertile Sarah, Rebecca,



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etc., were Old Testament foreshadowings of the birth of Christ. In the same way it is not the propagation of virginity that decreases the human population, but sin and, particularly, illicit intercourse, that provokes God to wrath. This is evident from Noah's time.

How does Chrysostom interpret Adam's comments at the time when he first gazes upon Eve? In Adam's initial proclamation he asserts, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and will cling to his wife and the two will become one flesh." Chrysostom does not deny that Adam's statements refer both to marriage and sexual intercourse. Rather, St. John posits that these statements were prophetic in nature and demonstrate that Adam's understanding was inspired. This is a necessary conclusion to make since "the consummation of that intercourse occurred after the Fall (μετὰ γὰρ τὴν παράβασιν τὰ τῆς συνουσίας γέγονεν); up till that time they were living like angels in Paradise and so they were not burning with desire (οὐχ ὑπὸ ἐπιθυμίας φλεγόμενοι)."

St. John roots his teaching on the origin of sexual intercourse in his exegesis of Genesis 4:1. *Now, Adam had intercourse with his wife Eve.* Consider when this happened. After their disobedience, after their loss of the Garden, then it was that the practice of intercourse had its beginning. You see, before their disobedience they followed a life like that of the angels, and there was no mention of intercourse." According to Chrysostom the Scriptural text here clearly states that Adam did not "know" his wife sexually until following the Fall. Sexual intercourse is rooted in man's Fall and subsequent death. It is not that marital intercourse is defiling. Intercourse is not impurity (οὐκ εἰς ἀκαθαρσίαν); rather, it is simply a distraction or waste of time (εἰς ἀσχολίαν ἀγούσης). It is the fruit of being subject to the needs of the body. Those who are not in such a subjected state simply have no use or compulsion for sexual intercourse.

He suggests that, while because of the temporal intervention of the Fall we have no concrete examples of exactly how humans would have reproduced the image of God in Paradise, we have every reason to believe that they would have reproduced in a fashion consonant with their angelic being. God multiplied the angels without the aid of physical intercourse, and could have done so for mankind as well. "An infinite number of angels are at the service of

God, thousands upon thousands of archangels are beside Him, and none of them have come into being from the succession of generations, none from childbirth, labor pains, and conception. Could He not, then, have created many more men without marriage? Just as he created the first two from whom all men descend?" In this theory, Chrysostom hints at an explanation more fully developed and previously set forth by St. Gregory of Nyssa. **Those who assume sexual intercourse was a part of life in the Garden of delights are guilty of projecting back into the original creation what has become normative for fallen man, and of a failure to appreciate the massive chasm separating man's life in Paradise from his life following the Fall.**



Virginity works, as should truly a Christian marriage, to accomplish the divine task of reducing the baseness of our souls and leading them to perfect virtue. **God has called us to one ambition only: to regain Paradise lost.** Success in the battle against the devil and victory over evil is the path of return, and constitutes the re-acquisition of the virginal life of Paradise. Whether one travels there by virginity, which is the

most direct route, or by the blessed state of earthly marriage is not God's main concern; it is the return to Paradise itself that is important.

*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.* (Mt 11:15)



**A**bstinence is for everyone, not just for monks. Husbands and wives for whom marriage means only the satisfaction of bodily passions will not be justified. They will answer before God for not having been abstinent. Of course, as the Apostle says, they are not to abstain from each other for a long time, lest the devil deceive them, but they should abstain according to mutual consent (cf. 1 Cor 7:1-6). Married people should abstain from corporeal relations during fasts and on great Feast days.

**Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica (+2003)**  
*"Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives"*

## AWAKENING THE SINNER FROM THE SLEEP OF SIN

Source: "The Path to Salvation," by St. Theophan the Recluse, translated by Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) and the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, published by the Holy Monastery of St. Paisius (Arizona, 2016), pp. 94-96.

The awakening of the sinner is that act of divine grace in his heart, the consequence of which he, as one awakened from sleep, sees his sinfulness, senses the danger of his situation, begins to fear for himself and to care about deliverance from his misfortune and salvation. Previously, he was like a blind man, unfeeling and uncaring with regard to salvation; now he sees, senses and cares.

However, this is still not change. It is only the opportunity for change and the call for it. Grace is only telling the sinner at this point, *See what you have gotten into; look then, take measures for salvation.* It merely removes him from his customary bonds and sets him beyond them, thereby giving him the opportunity to choose a completely new life and find his place in it. If he takes advantage of this, it is to his benefit; if he does not, he will be cast again into the very same sleep and the very same abyss of destruction.

This divine grace is achieved by exposing to the consciousness and feeling the insignificance and shame of that to which a person is devoted and values so highly. Just as the Word of God pierces even to the *dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow* (Heb 4:12.), so does grace pierce to the division of the heart and sin, and breaks down their unlawful alliance and relationship. We saw how the sinner with his entire being falls into a realm where there are principles, ideas, opinions, rules, customs, pleasures and ways that are completely incompatible with the true spiritual life for which man is intended.

Once he has fallen into this place, he is not there in isolation or detachment. Instead, he is permeated by everything, mingles with everything. He is completely immersed in it. Thus, it is only natural that he not know or think about its incompatibility with spiritual life, and he has no kind of sympathy toward spiritual life. The spiritual realm is completely closed off to him. It is obvious from this that the door to conversion may be opened only under the condition that **the spiritual way of life be revealed to the sinner's consciousness in its full light**, and not merely revealed, but that it touch the heart; that the sinful way of life be discredited, rejected, and destroyed. This also takes place in the presence of consciousness and feeling. Only then can the care arise to abandon the old ways and begin the new. All this is accomplished in the single act of the sinner's arousal by grace.

In its course of action, the arousing divine grace is always connected not only with the bonds in which the sinner is

held, but also with the overall condition of the sinner. In this latter regard, one must above all keep in mind the difference in the way the action of grace appears when it acts on those who have never been aroused, and when it acts on those who have previously experienced such arousal. For someone who has never experienced spiritual awakening before, it is given to him freely, like some all-encompassing, preliminary or summoning grace. Nothing is required from the person beforehand, because he has a completely different orientation.

However, grace is not freely given to the person who has already experienced spiritual arousal, who knows and senses what life in Christ is, and who has fallen into sin again. He must give something himself first. He must still be worthy and beseech. It is not enough merely to wish; he must work on himself in order to attract spiritual arousal by grace. Such a person, in recollecting his previous sojourn in the virtuous Christian way, often desires it again, but has no power over himself. He would like to turn over a new leaf, but is unable to gain self-mastery and conquer himself. He has abandoned himself to helpless despair because he previously abandoned the gift and reproached and *trodden underfoot the Son of God ... and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace.* (Heb 10:29). Now he is allowed to perceive that this power of grace is so great that it will not be granted immediately. Seek and labor, and learn to appreciate how difficult it is to acquire.

Such a person is in a somewhat agonizing condition: He thirsts but is not given drink, hungers but is not fed, seeks but does not find, exerts himself but does not receive. Sometimes a person is left in this condition for a very long time, to the point where he feels divine reproach, as if God has forgotten him, turned away and betrayed His promise. He feels *like the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, ... But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned..* (Heb 6:7-8). But this slow touching of grace to the heart of the seeker is only a trial. He goes through the period of trial, and thanks to his labors and agonizing search, the spirit of arousal once again descends on him as it descends on others as a gift. This course of action of salvific grace shows us two things: first, the special actions of divine grace in arousing the sinner; and second, the usual way of acquiring the gift of arousing grace.



For error does not show itself as it really is, that by appearing in its nakedness it would not expose itself for what it is. But cunningly dressing itself in alluring clothing, it achieves what seems outwardly to the inexperienced as truer than truth itself.

**Hieromartyr Irenaeus the Bishop of Lyons (+202)**

## THE AROMA OF REVERENCE

Source: Excerpt from *Elder Paisios of Mount Athos* by Hieromonk Isaac.

Once a reclusive ascetic, who had heard a lot about Elder Paisios, came to visit him. They talked for a while, and he ascertained that Elder Paisios was an exceptionally reverent man. Indeed, the elder had a rare reverence, which he had learned from his parents, and mainly his mother.

While at the monastery, he benefited from many of the fathers, and especially from a particular hieromonk. He would say, “We can’t reach the reverence he had—impossible. He would celebrate liturgy every day, and he struggled greatly. Once, for half a year, he ate nothing but half of a small *prosporon* and a few tomatoes dried in the sun.”

When he would serve out in the chapels, this reverent priest, like other priests of the monastery, preferred to have as a chanter the young Father Averkios (as the elder was then called).

The elder had an innate reverence, but he also cultivated it a great deal. He placed such emphasis on it that he once said that “reverence is the greatest virtue, because it attracts the grace of God.” To the elder, reverence was the fear of God and spiritual sensitivity. Reverent people behave carefully and modestly, because they intensely feel the presence of God.

The elder wanted reverence to be unaffected and internal. He turned away from mere external forms. Regarding a group of monks who had great order and discipline in their liturgical life, he commented, “I respect that, if it’s something that comes from within.” The elder’s conduct was reverent, but with a freedom that was alien to dry forms. If he didn’t feel something, he wouldn’t do it. He distinguished reverence from piety—a word he even avoided saying. He would say that reverence is like incense, while piety is just perfume.<sup>(1)</sup>

The elder’s reverence encompassed not only small and seemingly unimportant matters, but also spiritual and essential issues. “If someone neglects the little things,” he taught, “the danger is that he’ll start neglecting greater, holier things. And then, without realizing it, rationalizing it all to himself—‘This is nothing, that doesn’t matter’—he can end up, God forbid,

totally neglecting the things of God and becoming irreverent, arrogant, and atheistic.”

His reverence could be seen in the way he prayed, venerated icons, received *antidoron* and holy water, partook of Holy Communion, held icons during processions, chanted, and arranged and beautified the small chapel of his hermitage. He paid attention to details, but in a way that wasn’t ritualistic or fastidiously formal. This was his own attitude toward God, which wasn’t laid out in advance by any *typikon* of the Church: it was his personal disposition. He felt that his whole hermitage, not just his chapel, was sacred space. He arranged his cell, where he prayed, just like a little church. There was an *iconostasis* with many icons and a lamp that burned continuously, and he would cense and light many candles there. He had

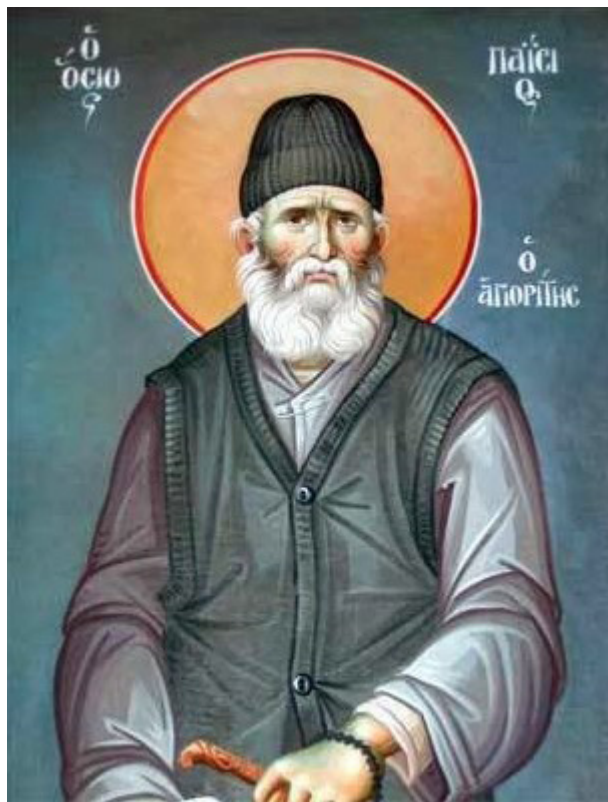
constructed his bed so that it was like a coffin, and he would say, “This is the altar of my cell.” Icons and holy books never touched his bed, with the exception of an icon at its head.

The icon was rather tattered and faded, and a brother once asked him why it was in this condition. The elder tried to hide the truth, but the monk finally realized that it was like that because of his many kisses and tears. The elder reluctantly admitted, “I can get through an entire vigil that way;” that is, weeping.

He also treated the other areas of his hermitage with reverence—the workshop where he made the little icons, the guesthouse where souls were reborn by God’s grace, the balcony, and even the yard. He thought that it

was irreverent to have a toilet inside the hermitage. It was partly for ascetic reasons that he kept it at such a distance, but mostly it was out of reverence.

Once, when he was away from the hermitage of the Holy Cross, the fathers of the monastery (out of love, so he wouldn’t be uncomfortable) made him a small outhouse, outside but sharing a wall with the hermitage. The elder never used it. At Panagouda, when his health had deteriorated toward the end of his life and he needed to go out frequently at night—in cold, rain, and snow—his spiritual children began to insist on building him an outhouse just clear of the balcony to make things easier for him. He refused. “That’s where the Panagia appeared,” he said. “How can I go to the toilet there?”



The elder's life was fragrant with deep and unaffected reverence, just as the angels in heaven worship God day and night "with great reverence." This was clear to see from his relationship with God and from the expressions on his face when coming into contact with sacred things. He reacted to sacred objects as though they were alive.

Once, when Elder Paisios was visiting the hermitage of another monk, his hernia was bothering him. The elder of the hermitage begged him to lie down and rest a little, but Elder Paisios declined. He was only able to lie on his left side, and, if he had done that there, his feet would have been pointing at some icons, which he thought of as irreverent.

Before entering the holy altar, he would make a prostration to the floor, remove his monastic cap, and kiss the cross on the altar-curtain; and then he would enter by the side door. During the Communion hymn at liturgy, if he intended to commune, he would make full prostrations. For a time, he had it as a rule to eat nothing for thirty-three hours before communing.

Because of his great reverence for the mystery of the priesthood, the elder never assented to ordination, even though, as he once said, "It's been revealed to me three different times that I could become a priest."<sup>(2)</sup>

Plainly, the elder saw reverence as a fundamental virtue for every Christian—although, rigorous as his criteria were, he considered it something rare. To the elder, reverence was greater than most of the other virtues.

He often used it as a criterion.

If a reverent person wrote or said or did something for which he was criticized, the elder, even before forming a clear opinion on the issue itself, would go out of his way to propose mitigating circumstances. He would say, "He's a reverent man—I don't believe he'd do something like that." The elder believed that this quality preserved a person from making errors, from deceptions and from falling—perhaps in the sense of the verse declaring that the Lord *will carefully guard the way of those who reverence Him.* (Prov 2:8.).

The elder considered reverence to be extremely important in all of a Christian's life and struggles, and especially those of a monk. A person's reverence, he believed, acts as a steady factor in his life, affecting everything and raising his spiritual level.

He advised monks to take care to acquire reverence. "A new monk, especially, has to be reverent through and through. It helps for him to always have the *Evergetinos* open<sup>(3)</sup> and to spend time with other monks who are reverent." When a new monk asked the elder what it was that he should pay the most attention to, the elder replied, "Reverence and attention to yourself."

A Russian bishop, presented with many candidates for the priesthood, once asked the elder whom he should ordain. "Those who are reverent and pure," the elder answered—he did not say educated or energetic men, or candidates with good voices.

In chanting and iconography also, reverence was more important to the elder than technique. He was able to discern its presence in chanting or in an icon, and he would say: "If



A young St Paisios in the hermitage of St. Epistimi above St. Catherine's Monastery, at Mt. Sinai

you pay attention to the meaning of a *troparion*, it'll change you, and you'll be able to chant in a reverent way. If you're reverent, you might make a mistake while you chant, but it'll come out sounding sweet. If you only pay attention to technique—I mean, going note-by-note, without a reverent spirit—then you'll end up like a lay chanter I once heard; he was chanting *Bless the Lord, O my soul* like a blacksmith striking an anvil. I heard it in a car, and it disturbed me—I told the driver to turn off the tape. When someone doesn't chant from the heart, it's like he's running you out of church. A sacred canon says that people who chant with improper voices should be given penances

because they drive people away from church."

Concerning iconography, he advised, "You should make an icon with reverence, like we were going to be giving it to Christ Himself. How would we like it if someone gave us a photograph where our face wasn't right? It's not right for the Panaghia to be depicted like Saint Anna—I mean, not to show her physical beauty. There has never been a woman as beautiful as the Panaghia was in soul and body. How she transformed people's souls with her grace!"

Of the icon of the Tenderly Kissing Mother of God (*Glykofilousa*), at Philotheou Monastery, he remarked: "Technically, it's not quite perfect, because Christ's feet are wedge-shaped, but it works miracles and has such grace and sweetness. It's probably because God rewarded the iconographer's reverence."

“The grace of God,” observed the elder, “comes to reverent people, and it makes the soul beautiful.” But he observed with sadness that contemporary people pay little attention to such things. “If a person is not reverent,” he said, “if he scorns divine things, then divine grace abandons him and he’s overcome by temptations, and becomes like the demons. Divine grace won’t come to an irreverent person—it comes to people who honor it.” As examples of irreverence, he mentioned the sacrifice of Cain and the behavior of the sons of Eli related in the Old Testament. Their disdain provoked the wrath of God, and they were punished.

The elder considered it irreverent to place icons, ecclesiastical books, *antidoron*, and holy objects in general on the seats of church-stalls, and even more so on chairs or beds (except on a pillow). He suggested that people put the little icons that he would hand out in their chest pockets. Once, he related, a pilgrim came holding his head crooked from neck pain. Through divine enlightenment, the elder realized that the man had suffered this at the hands of demonic powers, because he had put a cross the elder had given him, which contained a piece of the Precious Cross of the Lord, in his back-pocket. The elder forbade anyone who lived carelessly to carry the Precious Cross.

He once told us about someone who had become possessed because he had spit in an unclean place on a day when he had communed. The same had happened to a woman who had thrown holy water onto excrement. Another time, he related, a young man who was engaged to be married visited a conjurer, who told him to urinate on the wedding rings. Upon following the conjurer’s instructions, the young man became possessed, because wedding rings are holy. The elder also gave other, similar examples of careless and irreverent people being abandoned by divine grace and becoming possessed.

He didn’t think it was right to refer to the holy fathers of the Church simply by their first names; for example, as “Basil” or “Gregory.” “We talk about ‘Father So-and-so’ and say ‘Father’ to monks and clergy,” he commented, “and this is how we’re going to talk about the holy fathers?”

He didn’t want people to offer God candles made from impure or artificial beeswax or to fill their lamps with olive oil of poor quality or with seed-oil. On the contrary, he emphasized, “[we should] offer our best to God in worship. We should offer up our best efforts and our pure prayer—not our yawning.” He considered it greatly irreverent to use *prospora* for the liturgy that was tainted with mold. “Christ gives us His Body and Blood,” he would say, “and we give Him moldy *prospora*?” He would walk miles to find *prospora* for the Divine Liturgy, and when he carried it, he would hold it by the side, taking care not to touch the seal.

The elder tried to show gratitude and be pleasing to the One whom he loved. Out of his great love, he offered to God the very best, and he conducted himself with refinement, with spiritual sensitivity and reverence. And God, being pleased, bestowed His grace on the elder in abundance.

† † †  
NOTES:

(1): “Reverence,” in Greek *evlavia* (εὐλαβεία); and “piety,” *evsevia* (εὐσέβεια). The latter word is used in the Greek of the Scriptures and Church fathers to refer to Christian reverence and correct faith; and, especially in older translations, it has often been rendered as “piety.” By the elder’s time, the Greek word had taken on a negative meaning in a somewhat similar fashion as the word “piety” has come to do in English; to many, it was synonymous with pietism and formalism.

(2): Most likely these signs were not commands—rather, he was presented with the possibility of becoming a priest. When he was asked about this, he answered, “Christ gives us gifts. Do we have to accept all of them?”

(3): That is, to study it frequently. The *Evergetinos* is a collection of anecdotes and teachings from the early Egyptian desert fathers. Unlike the *Philokalia*, a more advanced spiritual text that treats the way in which “the intellect (*nous*) is purified, illumined, and made perfect” (vol. 1, p. 13), the *Evergetinos* focuses on the practice of Christian virtues, a necessary precursor to the exalted attainments described in the *Philokalia*.



Where is this world coming to? Once they sent me a picture of a bride, and asked me to pray that her marriage would be a good one. She was wearing an awful wedding gown. When they dress this way, they are showing an irreverence to the Mystery of Marriage and to the Church, whose space is sacred. These are supposedly spiritual people, and yet they do not seem to think twice about the dress. What will those who are not spiritual do, if they follow their example? That’s why I am saying: **If monasteries do not hold the line, no one else will put the brakes on people.** They are out of control.

St. Paisios the Athonite



## GERO-ARSENIOS THE CAVE-DWELLER (1886-1983)

FELLOW ASCETIC OF ELDER JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST

Source: "My Elder: Joseph the Hesychast and Cave-dweller," St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery (2013), pp. 563-568.



Gero-Arsenios was a living example of obedience for our brotherhood. He was obedient to Geronda his whole life. Not once did he disobey or grieve him. Gero-Arsenios was so humble that he was actually obedient to everyone.

One day my brother came to visit me. Since he was a carpenter and we were building our chapel, Geronda asked him:

-Niko, can you make the *iconostasis* for us?

-Yes, I can, Geronda, he replied.

As he worked, Gero-Arsenios helped him out and took orders from him as if he were a little child, even though he was forty years older than my brother.

Gero-Arsenios' life was extremely ascetical, beginning with his first years in Jerusalem and then in our brotherhood.

When he was seventy, he took care of his own garden. He did this not only to help provide for our needs but also because he wanted to please Geronda who liked having our own fresh vegetables. Even at that age, Gero-Arsenios worked along with us youngsters. He was even shorter than me, but he toiled and sweated and carried just as much as the rest of us. Whenever Fathers Athanasios and Joseph the Cypriot went working at the monasteries all day long to gather chestnuts or olives, he would tell them:

-Don't worry; I'll do your prayer rules for you.

He said this because they would be so tired from working all day that they wouldn't have the strength to do their prostrations. We youngsters were no match for this little old man!

Not only did he have endurance, but he also had tremendous strength. He would go down to the harbor and load up on his back whatever we needed; wheat, sand, rocks, wood, all types of provisions. Sometimes the load he carried was in excess of 150 pounds! When someone asked him how he was able to carry such a heavy load after such a tiresome vigil, he answered:

-I have a naturally strong constitution, but when a disciple has faith in the blessing of his elder, he can lift even a mountain. Many times when I had loaded up my back with things beyond my strength, my knees would be ready to buckle. But when I made the sign of the cross and called upon Geronda's prayers, and the load would lighten on its own. Then I felt as if someone were supporting me from

behind, and I flew up the mountainside like a bird, while ceaselessly saying the prayer.

Not only was Gero-Arsenios naturally strong and a hard worker who labored wholeheartedly, but he would also keep vigil every night, **doing thousands of prostrations** and saying the Jesus prayer with his prayer rope countless times. He said the Jesus prayer while making the sign of the cross for so long that one day he injured his shoulder. Geronda was forced to tell him to do fewer. I would see Gero-Arsenios stand upright from sunset till sunrise for his vigil, even after working hard all day with minimal sleep. He would sleep only two hours in the evening and one hour in the morning. He told me that sometimes when it was time for vigil, he would say to himself:

-How am I going to keep vigil now? I am so tired from working all day, how am I going to stand up for so many hours.

But then he added:

-As soon as I stand up and put my nous in my heart—my, oh, my! My heart opens up with prayer, and I feel such grace from God that I notice no exhaustion. Eight hours pass, ten hours pass, and there is zero exhaustion. I just hold on to the prayer. Only when I stop in the morning do I realize the exhaustion.

He continued keeping vigil like this until he died at the age of ninety-seven.

Sometimes he would remain standing for twelve hours straight! He would not even shift his weight from one foot to the other, nor would he lean against the wall or even pause to read a book. It was awe-inspiring. And to think that he was doing this in his sixties, while I was a nineteen-year-old kid, and I had to often lean against the wall. He would just tilt his head down towards his heart, hold his prayer rope, and keep saying, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. What prayer he had! His little cell was fragrant from all the prayers he said synchronized with his breathing. He had the name of Christ "carved" within his heart.

He himself admitted:

-When I pray with my prayer rope while standing, I perceive an intense divine fragrance. But when I say the prayer sitting down, I perceive very little fragrance.

When Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain met Gero-Arsenios, the holy Elder was amazed at his fragrance because he knew that it is not just a sign of dispassion but also of sanctity.

He was often so absorbed in the prayer that when it was time to begin work, he couldn't tear himself away from the prayer. We would go up to him and tell him:

-Geronda, it's time for work.

After coming to his senses, he would say with surprise

-It's daytime already?

Gero-Arsenios was an extremely simple and childlike person. You cannot imagine how simple he was. He was simple and

innocent like a small child. He was never upset with anyone. I never saw Gero-Arsenius get angry or behave inappropriately. This is why he never had temptations in his life. He passed his life like an infant. While other people were passing through the furnace of temptations, he passed his life with ease because he was always obedient to Geronda.

He was simple-minded because that is how he was born. All he knew was how to say the prayer; he did not have *theoria*. He did not experience the expansion of his nous (\*) in prayer. Nevertheless, he felt grace intensely in his heart from noetic prayer. He did not have Geronda's sharpness of mind. Geronda was extremely sharp and had both noetic prayer and *theoria*. He had both *praxis* and *theoria*. Geronda was unsurpassed in his prayer of the heart and *theoria*, and from both springs he drew huge amounts of grace, which sanctified him.

Only once did Gero-Arsenius experience a "mini-*theoria*," if we can call it that. Once, when he was praying for the departed, he found himself in a beautiful place with groups of families, each in their own tent. The people inside the tents were very happy. Gero-Arsenius entered one of the tents and said with all of his characteristic simplicity:

-What are you people doing in here? Does anyone come and visit you?

-Yes, papa-Bartholomew visits us and brings us presents.

Papa-Bartholomew was the priest who served the Liturgy for them back at St. Basil's Skete. This goes to show the benefit of commemorating the departed in the Divine Liturgy.

Even though Gero-Arsenius did not experience *theoria*, he had an immense number of exceptional visitations of grace. Every year on the feast day of St. Savvas the Sanctified, Gero-Arsenius smelled an indescribable fragrance in his cell. Geronda knew that this was a visitation of grace. (It is significant that he used to live at the Monastery of St. Savvas and had labored very hard there.) But to protect Gero-Arsenius from vainglorious thoughts, Geronda said in front of everyone:

-Listen, fathers. Don't attach any importance to fragrances, because the enemy is also able to create them...

Geronda taught all his disciples these lessons of discernment:

-If, during prayer, you perceive an unusual phenomenon with one of your five senses but without your soul sensing anything, pay no attention to that phenomenon because God is beyond the five senses. But if joy or hope come to your soul when you see a vision, smell a fragrance, hear something, or have any other sensation, neither accept it nor reject it, but go tell it to your spiritual father immediately!

-If the triad of faith, hope, and love before you begin praying is—in a manner of speaking ten degrees Celsius—and afterwards your faith, hope, and love have increased to one hundred degrees, then this transformation is from God, because the evil one is incapable of inspiring you with either faith or hope or love, since he lacks all three of these.

-So if you find that these three have increased after you have prayed, know that your prayer has been acceptable to God. If these three qualities remain unchanged, know that you have prayed in a worldly manner. If these three have decreased in you, you have prayed in a deluded manner. And if, after prayer, you feel some kind of carnality, however slight, you have prayed wrongly.

Once during the Liturgy, Geronda spilled an oil-lamp. Gero-Arsenius said:

-Hey, you spilled the oil-lamp!

-Be quiet, Geronda replied. We're in church!

How charming the two of them were!

Gero-Arsenius was always healthy, which is why he lived to

be ninety-seven. He never got sick, except for catching a minor cold now and then. When he did, the only medicine he took was herbal tea with some raki. Then he would just stay in bed and keep warm until it passed. Never in his life did he take any medicine or pills or injections. He did not even bathe for seventy years. He only washed his feet and



head sometimes. Despite this, his body always had a pleasant scent of the wilderness, somewhat like basil.

After Elder Joseph's repose, Gero-Arsenius stayed with Papa-Haralambos. Gero-Arsenius missed Geronda's presence and said:

-Ah, Geronda, you forgot me! You didn't take me with you! But I said to him:

-No... he left you behind as a consolation for us.

Twenty-four years later, in 1983, he departed like a ripe fig. He did not even get sick; his soul departed out of ripeness. He was not afraid of death because he had been obedient to Elder Joseph until the age of seventy-three when Elder Joseph fell asleep in the Lord. Besides, he had the Jesus prayer constantly within him, he was overflowing with grace, he had worked hard his entire life in asceticism, and he had Geronda's intercessions. How could he not be at peace? How could he fear death? He had faith that Geronda would come and receive his soul...

† † †

(\*) Elder Joseph describes what is meant by expansion of the nous near the end of his tenth letter in *Monastic Wisdom*.

## LET US FOLLOW HIM!

By the late Augoustinos N. Kantiotes, bishop of Florina, Greece (+2010), from "Follow Me," translated by Asterios Gerostergios, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts, pp. 68-74.

### *They forsook all and followed Him.*

[Lk 5:11]

† † †

We hear the voice of the Lord. He calls us, too, to leave everything and follow Him. Leave everything? Our homes, our work, our various businesses? Not quite. For we saw that those who, like the Apostles, are called to a special, extraordinary mission requiring absolute self-denial and consecration are expected to leave all these things. But then, what do we mean when we say that he who wants to follow the Lord must leave everything?

Listen! Besides the things that comprise one's material goods, which everyone—even the poorest person—has to some degree, there is another bounty—one that is not material or visible, a wealth that is not blessed but damnable, and which has collected in our secret coffer by the meddling of Satan. This bounty is vice, evil, and passion. With all the mental and physical corruption that passions cause, people still love them, tend to them, feed them, and would not think of separating themselves from them. There are cases, not rare, when people love the passions more than cherished persons and possessions. Whatever promises he makes, the alcoholic will not separate himself from his passion for drink, the gambler from his passion for card playing, the debauchee from his carnal passion. Above all else is the drink, the card, the delight. How many houses, stores, and factories—how many enormous fortunes—are used up to satisfy bottomless passions!

The passions are the possessions, the principal possessions, which we are called upon to leave, to separate ourselves from, in order to *follow Christ*. (Lk 14:33). For one to leave material goods and put them at Christ's disposal for the common good is a praiseworthy act, but it is not as difficult as cutting oneself from one's faults, evils, and passions. The Apostles easily left their boats and nets, but how difficult it was for them to leave behind their errors, faults, and vices! Passions stick to our beings like a turtle's shell adheres to its body. They compose a second nature, an evil nature. "To transform the evil nature is not a light undertaking," the ancient Greeks used to say.

A person who wishes to *follow Christ* is called upon to deny, renounce, and throw far away like an old garment all that comprises the worst fortune of his existence. In the sacred service of Baptism, we see that this is at the heart of renouncing. If he wants to *follow Christ*, the one to be baptized is asked to renounce his evil habits, vices, passions, and everything which constitutes service to Satan. Stripped of that which was formerly beloved, the one baptized can *follow Christ*.

But Christ, who wraps Himself in light as with a garment, does not leave him naked but clothes him in a garment, an imperishable garment. And this imperishable garment is comprised of the virtues of Christ, which should become the virtues of the Christian.

St. Clement of Alexandria, allegorically interpreting Matthew 19:21 (*sell what you have and give to the poor*) says that for someone to deny his wealth and give it to the poor or to his country is nothing new, as in the sense of Jesus' teaching, for many ancients like Anaxagoras, Democretes, and Cratetes did the same for a worldly cause. What is new in Jesus' teaching, however, is something "greater, more godlike, and more perfect, the stripping off of the passions from the soul itself and from the disposition" and eradicating them completely. This is the highest perfection.

Has anyone succeeded? "So," continues Clement, "let no man destroy wealth, rather than the passions of the soul, which are incompatible with the better use of wealth. So that, becoming virtuous and good, he may be able to make a good use of these riches," i.e., delivered from the passionate attachment to material things, one will be able to dispense in the best manner whatever material goods he has for the glory of God.

Therefore, O Christian, when you hear the Gospel say that the four fishermen *forsook all* and followed Christ, consider this and ask yourself: "The Apostles left material possessions for the Lord's sake. What have I left for the Lord's sake? What has my faith cost me up till now?"

Any sacrifice of material goods for Christ's sake is small, very small and unimportant, says Anthony the Great. And were we to suppose that we possessed not just a few earthly, household goods or money, but were lords of all the earth and denied all this for the spiritual good of the soul, even this sacrifice would have no value compared to the Kingdom of the heavens. This is what Anthony the Great taught, as related by St. Athanasios. Today's Christians, however, have such an attachment to material goods and are so worldly in their cares, that they wouldn't sacrifice a strip of land for righteousness' sake, for love or peace. Many would not even sacrifice a penny for Christ's sake! They sacrifice everything for matter, which they have deified, while **the true Christian sacrifices matter for the sake of the spirit**. This is the difference between the material and the spiritual person, and every Christian should be such a spiritual person.

The Gospel does not oblige me to forsake my job. It calls me, however, to make another kind of sacrifice—to forsake my bad habits. Have I left them all? Or have I maybe forsaken only a few bad habits which never bothered me much, and kept certain pet passions that I call "human weaknesses" to ease my conscience, but ones the Gospel of Christ condemns?

Every follower of Christ should ask these questions, for next to the Lord Himself, our salvation is the most serious responsibility of our lives, and woe to us if there is any weakness we

decide not to forsake. We will remain far from the Lord. Is there a greater calamity than this? Therefore, with His help, let us banish every sinful burden, and as well-girded soldiers follow the glorious path of the martyr.

If we think of “forsook all” in this spiritual sense, everyone could imitate the Apostles and follow the Lord. St. Chrysostom thunders: **Forsake only your evil habits, and remaining in your own homes, you can easily be saved.**

People who want to banish every evil habit must come to know and feel the infinite wretchedness which human passions create, and recognizing this, call on the Lord, Who alone can change this terrible state.

St. Chrysostom gives us an analogy of the misery of the passions. He tells us that our present life is not different from a jail. If we go into a jail, we see the unfortunate condemned, all bound with heavy chains, so that if we even partially leave the fantasy (the false image which this bounty gives to many, i.e., pleasure or glory) and psychologically interpret the reality—that is, if each of us would examine our mental lives—we would see that our souls are no different from prisoners. They also pull heavy bonds and tolerate them. For the soul, heavy bonds and chains are the passions possessing it. Do you want to see what misfortune these bonds create? Examine, if you will, the life of a greedy rich man who never rests, for the more riches he has, the heavier his bonds become. The greedy man has a fearsome jailor who does not even let him go a little distance from the prison door to breathe, but constantly thrusts him into the deeper and darker parts of the jail where the filth is unbearable and the bothersome insects do not let him rest at all. Who is this stern jailor? The evil love of money.

Bound souls! Poor people, although they seem free in body, they live as if in a jail under the watch of austere jailors who carry whips with which they mercilessly strike the ever-petulant criminals. And these criminals would most unwillingly wear physical bonds but gladly wear the ones with which sin binds the soul. Appropriate is this tale:

A tyrant of ancient times ordered a workman to prepare a chain of a certain length with the promise that he would reward him as he deserved. The workman carried out the tyrant’s desire. He prepared the chain. But as soon as he saw it, the tyrant ordered the workman to double its length. And when he did this, the tyrant ordered it doubled again. The chain became very long and heavy. And then the tyrant rewarded him, very deservedly. What was his reward? He ordered that the workman be bound hand and foot with the chain and be thrown into prison for life.

That great tyrant of humanity called the devil does something similar. He orders every person who blindly follows him to prepare a chain, to practice sin. And when the sin is done, he does not say, “Good enough,” but orders it to be repeated, to have its power doubled. And when through

constant repetition the chain of sin becomes “long and heavy,” it becomes a passion. Then wail and lament! The miserable person becomes a chained servant of Satan. Who is to blame? We are. The person who hears Satan’s voice and follows him descends into the fearful prisons of sin—his passions.

In this terrible state there is no other escape except that which St. Chrysostom points out. And that is, beg the Redeemer of souls to break the bonds, banish the jailor, and remove the burden of iron chains from us and show our spirit to be lighter than an eagle’s wings. But we must cooperate, “offering attention, thought and eagerness.” Working thus, we will quickly expel our vices, and, free of the evils which now possess and tyrannize our souls, we will realize in what a calamitous abyss we had once lived and what freedom we now enjoy following the Lord.

In his novel *Let Us Follow Him*, the Polish writer, Henryk Sienkiewicz, very artfully describes the terrible catastrophe of the human soul in the person of a noble girl named Antaia, who became the wife of a powerful figure of the Roman Empire, the Patrician Cenna, charged with governing Alexandria. The excellent position was full of worldly joy. But there appeared deep and inexplicable pain. Antaia was afflicted with a mysterious illness which fed on her physically and mentally. She withered like a flower in the bud and no medicine, physician, magician or sage was able to cure her. Finally Cenna, in despair, brought Antaia to Palestine. There was a leader whom they knew, Pontius Pilate. Then came the day when Jesus was to be crucified.

The sick girl’s ardent desire was to see the Condemned, and it was granted. Pilate saw to it that the litter carrying the sick girl was at a point on the way to Golgotha, from which she could watch the procession. ... And she saw Jesus carrying His Cross. Looking into His face, Antaia was moved by a most holy feeling. She got up her strength, sat up in her litter, looked at the King of Pain and Suffering and began showering Him with flowers. Her lips whispered, “You are the Truth...” Antaia was healed from that very moment, and her unbelieving husband believed. This is a synopsis of the story, certainly a creation of the novelist’s imagination, but two realities are vividly presented in it: The agony of the human soul and redemption in Christ!

Dear friends, innumerable examples are contained in the experience of centuries to certify that far from the Lord there is the slavery described, while near the Lord there is freedom which springs from His sacrifice on the Cross, from the blood of Christ. And after so many examples, after the experiences of the past centuries of those who found redemption in Christ, why, dear friend, do you still hesitate to follow the Lord? Banish all delay and make the decision.

Brothers, fellow sinners! Let’s listen to the mystical voice of the Lord who calls us and, forsaking everything, **let us follow Jesus wherever He leads.**

## 1<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου: Ἡ Ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου

**Ἡ πρώτη τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου ἐορτάζεται ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Χριστιανικὴ Ἐκκλησία ὡς ἡ πρώτη τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους.**

*Θεοδώρου Ρόκα, θεολόγου ἐρμηνευτικῆς θεολογίας.*

Ἡ λέξη Ἰνδικτος («indictus») εἶναι λέξη Λατινικὴ ποὺ σημαίνει «ὄρισμός», «διάγγελμα», «ἐπαγγελία», «κήρυξη», «ἐπιβολὴ ποινῆς ἢ φόρου». Ἡ λέξη αὐτὴ χρησιμοποιεῖτο ἀπὸ τοὺς Ρωμαίους αὐτοκράτορες, μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ καθορίζουν τὸ ὕψος τῶν φόρων ἐπὶ τῆς παραγωγῆς τῆς γῆς, ποὺ θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ πληρώσουν οἱ ὑπήκοοι τῆς Ρώμης γιὰ τὴ συντήρηση τοῦ στρατοῦ. Τὸ διάγγελμα αὐτὸ ἴσχυε γιὰ δεκαπέντε χρόνια καὶ τοῦτο, γιὰτὶ κάθε δεκαπέντε χρόνια ἀπολύονταν οἱ παλαιοὶ στρατιῶτες καὶ κατατάσσονταν οἱ νέοι. Νὰ σημειωθεῖ ὅτι τὸ ὕψος τῶν σχετικῶν φόρων καθοριζόταν ἀπὸ τὴν νέα δύναμη τοῦ στρατοῦ γιὰ τὴν ἐπόμενη δεκαπενταετία.

Μὲ τὴν πάροδο τοῦ χρόνου ἡ λέξη Ἰνδικτος ἔπαυσε νὰ σημαίνει μόνον διάγγελμα καὶ ὅλα τὰ ἀνωτέρω, ἀλλὰ σήμαινε τὸ διάστημα τῶν δεκαπέντε ἐτῶν. Καὶ ἔτσι ἄρχισαν νὰ μετροῦν τὸ χρόνο σὲ Ἰνδίκτους (πρῶτη Ἰνδικτος, δευτέρη Ἰνδικτος, κ.ο.κ.). Ἦδη πρῶτος ὁ Μέγας Κωνσταντῖνος ὄρισε ὡς ἐπίσημη μέτρηση τοῦ χρόνου (τὸ 312 ἢ 313 μ.Χ.) τὴν Ἰνδικτο, ποὺ ἄρχιζε τὴν 1<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου, ἐποχὴ ποὺ εἶχε τελειώσει ἡ συγκομιδὴ τῶν καρπῶν τῆς γῆς. Ἡ μέτρηση αὐτὴ τοῦ χρόνου ὀνομάστηκε, ἀπὸ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου, «Κωνσταντίνειος Ἰνδικτιῶν» ἢ «Ἑλληνικὴ».

Ἡ Ἰνδικτιῶνα εἶναι ἓνας γενικότερος τρόπος μέτρησης τοῦ χρόνου ἀνὰ 15ετίες μὲ ἀφετηρία τὴ γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἢ γιὰ τὴν ἀκριβεία ἀπὸ τὸ 3 π.χ. Ἡ 1<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου καθορίστηκε ὡς ἀρχὴ τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς χρονιάς ὡς ἑξῆς: Στὴν περιοχὴ τῆς Ἀνατολῆς τὰ περισσότερα ἡμερολόγια εἶχαν ὡς πρωτοχρονιά τὴν 24<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου. Ἐπειδὴ ὅμως ἡ 23<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου ἦταν ἡ γενέθλιος ἡμέρα τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα τῆς Ρώμης Ὀκταβιανοῦ, ἡ πρωτοχρονιά μετατέθηκε στὶς 24 Σεπτεμβρίου, ἡ ὁποία καὶ καθορίστηκε ὡς ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου, δηλαδὴ τῆς περιόδου τοῦ Ρωμαϊκοῦ διατάγματος γιὰ τὸν φόρο ποὺ ἴσχυε γιὰ 15 ἔτη. Ἔτσι Ἰνδικτος κατάντησε νὰ σημαίνει ἀργότερα τὸ ἔτος καὶ ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου τὴν Πρωτοχρονιά.

Σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν Πρωτοχρονιά βρῆκε ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἀφορμὴ καὶ τῆς ἔδωσε Χριστιανικὸ περιεχόμενο, ἀφοῦ

τοποθέτησε σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἐορτὴ τῆς συλλήψεως τοῦ Προδρόμου (24 Σεπτεμβρίου). Ἀργότερα, τὸ 462 μ.Χ., γιὰ πρακτικὸς λόγους καὶ γιὰ νὰ συμπίπτει ἡ πρώτη τοῦ ἔτους μὲ τὴν πρώτη τοῦ μηνός, ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ πρωτοχρονιά μετατέθηκε τὴν 1<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου. Ἡ 1<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου, ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους, ἀποτελεῖ τὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου. Τότε τελεῖται ἡ ἀκολουθία τῆς Ἰνδίκτου σὲ συνδυασμὸ μὲ τὴ Θεία λειτουργία γιὰ τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους.

Τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Λευτικοῦ ὄριξε: «*Προσάξετε μετὰ τῶν ἄρτων ἑπτὰ ἀμνοὺς ἀμώμους ἐνιαυσίους καὶ μόσχον ἓνα ἐκ βουκολίου καὶ κριοὺς δύο ἀμώμους, καὶ ἔσονται ὀλοκαύτωμα τῷ Κυρίῳ καὶ αἱ θυσίαι αὐτῶν καὶ αἱ σπονδαὶ αὐτῶν θυσία ὁσμῆ εὐωδίας τῷ Κυρίῳ*» (Λευ. 23:18), ἐπιβάλλοντας μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο στοὺς Ἰουδαίους νὰ προσφέρουν θυσίες ὀλοκαυτωμάτων κατὰ τὴν ἐορτὴ τῆς Νουμηνίας ἢ τῶν Σαλπύγγων (τὴν

πρῶτη ἡμέρα τοῦ ἑβδόμου Ἰουδαϊκοῦ ἔτους) ἀποδίδοντας εὐχαριστίες πρὸς τὸ Θεὸ γιὰ τὴν εὐνοιά Του πρὸς τὴν κτίση. Τὴν τακτικὴ αὐτὴ υἰοθέτησε καὶ ἡ Χριστιανικὴ ἐκκλησία ὡς ἐορτὴ προετοιμασίας γιὰ τὸ νέο ἔτος βλαστήσεως καὶ συγκομιδῆς—ἀρχὴ τῆς γεωργικῆς περιόδου, ποὺ ξεκινᾷ κάθε Σεπτέμβρη.

Μὲ τὸν καιρὸ ὀρίστηκαν δύο εἴδη Ἰνδίκτου, ἡ Καισαρικὴ,

δηλαδὴ ἡ παλαιὰ Ρωμαϊκὴ, ποὺ ἄρχιζε τὴν 1<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου καὶ τὴν ὁποία συνέχισε τὸ Βυζάντιο, καὶ ἡ Παπικὴ, ποὺ ἄρχιζε στὶς 25<sup>η</sup> Δεκεμβρίου καὶ ἀργότερα τὴν 1<sup>η</sup> Ἰανουαρίου. Ἡ πρωτοχρονιά τῆς 1<sup>ης</sup> Ἰανουαρίου ἔχει Ρωμαϊκὴ προέλευση καὶ ἦρθε στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἀνατολὴ κατὰ τὰ νεότερα χρόνια.

Ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἀκολουθία γιὰ τὸ νέο ἔτος τελεῖται τὴν 1<sup>η</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου, μία ἀκολουθία ἀπαράμιλλου κάλλους ὡς πρὸς τὸ ὕμνογραφικὸ ὕλικό.



Πάνω ἀπὸ ὅλα ἡ «πλεονεξία» ἀπομακρύνει πιδὸ πολύ, ἀποξενώνει πιδὸ πολύ τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἀπὸ τὸ βασίλειον τοῦ Χριστοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ πλεονέκτης ἀπορρίπτεται ἀπὸ τὴν βασιλεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τί εἶναι πλεονεξία; Ἡ πλεονεξία εἶναι ἡ «ἀγαπητικὴ» διάθεση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὰ πράγματα τοῦ κόσμου, ἡ θεοποίηση τῶν πραγμάτων, ἡ τοποθέτησή τους στὴν θέση τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ.

**Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς (+1979)**

## Ὁ Ἐγωισμὸς Ρεζιλεύει καὶ Θεατρίζει

Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ Ἀριζόνας, προηγουμένου τῆς Τερᾶς Μονῆς Φιλόθεου.



Σήμερα θὰ μιλήσουμε γιὰ τὴν μεγάλη πνευματικὴ ἀσθένεια ποὺ λέγεται ἐγωισμὸς. Ὁ ἐγωισμὸς εἶναι ἓνα παράλογο πάθος ποὺ μαστίζει κυριολεκτικὰ ὅλο το ἀνθρώπινο γένος· ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι πάσχουμε ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴ μεγάλη ἀσθένεια. Τὸν ἐγωιστὴ ἄνθρωπο ὁ ἐγωισμὸς τὸν ρεζιλεύει καὶ τὸν θεατρίζει. Αὐτὸν τὸν ἐγωισμὸ καλούμεθα ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ νὰ ἀγωνιστοῦμε, νὰ τὸν καταπολεμήσουμε, γιὰ νὰ ἀπαλλαγοῦμε ἀπ' αὐτόν.

Ὁ παλαιὸς ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἡ ἐμπαθὴς κατάσταση τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ στὴν κυριολεξία εἶναι ἐγωισμὸς. Ὅλα τα πάθη, ὅλα τα ἁμαρτήματα, ὅλες οἱ πτώσεις, ἔχουν τὴν ἀρχὴ τους, τὴν ἀφετηρία τους στὸν ἐγωισμὸ. Μεγάλο κακό. Δὲν ἀφήνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἡσυχά· τὸν τυραννᾷ νύχτα-μέρα. Ὅλοι γενικὰ οἱ ἄνθρωποι πάσχουν ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ κακό, καὶ περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅλους ἐγὼ ὁ ἁμαρτωλός...

Στὸν πρῶτο καιρὸ ποὺ ἤμουν κοντὰ στὸν ἅγιο Γέροντά μου, ὅταν πρωτοπῆγα κοντὰ του ἐκεῖ σ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἀπαράκλητο τόπο τῆς ἐρήμου, ἐκεῖ κοντὰ σ' αὐτὸν τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γνώρισα καὶ εἶδα στὴν πράξη τὸν ἐγωισμὸ μου. Ὅταν ἤμουν στὸν κόσμο, οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μὲ νόμιζαν ὅτι ἤμουν ἓνα ἁγιασμένο παιδί. Ἐγὼ ἀντιδρούσα σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς χαρακτηρισμούς, πλὴν ὅμως σιγὰ-σιγὰ οἱ ἔπαινοι μου κάνανε κακό. Καὶ τὸ κακό αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδα στὴν πράξη, ὅταν ἔβαλα τὴν κατὰ Θεὸν ἀρχὴ νὰ θεραπευθῶ ψυχικὰ ἀπὸ ὅλα μου τὰ πάθη.

Ὅταν πρωτοπῆγα στὸ Γέροντα Ἰωσήφ, ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη μέρα ἀμέσως ἄρχισε τὴν ἐπίβλεψή του, ἄρχισε τὴν θεραπεία του. Καὶ μὲ μεταχειριζόταν αὐστηρά· μὲ ἤλεγε συνέχεια, μὲ μάλωνε, καὶ μὲ κούραζε ἀρκετά, διότι ἤμουν ἀδύνατος ψυχικὰ.

Εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι, ὅταν μοῦ ἔκανε τοὺς ἐλέγχους, δηλαδή ὅταν ἔβαζε τὸ φάρμακο πάνω στὴν πληγὴ μου, ἐγὼ πονοῦσα. Ὁ ἐγωισμὸς μου κλωτσοῦσε μέσα μου καὶ μοῦ ἔλεγε· γιατί μόνο σὲ μένα ὁ Γέροντας ἐξασκεῖ αὐτὴ τὴν αὐστηρὴ παιδεία, γιατί νὰ μὲ μαλώνει, γιατί καὶ γιατί...; Ἐγὼ μὲ τὴν εὐχὴ τοῦ Γέροντά μου ἀντιδρούσα, ἀντέλεγα, ἄνοιγα μαζί του πόλεμο. Καὶ πολλές φορές, μετὰ ἀπὸ ἓναν κραταῖο ἀγώνα, πήγαινα μέσα στὸ κελάκι μου καὶ ἔπαιρνα

τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο καὶ ἔκλαιγα ἐπάνω του καὶ τοῦ ἔλεγα:

«Ἰησοῦ μου γλυκύτατε! Ἐσὺ ποὺ ἦσουν ὁ ἀναμάρτητος Θεός, ὑπέμεινες τόσα καὶ τόσα κακά, τόση ἀντιλογία, τόσες ὕβρεις καὶ χλευασμοὺς ἀπὸ ἓνα τόσο μεγάλο πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων ποὺ σὲ μισοῦσαν καὶ εἶχαν μεγάλη κακία ἀπέναντί σου. Καὶ ἐσὺ μὲ ἀνεξικακία ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ ὑπέμεινες γιὰ τὴ δικὴ μου ἀγάπη καὶ σωτηρία. Καὶ ἐγὼ ἓνας ἁμαρτωλὸς ἄνθρωπος, ἓνας ἐμπαθὴς καὶ ἐλεεινὸς νὰ διαμαρτύρομαι καὶ νὰ λέω, γιατί μοῦ βάζει ὁ Γέροντας τὸ πικρὸ φάρμακο τῆς σωτηρίας μου; Ἄξια αὐτῶν ποὺ ἔπραξα ἀπολαμβάνω. Ἐπομένως δὲν ἔχω οὔτε μία δικαιολογία ἀλλὰ μόνο πρέπει νὰ κάνω ὑπομονὴ νὰ σηκώσω τὸ Σταυρὸ τὸν ὁποῖο μου χάρισε ἡ ἀγαθότητά Σου πρὸς σωτηρία μου».

Αὐτὰ τοῦ ἔλεγα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ πράγματι δεχόμουν μεγάλη ἀνακούφιση. Μετὰ ἀπὸ ἓνα τέτοιο κλάμα ἐνοιώθα μία δύναμη μέσα στὴν καρδιά μου, στὸ νὰ ὑπομείνω μέχρι τέλους, ἕως ὅτου νὰ σταυρωθῶ ψυχικὰ γιὰ νὰ δεχθῶ στὴ συνέχεια τὴν ἀνάσταση τῆς ψυχῆς μου.

Πολλὰ παραδείγματα ἁγίων ἀνθρώπων μᾶς δίνουν πολὺ κουράγιο γιὰ νὰ σηκώσουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς αὐτὸν τὸ σταυρὸ, αὐτὴ τὴ δυσκολία στὴν ἀντιμετώπιση τοῦ τρομεροῦ ἐγωισμοῦ. Κακὸ πάθος, δύσκολο. Τὴν καρδιά τὴν ἔχει περιπλέξει πολὺ δύσκολα. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ μέγας Πατέρας τῆς ἐρήμου, ὁ Ποιμὴν, λέει, ὅτι, ἐκεῖνος ποὺ θέλει νὰ ξεριζώνει τὰ πάθη του, πονάει καὶ αἰμορραγεῖ. Καὶ πράγματι ἔτσι ἔχει ἡ ἀλήθεια.

Ὅταν κάποιος μᾶς ἐλέγξει, μᾶς προσβάλλει, ἀμέσως μέσα μας γίνεται ἓνα κλώτσημα, μία δυσκολία ἐσωτερικὴ, μία στενοχώρια, ἓνας πνιγμός, μία πίεση ποὺ μᾶς σπρώχνει νὰ ἀντιμιλήσουμε, νὰ ἀνταποδώσουμε, νὰ θυμώσουμε σ' αὐτὸν τὸν ἄνθρωπο ποὺ μᾶς ἔκανε τὸν μεγάλο. Ἐκεῖνη τὴν ὥρα χρειάζεται σφίξιμο, χρειάζεται νὰ καταπιούμε μέσα βαθειὰ στὴ ψυχὴ μας, τὸ φαρμάκι αὐτὸ τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ.

Νὰ πνίξουμε τὸ θηρίο ποὺ ἔρχεται νὰ βγεῖ πρὸς τὰ ἔξω γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἐνοχοποιήσει. Καὶ ὅταν στὴ συνέχεια, σὲ κάθε τέτοια περίπτωση, ἀντιμετωπίσουμε τὸ κακὸ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο, πνίγοντας τὸ θηρίο ὅταν πρόκειται νὰ βγεῖ πρὸς τὰ ἔξω, μὲ τὸ πέρασμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐσωτερικὰ θὰ ψοφήσει. Ὅταν ἓνα θηρίο τὸ κλείσει κανεὶς μέσα σ' ἓνα κλειστὸ χῶρο καὶ δὲν τὸ τροφοδοτεῖ, δὲν τοῦ ρίχνει τροφή, κατὰ φυσικὴ συνέπεια, μετὰ ἀπὸ ἓνα διάστημα χρόνου θὰ πεθάνει. Ἔτσι καὶ μὲ τὸ θηρίο αὐτὸ τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ, ἐὰν δὲν τὸ τροφοδοτοῦμε μὲ ὑποχωρήσεις, μὲ τὴ χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ σιγὰ-σιγὰ θὰ ἐκλείψει.

Μία παρθένος πηγὴ στὸν Ἀββᾶ Παμβὼ καὶ τοῦ λέγει: -Ἀββᾶ, ἐγὼ νηστεύω πολὺ καὶ τρώω ἀνά ἑπτὰ ἡμέρες. Κάνω καὶ διάφορες ἄλλες ἀσκήσεις. Ἐχω ἀποστηθίσει

τῆ Παλαιὰ καὶ Καινὴ Διαθήκη. Τὶ μοῦ ὑπολείπεται ἀκόμη νὰ πράξω, ὥστε νὰ φθάσω στὴν τελειότητα;

Ὁ σοφὸς γέροντας τῆς λέει:

-Παιδί μου, ὅταν κανεὶς σὲ βροῖσει, σὲ χλευάσει, σοῦ φαίνεται μέσα σου σὰν νὰ σὲ ἐπαινεῖ;

-Ὅχι.

-Ὅταν σὲ ἐπαινεῖ κάποιος, σοῦ φαίνεται μέσα σου σὰν νὰ σὲ βροῖζει;

-Ὅχι Ἀββᾶ.

-Ἄντε παιδάκι μου πήγαινε, λέει, καὶ τίποτα δὲν ἔχεις κάνει μέχρι τώρα.

Ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν εἶχε ἄλλους ἕξι ἀδελφούς. Ὁ μεγαλύτερος ἦταν ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ἀνούβ. Καὶ κάποτε ὅλοι μαζί πήγαινε καὶ κατοικήσανε σὲ ἓνα κελί, σὲ ἓνα παλιὸ εἰδωλολατρικὸ ναὸ ποῦ ἔξω ἀπὸ αὐτὸν ἦταν στημένο ἓνα ἄγαλμα, μία θεότητα. Καὶ κάποια μέρα ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ἀνούβ, κατὰ παράδοξο τρόπο, πήγε καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ ρίχνει πέτρες στὸ ἄγαλμα καὶ νὰ τὸ βροῖζει. Τὴν ἄλλη μέρα πήγε καὶ τὸ προσκυνοῦσε καὶ τοῦ ἔλεγε πολλὰ ἐπαινετικά λόγια.

Ὅταν εἶδαν τὸν Ἀββᾶ νὰ κάνει κάτι τέτοιο, οἱ ἀδελφοὶ τὸν ρώτησαν:

-Γέροντα μ' αὐτὸ ποῦ ἔκανες τί θέλεις νὰ μᾶς διδάξεις;

-Νά, λέγει, ὅταν μὲ εἶδατε ποῦ πήγα καὶ τὸ λιθοβολοῦσα καὶ τὸ βροῖζα τὸ εἶδωλο αὐτό, μοῦ ἀπαντοῦσε;

-Ὅχι.

-Ὅταν τὴν ἄλλη μέρα, εἶδατε νὰ τὸ προσκυνῶ καὶ νὰ τὸ ἐπαινῶ, εἶδατε πάλι νὰ μοῦ πεῖ τίποτα;

-Ὅχι, Ἀββᾶ.

-Ἄ, ἂν θέλετε κι ἐσεῖς νὰ μείνουμε ὅλοι μαζί καὶ νὰ βιώσουμε μὲ ἀγάπη, ἔτσι πρέπει νὰ κάνουμε. Νὰ ὑπομένουμε ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλο.

Ὁ ἐγωισμὸς εἶναι μία κληρονομία ποῦ δεχθήκαμε ἀπὸ τοὺς πρωτοπλάστους, ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀδὰμ καὶ τὴν Εὐά. Καὶ οἱ πρωτόπλαστοι νικήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸ διάβολο, τὸν ἑωσφόρο. Ἐκεῖνος ξεκίνησε τὸ θέμα. Ὁ ἑωσφόρος εἶχε τὸ πρῶτο τάγμα τῶν ἀγγέλων. Ἦταν τὸ πλησιέστερο πρὸς τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀπολάμβανε τὴν πρώτη χάρη. Δεχόταν τὶς πληροφορίες, τὶς ἀποκαλύψεις πρὸς μὲν ἀπὸ τὰ ἄλλα ἑννέα τάγματα. Γιὰ ὅλη αὐτὴ τὴ δόξα του καὶ τὴ χάρη του, σκέφτηκε πονηρὰ κατὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐλεγε στὸ λογισμό του: «Γιατί ὁ Θεὸς νὰ εἶναι τόσο ψηλά; Γιατί νὰ ἔχει αὐτὴ τὴ δόξα; Γιατί νὰ τὸν προσκυνοῦμε; Γιατί νὰ τοῦ ὑποτάσσονται τὰ πάντα; Καὶ ἐγὼ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ γίνω Θεός; Ἐάνεβῶ κι ἐγὼ ψηλὰ καὶ θὰ καθίσω δίπλα Του, θὰ γίνω καὶ ἐγὼ ὁμοίος Του. Καὶ θὰ μὲ προσκυνοῦν τὰ πάντα. Καὶ θὰ ἔχω καὶ ἐγὼ τὴν ἴδια δόξα!».

Ὅταν σκέφτηκε αὐτὰ καὶ τὰ πίστεψε, ἀμέσως ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἀπέρριψε ἀπὸ τὸ πρόσωπό Του, τὸν πέταξε κάτω. Ὅλο τὸ τάγμα χάθηκε στὴν ἄβυσσο. Ἔτσι

καὶ κάθε ὑπερήφανος καὶ ἐγωιστῆς ἀποβάλλεται ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό.

Ὁ διάβολος, ὁ ἑωσφόρος, δὲν ἀρκέστηκε στὴ δική του μόνο πτώση. Φθόνησε καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπο τὸν ὁποῖον εἶχε πλάσει μὲ ἰδιαίτερο τρόπο ὁ Θεὸς καὶ τὸν εἶχε κάνει βασιλέα μέσα στὸν παράδεισο, καὶ σὲ ὅλη τὴν κτίση. Σοῦ λέει: «Γιατί αὐτὸς νὰ ἀπολαμβάνει τέτοια εὐτυχία; Ὅχι. Καὶ αὐτὸς πρέπει νὰ προσβάλλει τὸ Θεὸ καὶ αὐτὸς δὲν πρέπει νὰ Τοῦ ὑποτάσσεται· καὶ αὐτὸς πρέπει νὰ πλανηθεῖ...». Τὸν πλησιάζει καὶ τοῦ ψιθυρίζει τὰ ἴδια πράγματα, μὲ τὸ νὰ τοῦ πεῖ: «γιατί ὁ Θεὸς νὰ σοῦ ἀπαγορεύσει νὰ φᾶς ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸν καρπὸ; Αὐτὸ εἶναι πονηριὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, γιὰ νὰ μὴ γίνεις κι ἐσὺ θεός, ὥστε νὰ γνωρίζεις τὸ καλὸ καὶ τὸ κακό, τὸ πονηρὸ καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸ· φάε καὶ θὰ δεῖς ὅτι θὰ γίνεις θεός...».

Τὸν ἄκουσε ὁ πρωτόπλαστος καὶ στὴ συνέχεια ἔγινε τὸ παραπάτημα· γνώρισε στὴν πράξη ὅτι ἔπρεπε νὰ πειθαρχήσει στὴν ἐντολὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια καὶ ὁ ἐγωισμὸς ἔβγαλε τοὺς πρωτοπλάστους ἀπὸ τὸν παράδεισο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κληρονομήσαμε καὶ μεῖς σὰν μία περιουσία τὸν ἐγωισμὸ αὐτὸ καὶ τώρα ὑποφέρουμε καὶ ἀγωνιζόμαστε μέχρι αἵματος γιὰ νὰ ἀπαλλαγοῦμε.

Ὁ μοναχισμὸς εἶναι τὸ ἄμισθο ἰατρεῖο· εἶναι ἡ κλινικὴ του Θεοῦ, ποῦ ἐρχεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος γιὰ νὰ γίνεῖ καλά. Τὸν καλεῖ ὁ Θεὸς μὲ κλήση ἀγία καὶ τὸν φέρνει μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἰατρεῖο. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ζητᾶ τὴ θεραπεία του καὶ φωνάζει:

-Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με.

-Ναί, θὰ σὲ ἐλεήσω, ἀπαντᾷ ὁ Θεός.

Καὶ ἀρχίζει ὁ ἰατρὸς τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τῶν σωμάτων τὴν θεραπεία. Μᾶς στέλλει διάφορες θλίψεις, ἐπιτρέπει πειρασμούς. Καὶ ὅλα αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ φάρμακα, τὰ πικρὰ φάρμακα ποῦ θεραπεύουν τὴ ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Βέβαια, κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ πεῖ ὅτι στὸν καιρὸ τῆς ἐγχειρήσεως ἢ τῆς ἰατρικῆς ἐπεμβάσεως δὲν πονᾷ, δὲν ἀγωνίζεται νὰ ξεπεράσει τὸ πόνο καὶ τὴ θλίψη· ὡστόσο ὁμως στὸ τέλος τῆς θεραπείας γίνεται ψυχικῶς καλά.

Ὅταν ὁ Γέροντάς μου ἦταν ἀρχάριος στὴν ἔρημο, ἦταν στὴν ὑποταγὴ τοῦ γέροντα Ἐφραΐμ, ἑνὸς ἀπλοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἦταν ἓνα γεροντάκι εὐλογημένο. Κάποτε ἓνας γείτονας μοναχός, δὲν γνωρίζω τί εἶχε συμβεῖ, τὸ ἔθλιβε τὸ γεροντάκι. Ὁ παπποῦς φώναζε διότι δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ τὰ βγάλει πέρα. Διαμαρτυρόταν, ἔβγαζε φωνές, τσίριξε...

Ὁ Γέροντας ὁ δικός μου, νέο παιδί, δυνατὸ ποῦ μποροῦσε νὰ τὰ βάλει μὲ δέκα ἀνθρώπους, ὅταν ἄκουγε τὸν Γέροντά του νὰ φωνάζει ἔξω καὶ ὁ ἄλλος νὰ σηκώνει τὸ ἀνάστημά του, μέσα του ἀρχίζε νὰ βράζει ὁ θυμὸς καὶ ἡ ὀργή. Μόλις εἶδε τὸν κίνδυνο ὅτι ἂν βγεῖ ἔξω δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ προβλέψει τί θὰ συνέβαινε, σὰν νέος ποῦ ἦταν, ἀμέσως τρέχει στὴν ἐκκλησία, γονατίζει κι ἀρχίζει

νά φωνάζει: «Παναγία βοήθησέ με». Καί ἄρχισε νά κλαίει νά κλαίει, καί νά παρακαλεῖ, ὥστε νά ἐπέμβει ἡ Παναγία νά βοηθήσει μὴ τυχόν καί σ' αὐτὴ τὴν κατάσταση βγεῖ ἔξω. Καί ἀφοῦ ἔκλαψε πολὺ, καί ἔχυσε πολλὰ δάκρυα, τότε εἶδε τὸ θηρίο τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ καί τοῦ θυμοῦ νά μαλακώνει καί νά ὑποχωρεῖ. Ὅταν εἶδε ὅτι ἦρθε σὲ μία κατάσταση ποὺ μποροῦσε νά βγεῖ ἔξω καί νά μιλήσει μὲ πραότητα καί ἡρεμία, βγήκε καί ἀπάλλαξε, βέβαια μὲ ἥρεμο τρόπο καί μὲ εὐγένεια, τὸν Γέροντά του ἀπὸ τὸ γείτονα. Καί αὐτὸ μᾶς τὸ ἔλεγε σὰν παράδειγμα τοῦ πῶς ἀντιμετωπίζεται ὁ ἐγωισμὸς στὴ πράξη.

Ἔρχεται καί στὸν μοναχὸ ὁ πειρασμὸς καί τοῦ ψιθυρίζει παραπλήσια πράγματα μὲ ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ψιθύριζε στὸν Ἀδάμ. Ἄν ὁ Γέροντας τὸν μαλώνει ἢ τοῦ κόβει τὸ θέλημα, διαμαρτύρεται μέσα ὁ ἐγωισμὸς καί ψιθυρίζει στὸ μοναχὸ νά ἀντιλογηθεῖ, νά φιλονικήσει, νά στήσει τὸ δικό του θέλημα· μ' αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο δὲν πρόκειται νά θεραπευθεῖ ποτέ.

Ὁ μοναχὸς πρέπει νά ἔχει συνεχῶς τὴν προσοχὴ γιὰ νά ἀντιμετωπίζει τὴν κάθε περίπτωση, τὸν κάθε πειρασμὸ μὲ ἐπιτυχία, ὥστε μὲ τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ νά ἀπαλλαγεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν παλαιὸ ἄνθρωπο. Στὴ θέση τοῦ παλαιοῦ νά μπεῖ ὁ νέος, ὁ κατὰ Χριστόν, ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀπάθειας καί τῆς ἀναστάσεως.

Ὁ ἀγώνας δὲν εἶναι μικρὸς, οὔτε καί σὲ λίγο χρόνο κατορθώνεται ἡ νίκη καί ὁ θρίαμβος κατὰ τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ. Μεγάλο θηρίο. Πολυκέφαλο. Ὁ Ὅσιος Ἐφραίμ λέει: «Μὲ λιοντάρι καταπιάστηκες; Πρόσεξε μὴ σοῦ συντριβεῖ τὰ ὀστά!». Αὐτὸ τὸ θηρίο εἶναι ὁ Ἐγωισμὸς. Σὰν λιοντάρι παραφυλάει καί μᾶς ἐπιτίθεται. Ἐμεῖς πρέπει νά ἔχουμε στὰ χέρια μας τὸ ὄπλο καί τὸ μαχαίρι τῆς ἀντιρροήσεως κατὰ τῶν λογισμῶν.

Οἱ τύραννοι τῶν Χριστιανῶν στοὺς χρόνους τῶν διωγμῶν προσπαθοῦσαν νά παρασύρουν τοὺς Μάρτυρες στὸ νά ἀρνηθοῦν τὴ Θεότητα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τοὺς ὑπόσχονταν πολλὰ: πλοῦτη, δόξες, τιμές. Οἱ Μάρτυρες ὅμως δὲν ὑποχωροῦσαν. Θριαμβευτικὰ ὁμολογοῦσαν τὴ πίστη στὸ Χριστὸ καί στὸ τέλος δέχονταν τὸ στεφάνι τοῦ μαρτυρίου, καί ἔτσι ὁ Χριστὸς δοξαζόταν.

Καί τώρα οἱ τύραννοι τῶν παθῶν μᾶς πιέζουν. Τὰ πάθη μᾶς ὑπόσχονται, ἀν ὑποχωρήσουμε, ἀπόλαυση καί ἱκανοποίηση. Δὲν πρέπει ὁ μοναχὸς νά ὑποχωρεῖ σὲ μία τέτοια βία, ἀλλὰ νά ἀντιστέκεται μὲ ὅλη τὴν ἀνδρεία τῆς ψυχῆς καί νά περιμένει μετὰ ἀπὸ μία νόμιμη πάλη τὸ στεφάνι τοῦ μαρτυρίου.

Οἱ Μάρτυρες μαρτύρησαν σὲ λίγο χρόνο. Πολλοὶ μάρτυρες σὲ λίγα λεπτὰ δεχθήκανε τὸ στεφάνι. Ὁ

μοναχὸς μαρτυρεῖ συνέχεια, σὲ ὅλη του τὴ ζωή. Ὅχι σὲ ἓνα τύραννο ἄλλα σὲ πολλούς. Κάθε πάθος καί ἓνας τύραννος. Γι' αὐτὸ ὄχι λιγότερο θὰ στεφανωθοῦν οἱ μοναχοὶ ποὺ θὰ ἀντισταθοῦν στὴ βία τῶν παθῶν καί θὰ ὁμολογήσουν τὴν καλὴ ὁμολογία τῆς ἀσκήσεως, τῆς μὴ ὑποχωρήσεως.

Μᾶς σπρώχνει τὸ πάθος τῆς ἀντιλογίας. Ἐμεῖς πρέπει νά βάλουμε ἐμπόδιο, φράγμα, νά ἀνοίξουμε ὄρυγμα, νά πέσει τὸ ἄρμα τῆς ἀντιλογίας μέσα μας.

Ὁ ἀγώνας πρέπει νά εἶναι συνεχῆς. Νὰ μὴν παρουσιάζουμε κενά· διότι τὰ κενὰ τὰ ἐκμεταλλεύεται ὁ διάβολος καί σφηνώνει μέσα στὰ κενὰ καί μᾶς δημιουργεῖ κατάσταση ἐπικίνδυνη. Ἡ προσευχὴ πρέπει νά εἶναι ἀκατάπαυστη. Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι τὸ ὄπλο μας. Καί μόνο νά προσεύχεται κανεὶς, ὁ διάβολος δὲν τὸν πλησιάζει εὐκόλα.

Ἄς ἀγωνισθοῦμε ἐναντίον κυρίως αὐτοῦ τοῦ πάθους, διότι ἀπὸ ἐδῶ ξεκινοῦν ὅλα. Καί τὸ κυρίως φάρμακο κατὰ τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ εἶναι ἡ ταπείνωση. Ὁ Κύριός

μας, μᾶς εἶπε: «Μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι πρῶτος εἰμι καί ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καί εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν». Ἡ ταπείνωση καί ἡ πραότητα χαρίζουν μία πνευματικὴ ἀνάπαυση στὴ ψυχὴ. Τῆς χαρίζουν φῶς καί βλέπει καθαρότερα τὰ πράγματα. Ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ἰσαὰκ ὁ



ἀποκαλεῖ «Θεοῦφαντον στολήν». Τὴν ταπείνωση, λέγει, φόρεσε ὁ Υἱὸς καί Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ καί μπόρεσε καί κατήλθε ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, καί μπόρεσε ἡ γῆ νά τὸν δεχθεῖ χωρὶς νά καταφλεχθεῖ.

Ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη στολιζει τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ὁ ταπεινὸς ἄνθρωπος ὅπου καί ἀν σταθεῖ, ὅπου καί ἀν βρεθεῖ, σκορπάει μία κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο μυστηριώδη χάρι καί γίνεται ἀγαπητὸς καί προσφιλῆς. Τὴν ταπείνωση οἱ δαίμονες τὴν τρέμουν, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς συνέβη καί μὲ ἓναν ὑποτακτικὸ.

Ἐνας Χριστιανὸς εἶχε μία κόρη δαμονισμένη καί τὴν πῆγε σὲ πολλοὺς γιατροὺς ἀλλὰ δὲν βρῆκε τὴ θεραπεία τῆς. Αὐτὸς ὁ Χριστιανὸς εἶχε ἓνα φίλο, πνευματικὸ ἄνθρωπο, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶχε σχέση μὲ τοὺς μοναχοὺς, καί λέγοντάς του τὸ παράπονο, τὸν πόνο του γιὰ τὸ κορίτσι του, τοῦ λέει ἐκεῖνος:

-Τὸ παιδί σου θὰ βρεῖ θεραπεία μόνον ὅταν καλέσεις ἓνα μοναχό, ὑποτακτικὸ, καί ἔλθει στὸ σπίτι σου καί κάνει μία εὐχούλα, θὰ δεῖς ἀμέσως τὸ παιδί σου θὰ γίνει καλά.

-Καί ποῦ θὰ τὸν βρῶ ἐγὼ αὐτὸν τὸν μοναχό;



-Νά! Κάτω στην άγορά κατεβαίνουν, λέει, από την ξρημο νεώτεροι ύποτακτικοί μοναχοί και πωλούν διάφορα έργόχειρα. Σ' ένα τέτοιο μοναχό πές του «Έλα στο σπίτι να σου πληρώσω τὰ έργόχειρα, διότι τώρα επάνω μου δεν έχω χρήματα». Και πές του να σου κάνει μία εϋχή και θα δεις ότι τὸ παιδί σου θα γίνει καλά.

Αὐτὸς ἀμέσως τὸ πρωὶ κατεβαίνει στην άγορά, βλέπει ένα νέο μοναχό να πουλά διάφορα, ἐκεῖ, ἐργόχειρα. Τοῦ λέει:

-Πάτερ, πόσο τὰ δίνεις αὐτά;

-Τόσο. Εἶπε ὁ μοναχός.

-Μπορεῖς να ἔλθεις μέχρι τὸ σπίτι να σὲ πληρώσω, γιατί επάνω μου δεν έχω χρήματα;

-Έρχομαι, λέει.

Καὶ ἀφοῦ προχωροῦσαν πρὸς τὸ σπίτι και πλησίαζαν, ὁ διάβολος μυρίστηκε τὸ πράγμα, ὅτι ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα του να πάρει τὸ ἐξιτήριο του και να φύγει ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἐτοιμάστηκε και αὐτός. Και μπαίνοντας ὁ μοναχὸς μέσα στο σπίτι, τὸν συναντᾷ ἡ κόρη και σηκώνει τὸ χέρι και τοῦ δίνει ένα ράπισμα, τοῦ μονάχου. Αὐτός, ὁ μοναχός, γύρισε και τὴν ἄλλη πλευρὰ τοῦ προσώπου και τοῦ δίνει και ἀπ' ἐκεῖ ένα ράπισμα, και ἀμέσως ἡ κόρη ἔπεσε κάτω κι' ἔβγαξε ἀφρούς. Και στο τέλος, φεύγοντας τὸ δαιμόνιο εἶπε, ὅτι ἡ ἐντολή τοῦ Χριστοῦ με βγάζει και με διώχνει. Και ἀμέσως τὸ παιδί ἔγινε καλά.

Ὁ ὑποτακτικὸς αὐτός, ἀπὸ τὴν πράξη αὐτὴ φαίνεται ὅτι ἦταν ἕνας προοδευμένος, ἕνας πετυχημένος μοναχός ὁ ὁποῖος θα εἶχε ἐξασκηθεῖ στην παιδεία και τὴ θεραπεία τῆς ψυχῆς του.

Στὴν προσευχή μας πάντοτε να παρακαλοῦμε και να δεόμεθα τοῦ Θεοῦ να μᾶς ἀπαλλάσσει ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ θηρίο, τὸν ἐγωισμό, και να μᾶς χαρίζει τὴν ἁγία ταπεινώση τῆς ψυχῆς. Ἀμήν.



Δὲν μπορούμε να μετανοήσουμε, ἂν ὁ Κύριος δὲν μᾶς δώσει μετάνοια. Και αὐτὸ ἰσχύει για τὰ πάντα. Δηλαδή ἰσχύει τὸ γραφικό: «**Χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν**». Ἄν δὲν ὑπάρχουν προϋποθέσεις, για να ἐγκύψη μέσα μας ὁ Χριστός, μετάνοια δὲν ἔρχεται. Οἱ προϋποθέσεις εἶναι ἡ ταπεινώση, ἡ ἀγάπη, ἡ προσευχή, οἱ μετάνοιες, ὁ κόπος για τὸν Χριστό. Ἄν δὲν εἶναι τὸ συναίσθημα ἀγνό, ἂν δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀπλότητα, ἂν ἡ ψυχὴ ἔχει ἰδιοτέλεια, δὲν ἔρχεται ἡ θεῖα χάρις. Συμβαίνει τότε να πηγαίνουμε να ἐξομολογούμεσθε, ἀλλὰ να μὴ αισθανώμαστε ἀνακούφιση. Ἡ μετάνοια εἶναι πολὺ λεπτὸ πράγμα. Ἡ μετάνοια ἡ ἀληθινὴ θα φέρη τὸν ἁγιασμό. Ἡ μετάνοια μᾶς ἀγιάζει.

**Ἅγιος Πορφύριος ὁ Κανσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)**

## Καλογερομαχισμός

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Ἐπιστολές», (Ἀγίου) Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀγιορείτου.

Ὁ ἰ περισσότεροι Πνευματικοὶ τῆς ἐποχῆς μας εἶναι καλογερομάχοι και ποικιλοτρόπως βάλλουν κατὰ τοῦ Μοναχισμοῦ και μάλιστα χρησιμοποιοῦν και Μεγάλους Βασιλείους και κοινωνικὴ δράση, κ.λ.π.

Δὲν θέλω να ἀναφέρω τὴν ζωὴ τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου, πρὶν ἀρχίσῃ τις Βασιλειάδες, ἀλλὰ ἀπλῶς να πῶ τὸν λογισμό μου, τί θα ἔκανε ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος, ἐὰν ζοῦσε στην ἐποχὴ μας. Ἔχω τὴν γνώμη ὅτι θα ἔπιανε ξανά τὴν σπηλιὰ και τὸ κομποσχοῖνι, βλέποντας τὴν φλόγα τῆς ἀγάπης (ἀπὸ τις Βασιλειάδες και ἄλλων Ἁγίων Πατέρων) να ἔχη ἀπλώσει παντοῦ, ὄχι μόνο στοὺς πιστοὺς ἀλλὰ ἀκόμη και στοὺς ἀπίστους, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὅλοι μαζί ἀποτελοῦν τὴν Κοινωνικὴ Πρόνοια, ποὺ περιθάλλει ἀκόμη και μέλη τῶν Πνευματικῶν Φιλανθρωπικῶν Συλλόγων (με χαρτὶ μόνον ἀπορίας). Μὲ λίλα λόγια, ἡ Κοινωνικὴ Πρόνοια καθημερινῶς φωνάζει: «Ἅγιοι Πατέρες τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ἀφήστε τὴν φιλανθρωπία σ' ἐμᾶς τοὺς λαϊκοὺς, ποὺ δὲν μπορούμε να κάνουμε και κάτι ἄλλο, και ἐσεῖς κοιτάξτε να ἀσχοληθῆτε με κάτι τὸ πνευματικώτερο».

Δυστυχῶς ὅμως, ὄχι μόνον αὐτὸ δὲν κάνουν μερικοὶ Κληρικοὶ, διότι δὲν τὸ καταλαβαίνουν, ἀλλὰ τὸ κακὸ εἶναι ποὺ ἐμποδίζουν και αὐτοὺς ποὺ τὸ καταλαβαίνουν και θέλουν να δοθοῦν ὀλόκληροι στὸν Χριστό και αισθάνονται ἔντονα τὴν κλίση τῆς ἀναχωρήσεως. Δὲν φτάνουν... δηλαδή τὰ ὅσα ἀκούει ἕνας ἀρχάριος Μοναχὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς λαϊκοὺς, ἀκούει και ἕνα σωρὸ ἀπὸ τοὺς Κληρικοὺς, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔχουν ἀκόμη και τὴν παράλογη ἀπαίτηση ἀπὸ τοὺς Μοναχοὺς να ἀφήσουν τὴν ξρημο και να ἔλθουν στὸν κόσμο, να ἀσχοληθοῦν με τὴν κοινωνικὴ δράση τῆς φιλανθρωπίας. Καλὸ εἶναι να ἀναφέρω και μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ στεφάνια ποὺ τοὺς πλέκουν: «τεμπέληδες, ἀτομιστές, ἄνανδρους, κ.λ.π.», ἐπειδὴ θεωροῦν τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς τοὺς ἥρωες, ποὺ ἀγωνίζονται μέσα στην ἀμαρτωλὴ κοινωνία, και τοὺς Μοναχοὺς δειλοὺς, ποὺ φεύγουν, για να σώσουν μόνον τὴν ψυχὴ τους.

Ἀπορῶ πῶς δὲν καταλαβαίνουν τὴν μεγάλη ἀποστολὴ τοῦ Μοναχοῦ! Ὁ Μοναχὸς φεύγει μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμο, ὄχι γιατί μισεῖ τὸν κόσμο, ἀλλὰ ἐπειδὴ ἀγαπάει τὸν κόσμο και κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο θα τὸν βοηθήση περισσότερο διὰ τῆς προσευχῆς του σὲ πράγματα ποὺ δὲν γίνονται ἀνθρωπίνως παρὰ μόνο με Θεϊκὴ ἐπέμβαση. Ἔτσι σώζει ὁ Θεὸς τὸν κόσμο. Ὁ Μοναχὸς δὲν λέει ποτέ: «να σώσω τὸν κόσμο», ἀλλὰ προσεύχεται για τὴν σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου, παράλληλα με τὴν δικὴ του. Ὅταν ὁ καλὸς Θεὸς ἀκούσῃ τὴν προσευχὴ του και βοηθήση τὸν κόσμο, πάλι δὲν λέει «ἔσωσα ἔγω κόσμο», ἀλλὰ «ὁ Θεός»...

## Τὸ Θεμέλιο τῆς Νέας Ζωῆς

Ἀπό τό βιβλίον «Ἐρμηνεία τῆς πρὸς Φιλιππησίους Ἐπιστολῆς», Ὁσίον Ἰουστίνου Πόποβιτς, ἐκδ. Ἐν Πλῶ.

**Πολλοὶ γὰρ περιπατοῦσιν οὗς πολλάκις ἔλεγον ὑμῖν, νῦν δὲ καὶ κλαίων λέγω, τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**

[Φιλ. 3:18]

† † †

Ἀντίθετα στὴ ζωὴ ἐν Χριστῷ στέκει ἡ ζωὴ χωρὶς τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ ἐναντία στὸν Χριστό. Αὐτὴ ζοῦν οἱ ἀντίπαλοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, «οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ». Μποροῦν καὶ ὑπάρχουν τέτοιοι; Μὰ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἡ σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου ἀπὸ τὸ θάνατο, ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἀπὸ τὸ διάβολο, ἀπὸ τὴν κόλαση. Ὁ σταυρὸς εἶναι ἡ «δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ» καὶ ἡ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ, γι' αὐτὸ εἶναι καὶ ἀνθρώπινη δύναμη καὶ ἀνθρώπινη δόξα. Ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι θεμέλιο τῆς νέας ζωῆς, τῆς αἰώνιας ζωῆς, θεμέλιο τῶν Ἀποστόλων, θεμέλιο τῶν Μαρτύρων, θεμέλιο τῶν Ὁμολογητῶν, θεμέλιο τοῦ ἀσκητισμοῦ, θεμέλιο τῆς ἁγιοσύνης, μὲ μία λέξη, θεμέλιο ὅλου τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐλπίδας καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς προσευχῆς καὶ τῆς νηστείας καὶ τῆς πραότητος καὶ τῆς ἀνοχῆς καὶ τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ τῆς ἀπάθειας καὶ τῆς θεοποίησης. Ναί, εἶναι «ἡ δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ», μὲ τὴν ὁποία οἱ ἄνθρωποι νικοῦν ὅλους τοὺς θανάτους, ὅλες τὶς ἁμαρτίες, ὅλα τὰ κακά. Καὶ τὸ ὅτι ὑπάρχουν ἄνθρωποι ἐναντίοι στὸ σταυρό, τοῦτο εἶναι πράγματι ἀξιοθρήνητο.

Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ ἅγιος Ἀπόστολος κλαίγοντας μιλάει περὶ τῶν ἐχθρῶν τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι πρωτίτως ἐχθροὶ τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ τους, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν... ἄλλων, ἀφοῦ σκοτώνουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους ὄχι μ' ἓνα θάνατο ἀλλὰ μ' ἑκατοντάδες, καὶ ρίχνουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους ὄχι σὲ μία κόλαση ἀλλὰ σὲ χιλιάδες. Ὁφθαλμοφανῶς, ἐκεῖνοι εἶναι ἐχθροὶ τῆς ἀθανασίας τους, τοῦ παραδείσου τους, τῆς σωτηρίας τους, τοῦ θείκου τους προορισμοῦ, καὶ μ' αὐτὸ εἶναι ἐχθροὶ καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας ἀλλήλων καὶ τῆς ἀθανασίας ἀλλήλων, ἀφοῦ μποροῦν νὰ τοὺς σκανδαλίσουν καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἀποτρέψουν ἀπὸ τὴν ὁδὸ τῆς σωτηρίας καὶ νὰ τοὺς σπρώξουν στὸν γκρεμὸ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ θανάτου.

Συνειδητὰ ἢ ἀσυνειδητὰ, οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι πάντα μαθητὲς τοῦ διαβόλου, ἀφοῦ αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ κύριος ἐχθρὸς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς παρακινεῖ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἐχθρα καὶ μέσῳ τούτου τοὺς σκλαβώνει γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του. Ἔτσι τοὺς κρατᾶ στὴ σκλαβιά τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ κακοῦ. Αὐτὸς, ὁ «ἀνθρωποκτόνος» (Ἰωάν. 7:44), μέσῳ τῶν ἐχθρῶν τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ κάνει τὴν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς

ἐργασία του, δηλαδή μὲ τὶς ἁμαρτίες σκοτώνει τὸν ἓναν ἄνθρωπο μετὰ τὸν ἄλλο. Μόνο τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ σκοτώσει, γιὰτὶ ἀμύνονται σ' αὐτὸν μὲ τὸ σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸν νικοῦν σ' ὅλες τὶς μάχες, καὶ ἔτσι σώζουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους ἀπὸ κάθε ἁμαρτία, ἀπὸ κάθε κακό, ἀπὸ κάθε πειρασμό.

Ὁ Ἀντιόχειος Χρυσόστομος εὐαγγελίζεται: «Τίποτα δὲν εἶναι ἔτσι ἀνάρμοστο καὶ ξένο στὸν Χριστιανὸ ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ ἐπιζητεῖ τὴν ἄνεση καὶ τὴν ἀνάπαυση. Τίποτε δὲν εἶναι τόσο ξένο ἀπὸ τὴν προσήλωση σ' αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ. Ὁ Κύριός σου σταυρώθηκε καὶ ἐσὺ ἀναζητᾶς τὴν ἄνεση; Ὁ Κύριός σου καρφώθηκε στὸ σταυρὸ καὶ ἐσὺ ζεῖς στὴν πολυτέλεια; Καὶ ταιριάζουν αὐτὰ σ' ἓνα γενναῖο στρατιώτη; Γιὰ αὐτὸ λέει ὁ Παῦλος: «Πολλοὶ ἔχουν ἀνάρμοστη συμπεριφορά, γιὰ τοὺς ὁποίους πολλὰς φορὰς σὰς εἶπα καὶ τώρα κλαίγοντας σὰς λέω! Ἀναφέρομαι στοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.» Τὰ λέει αὐτὰ ἐπειδὴ κάποιοι ὑποκρίνονταν τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς, ζώντας μὲ ἀνέσεις καὶ πολυτέλεια, πράγμα ποῦ εἶναι ἐναντία στὸ σταυρό, ἐπειδὴ ὁ σταυρὸς εἶναι γνώρισμα τῆς ψυχῆς ποῦ ἀγωνίζεται ἔτοιμη γιὰ τὸ θάνατο καὶ δὲν ψάχνει τὴν ἄνεση. Αὐτοὶ ὅμως συμπεριφέρονται ἀντίθετα.

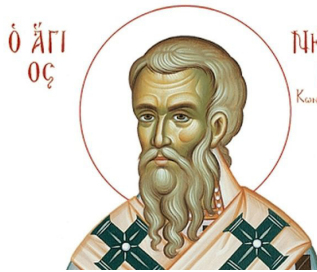
Ἔτσι, ἂν καὶ λένε ὅτι εἶναι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶναι ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ, γιὰτὶ, ἐὰν ἀγαποῦσαν τὸν σταυρό, θὰ προσπαθοῦσαν νὰ ζοῦν τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ ἐσταυρωμένου. Δὲν σταυρώθηκε ὁ Κύριός σου; Ἐὰν δὲν μπορεῖς νὰ σταυρωθεῖς μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο, μιμήσου Τον μὲ ἄλλο τρόπο· σταύρωσε τὸν ἑαυτό σου, ἔστω καὶ ἂν δὲν σὲ σταυρώσει κανεὶς· δὲν ἐννοῶ νὰ καταστρέψεις τὸν ἑαυτό σου (μακάρι κάτι τέτοιο νὰ μὴν γίνε, γιὰτὶ εἶναι ἀσέβεια), ἀλλὰ ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ Παῦλος: «Ὁ κόσμος νεκρώθηκε γιὰ μένα καὶ ἐγὼ γι' αὐτόν.»

Ἐὰν ἀγαπᾶς τὸν Κύριό σου, πέθανε ὅπως ἐκεῖνος. Μάθε πόση εἶναι ἡ δύναμη τοῦ σταυροῦ, πόσα κατόρθωσε, πόσα κατορθώνει· μάθε ὅτι εἶναι ἡ ἀσφάλεια τῆς ζωῆς. Μέσῳ αὐτοῦ γίνονται τὰ πάντα, διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ τὸ βάπτισμα (γιὰ νὰ λάβουμε τὴ σφραγίδα), διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ ἡ χειροτονία. Εἴτε εἴμαστε στοὺς δρόμους, εἴτε στὸ σπίτι, εἴτε ὁπουδήποτε, ὁ σταυρὸς εἶναι μέγα ἀγαθό, ἀνίκητο ὄπλο, ἀκατανίκητη ἀσπίδα, ἀντίπαλος τοῦ διαβόλου. Πότε;

Ὅταν πολεμᾶς τὸ διάβολο κρατώντας τὸ σταυρό σου, ὄχι κάνοντάς τον ἀπλὰ σὰν σημεῖο, ἀλλὰ ὑποφέροντας τὶς συνέπειές του. Γνώριζε πὼς ὁ Χριστὸς ἀποκαλεῖ τὰ πάθη σταυροῦ, ὅταν λέει: «Ἐὰν κάποιος δὲν σηκώσῃ τὸν σταυρό του καὶ μὲ ἀκολουθήσῃ», δηλαδή ἐὰν κάποιος δὲν εἶναι ἔτοιμος γιὰ τὸ θάνατο. Αὐτοὶ ποῦ ἀγαποῦν τὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα τους ὄντας ἐλεεινοί, εἶναι ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ. Καὶ καθέννας ποῦ ἀρέσκειται στὶς ἀπολαύσεις καὶ τὴν ἐνταῦθα βεβαιότητα εἶναι ἐχθρὸς τοῦ σταυροῦ».

## Ἡ Ἀνταμοιβὴ τῆς Εὐσπλαχνίας...

Πηγή: Ὁ Ἅγιος Νήφων Κωνσταντιανῆς, «Ἐνας Ἀσκητῆς Ἐπίσκοπος».



ΝΗΦΩΝ  
Κωνσταντιανῆς

Κάποτε ἦρθε στὸ κελὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Νήφωνα ἕνας Χριστιανὸς νὰ τὸν συμβουλευθεῖ. Μετὰ τὸν συνηθὴ χαιρετισμό, ρώτησε τὸν Ὅσιο:

–Σὲ παρακαλῶ, πάτερ, πές μου τί ὠφέλεια

ἔχουν αὐτοὶ ποὺ μοιράζονται τὴν περιουσίαν τους στοὺς φτωχοὺς;

–Δὲν ἄκουσες τί λέει τὸ εὐαγγέλιο; τοῦ ἀπάντησε ἐκεῖνος.

–Πολλὰ ἄκουσα καὶ διάβασα, ἀλλὰ θὰ ἤθελα ν' ἀκούσω κάτι καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα σου.

Τότε ὁ Νήφων τοῦ εἶπε:

–Ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς Γῆς νὰ σὲ διδάξει κατὰ τὴν πίστη σου. Γιατί ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἀδύνατος καὶ ἀνάξιος. Ἀφοῦ ὅμως ἦρθες γιὰ ν' ἀκούσεις κάτι, πρόσεξε, καὶ ὁ Θεός, καθὼς εἶπα, θὰ σὲ φωτίσει. Σώπασε λίγο καὶ ἔπειτα ἄρχισε:

–Στὶς ἡμέρες τοῦ ἐπισκόπου των Ἱεροσολύμων Κυριακοῦ ζοῦσε ἕνας πολὺ ἐλεήμων ἄνθρωπος, ὀνόματι Σώζων. Περνώντας κάποια μέρα ἀπ' τὴν πλατεία τῆς πόλεως, βλέπει ἕνα φτωχὸ ποὺ ἦταν γυμνὸς καὶ τουρτουρίζε ἀπὸ τὸ κρύο. Τὸν πόνεσε ἡ ψυχὴ του. Ἐβγαλε λοιπὸν τὸ ἱμάτιό του καὶ τὸ ἔδωσε στὸ φτωχό. Σὲ λίγο ἐπέστρεψε σπιτί του. Ἦταν σούρουπο καὶ ξάπλωσε νὰ κοιμηθεῖ.

Βλέπει τότε στὸ ὄνειρό του ὅτι βρέθηκε σ' ἕνα θαυμαστὸ κῆπο ποὺ φωτιζόταν μὲ καθαρὸ ἄυλο φῶς. Πλήθος λουλουθῶν—ρόδα καὶ κρίνα—καὶ ψηλόκορμα δένδρα τὸν στόλιζαν, ποὺ ξέχυναν ἀπ' τὴν κορφή ὡς τὶς ρίζες μία ὑπέροχη εὐωδία, ἐνῶ τὰ δένδρα ἦταν κατάφορτα μὲ ὠραιότατους καρπούς, ὥστε τὰ κλαδιά τους ἔγερναν ὡς τὴ γῆ. Τὸ καθένα εἶχε ξεχωριστὴ ὁμορφιά. Ἀνάμεσά τους ὑπῆρχαν πολυάριθμα πουλιὰ ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ εἶδη καὶ τὰ χρώματα καὶ κελαηδοῦσαν μελωδικά. Τὸ κελῆδημά τους ἦταν τόσο θεϊκό, ὥστε νόμιζες ὅτι ἐρχόταν ἀπ' τὸν οὐρανό. Ὅλα τα δένδρα, τὰ φυτὰ καὶ τὰ λουλουθῶν κυμάτιζαν μὲ πολλὴ χάρη. Βλέποντας καὶ ἀκούγοντάς τα, δοκίμαζε ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος ἀπερίγραπτη γλυκύτητα καὶ ἀνέκφραστη ἠδονή. Καθὼς παρατηροῦσε ἐκστατικός, ἔρχεται ἕνας νέος καὶ τοῦ λέει, «ἀκολούθησέ με».

Ἄρχισε νὰ βαδίζει πίσω του καὶ σὲ λίγο ἔφτασαν σ' ἕνα χρυσοκάγκελο φράχτη. Ἐβίβει τὸ βλέμμα του πέρα, ἀνάμεσα ἀπ' τὰ κενὰ ποὺ σχηματίζαν τὰ χρυσὰ κάγκελα καὶ εἶδε μίαν αὐλὴν καὶ στὸ βάθος

ἕνα θαυμάσιο παλάτι, ποὺ ἄστραφτε. Καθὼς κοιτοῦσε ὁ Σώζων, βγαίνουν ἀπ' τὸ ἀνάκτορο δέκα ἔξι ἄνθρωποι φτερωτοί, ποὺ ἔλαμπαν σὰν τὸν ἥλιο. Μετέφεραν ἀνὰ τέσσερις ἀπὸ ἕνα χρυσοστόλιστο κιβώτιο. Καθὼς διέσχισαν τὸ παραμυθένιο ἐκεῖνο προαύλιο οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Σώζων κατάλαβε ὅτι κατευθύνονταν πρὸς αὐτόν. Μόλις πλησίασαν στὰ χρυσὰ κάγκελα, ἀκριβῶς ἀπέναντί του, στάθηκαν, κατέβασαν τὰ κιβώτια ἀπ' τοὺς ὤμους καὶ τὰ ἀκούμπησαν στὴ γῆ. Φαίνονταν τώρα σὰν νὰ περιμέναν κάποιον Μεγάλον νὰ ἔρθει. Καὶ πράγματι, σὲ λίγο βλέπει ὁ Σώζων νὰ κατεβαίνει ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνάκτορα ἕνας Πανέμορφος Ἄνδρας καὶ νὰ ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸ μέρος τῶν ἀγγέλων.

«Ἀνοιξτε τὰ κιβώτια», τοὺς διέταξε, «καὶ δεῖξτε σ' αὐτὸν τὸν ἄνθρωπο τί τοῦ φυλάω γιὰ τὸ ἱμάτιο ποὺ μοῦ δάνεισε πρὸ ὀλίγου διὰ μέσου του φτωχοῦ». Ἀμέσως ἀνοιξαν τὸ ἕνα χρυσὸ κιβώτιο καὶ ἄρχισαν νὰ βγάζουν χιτῶνες καὶ ἱμάτια βασιλικά, ἄλλα κατάλευκα καὶ ἄλλα πλουμιστά, ὅλα πανέμορφα. Τὰ ἄπλωναν μπροστά του ρωτώντας τον: «Σοῦ ἀρέσουν, Σώζων;» Καὶ ἐκεῖνος εἶπε μὲ δέος: «Δὲν εἶμαι ἄξιος νὰ δῶ οὔτε τὴ σκιά τους!»...

Συνέχιζαν ὡστόσο νὰ τοῦ δείχνουν λαμπροὺς, καταστόλιστους καὶ ὀλόχρυσους χιτῶνες, ὥσπου ἀνέβηκε ὁ ἀριθμὸς τους στοὺς χίλιους. Ὅταν πιά μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο ὁ Κύριος τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ ἔδωσε νὰ καταλάβει τί σημαίνει τὸ «ἐκατονταπλασίονα λήψεται καὶ ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσει», τοῦ εἶπε: «Βλέπεις, Σώζων, πόσα ἀγαθὰ σοῦ ἔτοιμασα, ἐπειδὴ μὲ εἶδες γυμνὸ καὶ μὲ σπλαγγνίσθηκες καὶ μ' ἔντυσες; Πήγαινε λοιπὸν καὶ συνέχισε νὰ κάνεις τὸ ἴδιο. Ἄν δώσεις στὸ φτωχὸ ἕνα ἱμάτιο, ἐγὼ θὰ σοῦ ἔτοιμάσω ἐκατονταπλάσια».

Ἀκούγοντας αὐτὰ ὁ Σώζων ρώτησε μὲ δέος ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ χαρὰ τὸν Κύριον: «Κυριέ μου, τὸ ἴδιο θὰ κάνεις καὶ σ' ὅλους ὅσους βοηθοῦν τοὺς φτωχοὺς; Τοὺς φυλάς ἐκατονταπλάσια ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὴν αἰώνια ζωή;» Καὶ Ἐκεῖνος τοῦ ἀποκρίθηκε:

«Ὅποιοι θὰ θυσιάσει σπίτια ἢ χωράφια ἢ πλοῦτη ἢ δόξα ἢ πατέρα ἢ μητέρα ἢ ἀδελφοὺς ἢ ἀδελφές ἢ γυναῖκα ἢ παιδιὰ ἢ ὅποιοδήποτε ἀγαθὸ τῆς γῆς, **ἐκατονταπλασίονα λήψεται καὶ ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσει.** Γι' αὐτό, ποτὲ μὴ μετανώσεις γιὰ μία σου ἐλεημοσύνη ἐξευτελιζόντας τὸν φτωχὸ ποὺ τοῦ ἔδωσες κάτι. Μὴ τυχὸν ἀντὶ γιὰ ἀνταμοιβὴ πάθεις διπλὴ ζημιὰ. Διότι αὐτὸς ποὺ κάνει ἕνα καλὸ καὶ ἔπειτα μετανιώνει ἢ ἐξευτελίζει τὸν φτωχό, χάνει καὶ τὸν μισθὸ του, ἀλλὰ βρῖσκεται καὶ ἔνοχος τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Κρίσεως».

Ἐπὶ αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια ὁ Σώζων ξύπνησε γεμάτος θαυμασμὸ γιὰ τὸ ὄραμα. Σηκώθηκε ἀμέσως

ἀπ' τὸ κρεβάτι του καὶ ἔδωσε καὶ τὸ ἄλλο τοῦ ἱμάτιο σὲ κάποιον ποὺ ἤξερε πὼς τὸ εἶχε ἀνάγκη. Τὴ νύχτα βλέπει πάλι τὸ ἴδιο ὄραμα καὶ τὸ πρῶι, χωρὶς καθυστέρηση μοίρασε ὅλη του τὴν περιουσία, ἀπαρνήθηκε τὸν κόσμο καὶ ἔγινε ἓνας θαυμασίος μοναχός.

Καὶ μὲ τὰ μάτια του πάνω στὸ βλέμμα τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ ποὺ τὸν ἐπισκέφτηκε, ὁ Ἅγιος Νήφων τέλειωσε τὸ «μάθημά» του μὲ αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια:

– Αὐτὸ νὰ τὸ ἔχεις κι ἐσύ, παιδί μου, στὸ νοῦ σου ἀπὸ δῶ καὶ μπρός, συμβούλευσε τὸν ἐπισκέπτη του ὁ ἅγιος Νήφων, καὶ νὰ κάνεις ὅτι μπορεῖς γιὰ νὰ θησαυρίσεις ἑκατονταπλάσια στὸν Οὐρανό!



Γι' αὐτὸν τὸν λόγο, ἐπειδὴ εἶχαμε αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σὲ ὅλη τὴν Τουρκοκρατία, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ δὲν ἔσβησε ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία. Ἐὰν οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι τότε στὴν Τουρκοκρατία ἦταν αὐτοὶ ποὺ εἶναι σήμερα, θὰ εἶχε σβήσει ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ἱστορικὸ πιερωτὸ γεγονός.

Λοιπόν, ἐλεύθερος κατὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ὁ ὁποῖος βρῖσκεται σὲ κατάσταση φωτισμοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ λέμε στὴν Ἐκκλησία «*Εἰρήνη πάσι*», διότι ἔτσι ἔχει τὴν εἰρήνη.

***Εἰρήνην τὴν ἐμὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν.*** (Ἰωάν. 14:27). Καὶ ὅταν λέει ὅτι σὰς δίδω εἰρήνη, σημαίνει ὅτι σὰς δίδω Πνεῦμα ἅγιον, προσευχὴ στὴν καρδιά, καὶ ἔτσι ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰρηνεύει, ἔχει τὴν δικαίωση. Ἐχει τὴν καταλλαγὴ μὲ τὸν Θεό. Ἀρχίζει νὰ γίνεται φίλος τοῦ Θεοῦ μὲ τὸν φωτισμὸ καὶ μετὰ, στὴν θέωση εἶναι 100% πλέον φίλος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἐλεύθερος.

Αὕτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου· ὅταν φθάνει στὸ νὰ ἀπαλλαγεῖ, ὄχι μόνο ἀπὸ τὴν συμφεροντολογία, ὅπως στὴν κατάσταση τοῦ φωτισμοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν κατάσταση τῆς θεώσεως ἀπαλλάσσεται ἀπὸ τὴν δουλεία καὶ τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς φύσεως, διότι τρέφεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Θεὸ καὶ σ' αὐτὴν τὴν κατάσταση ἐὰν συνεχίσει μπορεῖ νὰ πάει καὶ χρόνια καὶ μῆνες κ.ο.κ. Ὅποτε ἡ καλύτερη μελέτη εἶναι νὰ ἐπανέλθουμε στοὺς βίους τῶν Ἁγίων νὰ τὰ δοῦμε ἐκεῖ καὶ νὰ καταλάβουμε ὅτι ἁμαρτία εἶναι ἔλλειψη φωτισμοῦ, ἐλευθερία εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸν φωτισμὸ στὴν θέωση.

Αὐτὰ εἶναι πολὺ ἀπλὰ τὰ πράγματα καὶ εἶναι ἡ θεραπεία τῆς προσωπικότητος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Γι' αὐτὸ λέγω ὅτι, ἐὰν ἐμφανιζόταν σήμερα ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία στὴν ἀκμὴ τῆς καὶ ὄχι στὴν κατὰπτωσή της, ὅπως σήμερα, θὰ θεωρεῖτο κατὰ πάντα θετικὴ ἐπιστήμη καὶ θὰ ἦτο κάτι παραπάνω ἀπὸ ψυχολογία καὶ ψυχιατρική...

**Πρ. Ἰωάννης Ρωμανίδης**

## Δυτικά «Πνευματικά Μικρόβια»

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Ἅγιος Παῖσιος ὁ Ἀγιορείτης».

Ὁ πατὴρ Παῖσιος δὲν συμφωνοῦσε νὰ σπουδάζουν οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι θεολόγοι στὴ Δύση, διότι ἔβλεπε τὸν κίνδυνο νὰ μεταφέρουν ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ «πνευματικὰ μικρόβια» καὶ νὰ μολύνουν τὴν ἀμώμητη Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας. «Τί θὰ πάτε νὰ πάρετε ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ; Ἔλεγε. Αὐτοὶ δὲν ἔχουν τίποτε, τὰ ἔχουν γκρεμίσει ὅλα».

Σὲ ἓναν Ὁρθόδοξο Γάλλο ιερομόναχο ποὺ τὸν ρώτησε σὲ τί διαφέρουν οἱ καθολικοὶ καὶ οἱ προτεστάντες ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους, εἶπε χαρακτηριστικά: «Ἄς ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι σὰν αὐτὸ τὸ καλύβι ποὺ βλέπεις, φτιαγμένο ἀπὸ πέτρες, λάσπη καὶ ζωνάρια. Οἱ καθολικοὶ ἀφαίρεσαν τὴν λάσπη, οἱ προτεστάντες ἀφαίρεσαν καὶ τὰ ζωνάρια. Μποροῦν τώρα νὰ σταθοῦν οἱ πέτρες μόνες τους;»

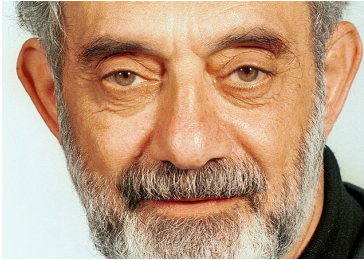
Οὔτε καὶ μὲ τοὺς «διαλόγους» ποὺ γίνονταν μὲ ἑτερόδοξους συμφωνοῦσε ὁ ὄσιος. Διότι ἔβλεπε ὅτι οἱ μὲν Ὁρθόδοξοι ποὺ ἀσχολοῦντο μὲ «διαλόγους» καὶ «συνέδρια» καὶ «προσπάθειες γιὰ ἔνωση» δὲν εἶχαν προηγουμένως ἐνωθεῖ οἱ ἴδιοι μὲ τὸν Θεό, καὶ ἐπομένως δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ πληροφορήσουν τοὺς ἄλλους μὲ Ὁρθόδοξα πατερικὰ βιώματα, οἱ δὲ ἑτερόδοξοι ποὺ συμμετεῖχαν σὲ αὐτὰ δὲν εἶχαν εἰλικρινὴ διάθεση.

Σὲ ἐπιστολὴ του τὸ 1978 ἔγραψε: «Τὸ εὐρωπαϊκὸ πνεῦμα νομίζει ὅτι καὶ τὰ θέματα τὰ πνευματικὰ μποροῦν καὶ αὐτὰ νὰ μποῦν στὴν Κοινὴ Ἀγορά. Ὅλα νὰ ἰσοπεδωθοῦν. Οἱ μὲν Ὁρθόδοξοι ποὺ ἔχουν ἐλαφρότητα καὶ θέλουν νὰ κάνουν προβολή, «ἱεραποστολή», συγκαλοῦν δήθεν συνέδρια, γιὰ νὰ γίνεται ντόρος, νὰ γράφουν οἱ ἐφημερίδες, καὶ νομίζουν ὅτι ἔτσι προβάλλουν τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, μὲ τὸ νὰ γίνουν ταρामοσαλάτα μὲ τοὺς κακοδόξους. Ἀρχίζουν μετὰ οἱ ὑπερ-ζηλωτὲς καὶ πιάνουν τὸ ἄλλο ἄκρο, νὰ λένε καὶ βλασφημίες γιὰ τὰ μυστήρια τῶν νεοσημρολογιτῶν κ.λπ. Καὶ κατασκανδαλίζουν ψυχὲς ποὺ ἔχουν εὐλάβεια καὶ Ὁρθόδοξη εὐαισθησία. Οἱ δὲ ἑτερόδοξοι, ἔρχονται στὰ συνέδρια, κάνουν τὸν δάσκαλο, παίρνουν ὅ,τι καλὸ ὑλικὸ πνευματικὸ βρῖσκουν στοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους, τὸ περνᾶνε ἀπὸ τὸ δικό τους ἐργαστήρι, βάζουν δικό τους χρῶμα καὶ φίρμα, καὶ τὸ παρουσιάζουν σὰν πρωτότυπο· καὶ ὁ παράξενος σημερινὸς κόσμος ἀπὸ κάτι τέτοια παράξενα συγκινεῖται καὶ καταστρέφεται πνευματικά».

Ὁ πατὴρ Παῖσιος εἶχε ἓναν δικό του τρόπο νὰ λέει καὶ στοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς ἑτερόδοξους τὴν ἀλήθεια, χωρὶς νὰ προκαλεῖ. Ὅταν τὸ 1978 θὰ γινόταν ἡ ἐκλογή νέου Πάπα, ἓνας Ρωμαιοκαθολικὸς μοναχὸς τοῦ ζήτησε νὰ προσευχηθεῖ, ὥστε ὁ Πάπας ποὺ θὰ ἐκλέξουν νὰ εἶναι καλός. Ὁ ὄσιος τὸν χτύπησε μὲ συμπάθεια στὴν πλάτη καὶ τοῦ εἶπε χαμογελώντας: «**Μὴ στενοχωριέσαι, παιδί μου, ὅποιος καὶ ἂν εἶναι, ἀλάθητος θὰ εἶναι...**».

## OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Source: "Empirical Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church According to the Spoken Teaching of Protopresbyter John S. Romanides, Vol. 1: Dogma-Ethics-Revelation," by Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos. Quoted text is from Fr. Romanides' lectures.



Holy Scripture is divided into two main parts: the books of the Old Testament, before the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, and the books of the New Testament, after the incarnation of the Word. Both the Old and the New Testaments were given by revelation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, to the Prophets of the Old Testament by the unincarnate Word, as the Angel of Great Counsel, and to the Apostles of the New Testament by the incarnate Word—Christ.

In its worship and calendar of feasts, the Church uses passages from the Old and New Testaments as readings. The readings for Vespers, which interpret the feasts of the Lord and the saints, come from the Old Testament, and the readings for the Divine Liturgy come from the New Testament.

The word *Testament* denotes someone's will, which is recorded and confirmed by his signature. In both Testaments the Second Person of the Holy Trinity appeared to the Prophets and Apostles. The revelation was granted to them. An *agreement* was made and it was sealed with the blood of sacrifice in the Old Testament, and the blood of Christ in the New Testament. We therefore study the Old and New Testaments using the interpretative keys given by the Prophets, Apostles and Fathers, as preserved within the Church.

### The Value of the Old Testament

In the West, the Old Testament has been noticeably underrated and disregarded in comparison with the New Testament. This is explained by the fact that Christ, and everything He said, is held in greater honor than the words of the Prophets of the Old Testament.

"The Westerners' preconception is that we also have the Old Testament, which they rate at a very low level. The Old Testament is almost nothing for many of the Protestants and the Latins. Afterwards Christ comes and then the true faith begins. Then we have the era of the Apostles, from the public teaching of Christ until the crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension and so on. After that we have the Church."

"Western theologians read the Old Testament and do not find much in the Old Testament that relates to the New Testament. Thus, from the point of view of Protestant and Papal research, one part of Scripture has been cut off from

the other. This separation is almost complete in the view of non-Orthodox, whereas for the Orthodox there is no difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Whatever is in the New Testament is also in the Old Testament. The only difference is the incarnation and the work of redemption: *By death He trampled down death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life.* The redeeming acts and the incarnation are the new elements, as is the verification, through the experience of Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit is a distinct and particular hypostasis, Who is neither a hypostasis of the Word nor of the Father, nor is He an energy, but a particular hypostasis."

The Fathers of the Church did not see the Old and New Testaments divided into *Law* and *Grace*, but from the perspective of the stages of perfection. Another serious issue is that Western theologians supported the view, as we see in Barlaam, that divine manifestations in the Old Testament are transitory. They are different from the *theophanies* of the New Testament. The Fathers of the Church did not hold such views. It is characteristic that St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, whose teaching is the same as the Eastern Fathers', guided blessed Augustine to prepare himself prior to Baptism by reading the Old Testament.

"Augustine tells us that in the beginning he paid attention to the form of the words. Because he was a teacher of rhetoric, he noted the form, the layout of the speech, not so much the content. However, gradually, as time passed, he began to notice the content as well. Then he realized that Christians have an interpretation of the Old Testament that differs a great deal from the Manichaeans. The Manichaean perception of the Old Testament is that the Old Testament belongs to the god of darkness. The Old Testament is a work of darkness, whereas the New Testament and their own writings belong to the Light.

Be that as it may, he tells us that Ambrose opened his eyes to subjects relating to the Old Testament, and he began to see things differently, in combination now with his Platonism. Then he decided to be baptized. He sent a letter to Ambrose from the place where he was on holiday, announcing his decision to be baptized the following Easter and asking what he ought to do in preparation.

Ambrose wrote him a letter telling him to read Isaiah and study him well in preparation for Baptism. Augustine confesses to us in his *Philosophical Dialogues* that he took up Isaiah to study him, read a few chapters, understood nothing and therefore took refuge in philosophical discussions with certain pupils and with his friends who were there, in a house lent to him by an acquaintance for the holidays. He was also slightly unwell; he had a bad cough and needed to recover.

It is clear that when he was preparing for Baptism he thought that there was no difference between Christianity

and Platonism. For someone with the slightest knowledge of the differences between the two, this is a very strange conviction, to say the least, which he took with him to Baptism.”

### Links between the Old and New Testaments

From the Orthodox viewpoint there is a close relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The difference that will be identified below is that “the God” revealed in the Old Testament is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity *unincarnate*, the Angel of Great Counsel, whereas the God revealed in the New Testament is the *incarnate* Word. It follows that the difference is the incarnation and the existence of the Church as the Body of Christ. *Everything else is common to both.*

First of all, in both the Old and New Testaments there are created words and concepts by which uncreated reality is communicated. Then the anthropology is common to both the Old and New Testaments, namely, that man, who went far away from God and lost communion with Him, is spiritually ill. This is the single interpretative key for interpreting the whole of Holy Scripture.

“In the Old Testament there are men called Prophets and these Prophets had a specific experience. This experience is described, as far as this is possible, within the Old Testament. We find something similar in the New Testament. Afterwards, linked with this experience of the Prophets and Apostles, there is also their preaching and the entire method that they use to try and introduce the faithful to the exact same experience.

Therefore, we have the phenomenon that in both the Old and New Testaments, if someone wants to find, in my opinion, the key to Holy Scripture and patristic tradition, there is one thing he must understand: in both the Old and New Testaments there is a specific anthropology.

When I say *anthropology* I do not mean it from a philosophical point of view. I mean more from a theological point of view, that there is a being who is called man. This human being has a tendency to weakness and sickness. Man is sick. Why is he sick? Because he is not in the state of glorification. Glorification is regarded as man’s natural state. As he is neither in the state of glorification nor in the state of illumination, man is spiritually and socially sick. He has an unhealthy personality, he has lost what we would nowadays call personality and has become self-centered, selfish and timid. He does not function correctly as a human being. There are different people at different levels, from cannibal to refined philosopher, but none of them lives correctly. Why not? Because their system does not work as it should.”

Sick and fallen man has selfish love and cares only for himself. He does not love God and other people. He has to be cured, to attain to unselfish love. This is achieved only through Christ, Who alone is healthy and sinless.

“From the point of view of Orthodox tradition and Jewish tradition—ancient Jewish tradition, that is, the Old Testament—the human being who does not have unselfish love is ill, that is why he does not have it. He may want to have it, but he does not know how to acquire it. He is unable to acquire it and he ought to know how to obtain it. He is like someone who is sick and knows he is sick, but does not know how to be cured. I know that someone else is healthy. I know that I am ill. But how will I be cured if I do not know how to be cured and to become like the other one who is not sick?

The one who is supremely well and sinless in the whole history of humanity is Christ. How can man become like Christ, Who is the only one Who was not only free from sickness, but was also born free from sickness, whereas all the rest of us were born sick, and everyone in the Old Testament and everyone in the New Testament was born sick? Only Christ was born sinless and not sick. Can we become like Christ because we want to be? Well, we may want to be, but how will we achieve it?”

The question of how we will achieve unselfish love, which constitutes the cure of our being and spiritual health, is what concerns the Prophets, Apostles and the Fathers of the Church. It is connected with the activation of the noetic faculty in the heart.

Throughout Holy Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments, we encounter the fact that the noetic faculty (energy) functions in the heart, and through it, someone acquires knowledge of God. Meanwhile the rational faculty (energy) acts in the reason through thoughts (*logismoi*) and by means of it man relates to his surroundings. In order to be cured, man has to pass through the stages of the spiritual life, which are *purification of the heart, illumination of the nous and glorification*. These stages of perfection are identified in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

This is the perspective in which the Law should be viewed in the Old Testament, together with the rites of purification and all the commandments in general. The Mosaic Law is clearly ascetic in character and consists of purification of the heart and progress towards illumination and glorification. Thus, there are not only words and concepts in the Old Testament, but also the experience of glorification which goes beyond words and concepts.

“We have a very basic problem in contemporary Orthodox theology. What is the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament? In the Old Testament, do we have the revelation of the truth? Do we have the experience of glorification, which transcends words and concepts? Or do we only have words and concepts in the Old Testament?”

The Augustinian tradition tells us that we have words and concepts, things that come and go, but we have nothing in the way of experiences that compares with the New Testa-

ment. Therefore, neither the Protestants nor the Latins understand the Old Testament as we Orthodox do. According to the Fathers of the Church, all the Prophets had reached glorification.”

### Difference between the Old and New Testaments

As has been pointed out already, the experiences of the Prophets, Apostles and Fathers, of the Old and New Testaments, are identical. The spiritual life is common to both, the stages of perfection are the same, glorification is lived by the glorified saints. There are, however, differences as well.

The first difference is that the unincarnate Word appears in the Old Testament, whereas in the New the incarnate Word appears. This has been emphasized in detail elsewhere.

The second difference is that the glorification of the Prophets in the Old Testament had a temporary character, as death had not been abolished. The glorification of the Apostles in the New Testament, by contrast, is stable because of the existence of Christ’s glorified human nature and the victory over death.

“The second great difference between the Old and New Testaments is between temporariness and permanence of participation in the glory of God. In the Old Testament participation is temporary. The experience of glorification is short-lived. Those who beheld the uncreated glory of the Word nevertheless died, both in body and soul. Now, however, through the incarnation, all who have seen the glory of the Word participate permanently in the glory of the Holy Trinity, because when the body dies, the soul does not undergo death. The death of the soul is the absence of glorification, that is to say, the vision of God.

When someone in this life, now, attains to glorification, death no longer dominates him and the experience of glorification continues even after death. A very powerful sign and testimony regarding this fact is the holy relics. Holy relics exist because those who have left relics have left them as testimony to the resurrection of their bodies. That is why all together they make up the communion of the saints.”

Generally speaking, the links between the Old and New Testaments and the differences between them can be set out in three basic questions.

“I pose certain questions. I do not offer any solution to these issues. I simply think that they ought to be examined and subjected to further research: (1) What has been revealed in the Old Testament? Was the truth revealed or is it lies?

(2) How does the Old Testament differ from the New? And, (3) What does Christ mean when He says, *He will guide you into all truth*? What is *all truth* and when was this *all truth* revealed? And if *all truth* has been revealed, this means that it ought to be regarded now as the highest pinnacle. Moreover, if we have a highest point after that pinnacle, we need to measure whether or not we still have that state. For *all truth* to be revealed there has to be a certain state. What was revealed as *all truth*? The dogma of the Holy Trinity? The dogma of the incarnation? What has been revealed as *all truth*? In addition, when? Was it revealed gradually? As time passed, down through the ages? Or was it revealed all at once, in a revelational experience? And so on.

Our contemporary perceptions on these issues are not usually within the framework of the patristic tradition. One professor of ours has caught onto the word *revelation* and says that even after Pentecost there is revelation. What revelation can there be after Pentecost? What does revelation

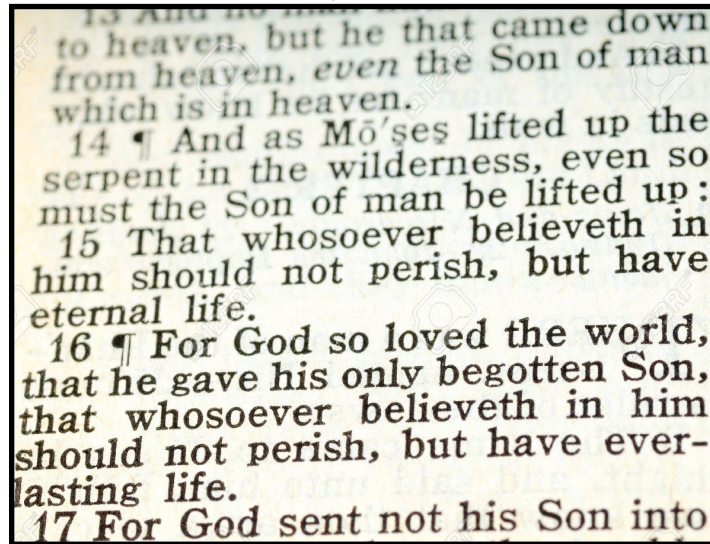
mean to the Fathers of the Church? And how is revelation after Pentecost different from the revelation at Pentecost or the revelation before Pentecost or the revelation after the Resurrection, from the revelation before the Ascension, from the revelation before the Resurrection, from the revelation before the incarnation?

We have revelations before the incarnation throughout the Old Testament. After the incarnation we have revelations.

Before the Resurrection we have revelations. At the Resurrection and after the Resurrection we have revelations. Before the Ascension, during the event of the Ascension, there is the experience of the Ascension. Afterwards we also have Pentecost. Then the Fathers speak again about revelations. When the Fathers speak of revelation, what do they mean by the word? And what is the connection between revelation and divine inspiration?”

The answer to these questions is that in the Old Testament there is revelation of the unincarnate Word. This is truth not falsehood, but *all truth*, which was revealed on the day of Pentecost, is that **the Church is the Body of Christ**. The unincarnate Word is now incarnate. This is *all truth*.

“The basic difference between the Old and New Testaments is the incarnation. First of all the Word appears unincarnate to the Prophets. The first great difference: there is no incarnation in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, however, there is the Holy Trinity, Which appears to the



Prophets, because the Word, Christ Himself, is manifested to the Prophets. For that reason, for us Orthodox Christians, the Old Testament is clearly Christo-centric. The things that some people say about monotheism having been revealed in the Old Testament and so on, are incorrect.”

This means that the difference between the Old and New Testaments is not the dogma of the Holy Trinity, but the incarnation.

“The Word, Who is unincarnate in the Old Testament, appeared without flesh. Now, however, the Word is incarnate and when He is revealed to man He is always revealed in the body. In the New Testament, the revelation concentrates on the human nature of Christ.

Since this is the case, even before Pentecost we have examples of glorification. We know from the Tradition about the glorification of the All-Holy Virgin, who entered the Temple at three years old. She reached the Holy of Holies, which means that the All-Holy Virgin at three years of age had attained to the experience of glorification. She lived in the glory of God. She also beheld God from at least the age of three, and in this way she was made ready to be the Mother of God. That is one example.

Afterwards we have the example of the Baptism of Christ. We have the example of the two disciples of John. Later we have the Transfiguration, and then Pentecost. From the Transfiguration until Pentecost, however, Christ says that *He will guide you into all truth*. (Jn 16:13). What is meant by these words, *He will guide you into all truth*? We have an experience of glorification in the Old Testament. The Holy Trinity has already been revealed to the Prophets: the Father in the Word and the Holy Spirit has been revealed to the Prophets.

We have the same revelation in the New Testament, but now the human nature of Christ is added. In the Transfiguration we have a revelation of the glory of Christ, by means of the human nature of Christ, but also in the cloud that overshadowed the Apostles. Afterwards we have Pentecost. Why is Pentecost the revelation of all truth and why is the Transfiguration not the revelation of all truth?”

The light which the Prophets of the Old Testament saw was the divine and uncreated Light, but there was no body. At the time of the Transfiguration of Christ, the Disciples saw Light issuing from the Body of Christ, which, however, was outside them, as they had not yet become members of the Body of Christ. From the day of Pentecost onwards, the holy Apostles and the saints see the Light through the Body of Christ, as they are members of this risen and glorified Body of Christ.

“That someone reaches glorification and has Light from within, means that the source of the Light is, of course, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but that it is also the human nature of Christ. Because of the hypostatic union,

that is to say, on account of the fact that it is the body of the Word, not only the Word but also the flesh is a source of life. The vision of God, glorification, is a source of life.

This is the basic difference between the Old and New Testaments. This now, from the point of view of reality, is what is called the Church, historical ecclesiastical reality.”

The visions of God in the New Testament are different from visions of God in the Old Testament, because now the human nature of the Word is a source of the uncreated energy of God and because the God-seers are members of the Body of Christ. Also because death has been abolished and glorification does not have a temporary character. Now the Church is the Body of Christ and there is no other truth beyond the Church. This is *all truth* that was revealed on the day of Pentecost and is experienced through the centuries by the faithful. **After Pentecost there is no additional truth.**



Although it is not clear in the Old Testament Who the Holy Spirit is, the Apostles discovered Who He is by experience. Their experience repeats the experience of the prophets, but there is a difference because the Apostles were glorified after the Incarnation: *Yahweh* of the Old Testament now has the human nature of Christ. Although three of the Apostles were partially glorified during the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, all of the Apostles were fully glorified at Pentecost, during which they reached the highest state of glorification that **any human being can ever reach in this life.**

After the experiences of the Apostles come the experiences of the glorified who include the Church Fathers and those saints who reached *theosis*. The experience of *theosis* continues to appear in each generation up to the present. This experience of *theosis* is the core of the Orthodox tradition, the foundation of the local and ecumenical councils, and the basis for the Church's canon law and liturgical life today.

If the contemporary Orthodox theologian is to acquire objectivity, he must rely on the experience of *theosis*. In other words, we can positively state that a student of Patristic tradition has acquired objectivity in his theological method **only when he has personally undergone purification and illumination, and reached theosis.** Only in this way will the researcher not only understand the Patristic tradition, but also verify for himself the truth of this tradition through the Holy Spirit.

**Fr. John Romanides (+2001)**



## A SERMON ON FAITH

### A SERMON GIVEN DURING A SERVICE FOR THE TAKING OF MONASTIC VOWS IN SRETENSKY MONASTERY

Source: "Everyday Saints and Other Stories," by Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov), translated by Julina Henry Lowenfeld, Pokrov Publications (2012), pp. 327-329.



Our Lord expects faith from us. Faith, and nothing more. Faith in the spirit of God. Faith in our faith. Faith in Him, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today in our monastery we have a special occasion—a new monk has appeared in this world. In detail we heard from the Scriptures today; the Lord has placed a child before him and has said: *Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and*

*become as little children, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.* (Mt 18:3).

Everyone after taking his vows appears before the Lord like a child, innocent—with a new life opening before him. And now it all depends on the monk himself: will he remain as pure of heart as a child standing before his Savior? From our teachings we know that the innocent boy set before the Lord was the future St. Ignatius, who suffered martyrdom for Christ, and yet remained true to Him in spite of everything. Or will he choose a different path, and be true only to his own desires that he will hold up as a law for himself and the entire world? Will he try to deceive everyone, and in the end deceive only himself?

Our Lord expects faithfulness from us. And from you, our new brother monk! Faithfulness above all. To your monastic vows. To obedience. Faithfulness in humility. Faithfulness to your commitment to love above all else in this world our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, and to prefer nothing and no one else in this world to Him.

If you can remain true to this, your new covenant with God, which you have made today upon taking your vows, then many people will come through you to salvation and eternal life. Yet if, God forbid, the human heart and the heart of the monk are focused on himself and not upon the Almighty, if we do not keep faith with God, then the very worst possible thing that could happen to us will occur—the senseless life of a monk. And there is absolutely nothing worse than that! But you have been given all the weapons you need to help you to victory.

The Lord has encouraged you with the remarkable words that you have heard upon taking your vows. We have all prayed for you. A remarkable and beautiful path is opening before you. It is full of struggle and of temptation, but it is also full of incomparable meaning, joy, and happiness that the rest of the world simply cannot comprehend.

May God help all of us, brothers and sisters, to be faithful to our calling: After all, **the vow of faithfulness is not just for us monks alone.** As St. Ephraim the Syrian wrote, the Lord does not seek the monk or the layperson, the scholar or the simpleton, the rich man or the pauper, but only the heart that thirsts for God, full of a sincere desire to be true to Him and His commandments!

May God give us understanding of this faith, for it gives our lives meaning. In exchange for our faith in Him, Christ gives His disciples and students everlasting joy and strength and courage to surmount all temptations we will face as we go through life. Amen.

† † †

**Postscript:** The monk for whom the sermon was given left the monastery within five years. There are no mechanisms within our Church to compel anyone to remain in the monastery. Here in the Sretensky Monastery over the past roughly twenty years we have had three such cases. When we are told that this is not very much in comparison with the other monasteries, we do not believe it. Even one such occurrence is truly a tragedy for the monastery, first of all for the monk himself who has betrayed his own vows.

One cannot help feeling terribly sorry for these people. Church canons prohibit them from being buried in a Christian cemetery, and they are treated the same as those who commit suicide. Their marriages are not recognized by the Church. I have had occasion to explain these theological rules and canons to others, and often it seemed that they were just too cruel.

But once I heard not a theological commentary, and not a paragraph from the ancient canons, but just one small quatrain, from which I understood that the laws of the Church merely confirmed the sorry state into which a monk who has recanted from his chosen path plunges himself. Of course, the Lord is merciful, and repentance is available to all.

And yet listen to how Arseny Chanyshev, a professor in the philosophy department of Moscow State University and the author of several books of commentary about classical philosophy, summed up his life. He was not a monk. He had no cause to repent for having violated vows that he had given to God. But he was the son of a monk who had abandoned his faith. And here is his quatrain:

*I'm a monk's son, a child of sin.*

*I am the breaking of a vow*

*And cursed by God for this somehow:*

*My life is naught but dust and din...*

## ON KNEELING AND SUNDAY CHURCH PRAYERS

### WHY ARE PRAYERS SAID IN CHURCH WITHOUT KNEELING ON ALL SUNDAYS AND FROM PASCHA UNTIL PENTECOST?

*From Orthodox Life, Vol. 27, No. 3 (May-June, 1977), pp. 47-50.*

As is evident from the Holy Scriptures, bows, kneeling and prostrations were employed during prayer even in the Old Testament. The holy Prophet King David refers to bowing down to God or to His temple in many of the psalms, for example: *Bow down to the Lord in His holy court* (Pss 28:2); *I shall bow down toward Thy holy temple in fear of Thee* (Pss 5:8); *O come, let us worship and fall down before Him* (Pss 94:6); *Let us go forth into His tabernacles, let us bow down at the place where His feet have stood* (Pss 131:7), etc.

About kneeling, it is known that the holy Prophet Daniel, for example, thrice daily *knelt upon his knees, and prayed and gave thanks before his God.* (Dan 6:10). Full prostrations are also mentioned in the books of the Old Testament.

For example: the Prophets Moses and Aaron besought God, *having fallen on their faces* (Num 16:22), to be merciful to the children of Israel who had grievously sinned. In the New Testament also, the custom of performing kneelings, prostrations and, of course, bows had been preserved and still had a place at the time of the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who sanctified this Old Testament custom by His own example, praying on bent knees and falling down upon His face. Thus, we know from the Holy Gospels that before His passion, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He *kneeled down, and prayed* (Mt 26:39), *fell on the ground and prayed.* (Mk 14:35).

After the Lord's ascension, during the time of the holy apostles, this custom, of which the Holy Scriptures also speak, existed unchanged. For example, the holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen *knelt down, and prayed* for his enemies who were stoning him (Acts 7:60); the Apostle Peter, before raising Tabitha from the dead, *knelt down, and prayed* (Acts 9:40), etc. It is an indisputable fact that, as under the first successors of the apostles, so even in much later periods of the existence of the Church of Christ, kneelings, bows and prostrations upon the ground were always employed by true believers at domestic prayers and at the divine services. In antiquity, among the other bodily activities, kneeling was considered the outward manifestation of prayer most pleasing

to God. Thus, St. Ambrose of Milan says: *Beyond the rest of the ascetic labors, kneeling has the power to assuage the wrath of God and to evoke His mercy.* (Book VI on the Six Days of Creation, ch. 9).

The canons concerning bows and kneelings now accepted by the Orthodox Church and set forth in the books of the divine services, and particularly in the Church *Typicon*, are observed in monasteries. But in general, Orthodox Christian laymen who have zeal are, of course, permitted to pray on their knees in church and to make full prostrations whenever they wish, excepting only those times when the Gospel, Epistle, Old Testament readings, six psalms and sermon are read. The Holy Church lovingly regards such people, and does not constrain their devout feelings. However, the exceptions with regard to Sundays and the days between Pascha and Pentecost apply generally to everyone. According to ancient tradition and a clear church law, kneeling must not be performed on these days. The brilliant solemnity of the events which the Church commemorates throughout the period of Pentecost and on



Sundays precludes, in and of itself, any external manifestation of sorrow or lamentation over one's sins: for ever since Jesus Christ, *blotting out the handwriting of the ordinances that was against us, ... nailing it to His Cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it*" (Col 2:14-15)—ever

since then *there is, therefore, no condemnation to them who are in Jesus Christ.* (Rom 8:1). For this reason, the practice was observed in the Church from the earliest times, beyond a doubt handed down by the apostles, whereby on all these days, in that they are consecrated to the commemoration of the glorious victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death, it was required to perform the public divine service brightly and with solemnity, and in particular without kneeling, which is a sign of repentant grief for one's sins.

The second century writer Tertullian gives testimony concerning this practice: *On the Lord's Day* (i.e., Sunday) *we consider it improper to fast or to kneel; and we also enjoy this freedom from Pascha until Pentecost.* (*On the Crown*, ch. 3). St. Peter of Alexandria (third cent.—cf. his Canon XV in the *Rudder*), and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (Book II, Ch. 59), also say the same thing.

Subsequently, the First Ecumenical Council found it necessary to make this legally binding by a special canon obligatory for the entire Church. The canon of this council states: *Since there are some persons who kneel in church on Sundays and on the days of Pentecost, with a view to preserving uniformity in*

all parishes, it has seemed best to the holy council for prayers to be offered to God while standing. (Canon XX).

Pointing out this canon, St. Basil the Great explains the rationale and meaning of the practice established by it thus: *We stand up when praying on the first of the week, though not all of us know the reason. For it is not only that it serves to remind us that when we have risen from the dead together with Christ we ought to seek the things above, in the day of resurrection of the grace given us, by standing at prayer, but that it also seems to serve in a way as a picture of the expected age. Wherefore, being also the starting point of days, though not the first with Moses, yet it has been called the first. For it says: "The evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen 1:5), on the ground that it returns again and again. The eighth, therefore, is also the first, especially as respects that really first and true eighth day, which the Psalmist too has mentioned in some of the superscriptions of his psalms, serving to exhibit the state which is to succeed this period of time, the unceasing day, the day without a night that follows, the day without successor, the never-ending and unaging age. Of necessity, therefore, the Church teaches her children to fulfill their obligations to pray therein while standing up, in order by constantly reminding them of the deathless life to prevent them from neglecting the provisions for the journey thither. And every Pentecost is a reminder of the expected resurrection in the age to come. For that one first day, being multiplied seven times over, constitutes the seven weeks of the holy Pentecost. For by starting from the first day of the week, one arrives on the same day... The laws of the Church have taught us to prefer the upright posture at prayer, thus transporting our mind, so to speak, as a result of vivid and clear suggestions, from the present age to the things come in the future. And during each kneeling and standing up again we are in fact showing by our actions that is was through sin that we fell to earth, and that through the kindness of the One Who created us we have been called back to Heaven...* (Canon XCI of St. Basil the Great). The three well-known kneeling prayers of Pentecost composed by this great Father of the Church are thus not read at third hour, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, nor at Liturgy on Pentecost, but at Vespers, which is already part of the following day, after the Entrance. The holy Father was determined not to break the ancient custom of the Church.

In Canon XC of the Council of Trullo, held in conjunction with the Sixth Ecumenical Council, we read: *We have received it canonical from our God-bearing Fathers not to bend the knee on Sundays when honoring the resurrection of Christ. Since this observation may not be clear to some of us, we are making it plain to the faithful, that after the entrance of those in holy orders into the sacrificial altar on the evening of the Saturday in question, let none of them bend the knee until the evening of the following Sunday, when, following the entrance after the lamps have been lit, again bending knees, we thus begin to offer our prayers to the Lord. For, inasmuch as we have received it that the night*

*succeeding Saturday was the precursor of our Savior's rising, we commence our hymns at this point in a spiritual manner, ending the festival by passing out of darkness into light, in order that we may hence celebrate the resurrection together for a whole day and a whole night.*

John Zonaras, explaining the canon, says: "Various canons have made it a law not to kneel on Sundays or during the fifty days of Pentecost, and Basil the Great also supplied the reasons for which this was forbidden. This canon decrees only with regard to Sunday, clearly indicates from what hour and until hour to kneel, and says: 'On Saturday, after the entrance of the celebrants into the altar at vespers, no one may bend the knee until vespers on Sunday itself, when, i.e., again the entrance of the celebrants takes place: for we do not transgress by bending the knee and praying in such a manner from that time on. For Saturday night is considered the night of the day of resurrection, which, according to the words of this canon, we must pass in the chanting of psalms, carrying the feast over from darkness to light, and in such manner celebrate the resurrection for the entire night and day.'" (*Book of the Canons With Interpretations*, p. 729).

There appears in the Church *Typicon* a direction concerning how the priest must approach and kiss the Gospel after reading it during the all-night vigil for the resurrection: "*Do not make prostrations to the ground, but small bows, until the hand touches the ground. For on Sunday and feasts of the Lord and during the entire fifty days between Pascha and Pentecost the knee is not bent.* (*Typicon*, ch. 2).

Nevertheless, standing at the divine services on Sunday and on the days between Pascha and Pentecost was the privilege of those who were in full communion with the Church; but the so-called "penitents" were not dispensed from kneeling even on those days.

We will close with these words from the famous interpreter of the Church canons, Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch of Antioch: **Preserve the canonical decrees, wherever and however they should be phrased; and say not that there are contradictions among them, for the All-holy Spirit has worded them all.** (Interpretation of Canon XC of the Council of Trullo).



Saints are people who live on earth by holy, eternal Divine truths. That is why the Lives of the Saints are actually applied dogmatics, for in them all the holy eternal dogmatic truths are experienced in all their life-creating and creative energies. In *The Lives of the Saints* it is most evidently shown that dogmas are not only ontological truths in themselves and for themselves, but that each one of them is a wellspring of eternal life and a source of holy spirituality.

**St. Justin Popovich**

## ON GRATITUDE TOWARDS OUR LORD AND CREATOR

*A homily on the Gospel on the Healing of the Ten Lepers by St. Nikolai Velimirovic, bishop of Ochrid, from "Homilies, vol. Two: Sundays after Pentecost," Lazarica Press, Birmingham (1998), pp. 299-306.*

*As Jesus entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off; and they lifted up their voices, and said: "Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!" And when He saw them, He said unto them: "Go shew yourselves unto the priests." And it came to pass that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks; and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said: "Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." And He said unto him: "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."*

[Lk 17:12-19]

† † †

We are taught through small things, not always being able to grasp big ones. If we are unable to grasp how God sees all men, let us see how the sun shines and sheds its light on all things on earth. If we are unable to grasp how a man's soul cannot live for an instant without God, let us see how a man's body cannot live for a moment without air.

If we do not know why God seeks obedience from men, let us understand why the head of a family seeks obedience from its members, a king from his subjects, a commander from his soldiers and an architect from his builders. If we do not know why God seeks gratitude from men, let us reflect and understand why a father seeks gratitude from his children. Let us pause for a moment on this subject: why does a father seek obedience from his children? Why does a father insist that his son take off his cap and make a reverence to him, and say "thank you" for everything, large or small, that he receives from his parents? Why do parents have to do this? Are they enriched by their children's thanks, or made more powerful or more eminent, or do they have more influence in society? No; nothing of all this. So, when parents gain nothing personally from their children's gratitude, is it not strange that they constantly teach their children to be grateful, and make them practice gratitude—and this not just on the part of devout parents, but also that of unbelievers?

This is not in the least strange, but is, rather, sublime. It is the parents' selfless love that drives them to teach their children gratitude. Why? That it should be for the child's good. That the child should grow up as a cultivated fruit tree and not as a wild thistle; so that it should go well with the child in this transitory life among men, among friends

and enemies, in villages and towns, in authority and in commerce. A grateful man is everywhere valued, liked, invited and assisted. He who learns gratitude learns mercy, and a merciful man walks more freely in this world.

Let us now ask ourselves why God seeks men's thanks. Why did He seek of Noah, Moses, Abraham and other of our forefathers that they offer Him sacrifices of thanksgiving (Gen 8:20-21; 12:7-8; 35:1; Lev Ch. 3)? Why did the Lord Jesus every day give an example to the world of how we must give thanks to God (Mt 11:25; 14:19; 26:26-7)? Why did the apostles do the same (Acts 2:47; 27:35), commanding all the faithful to give thanks to God in and for all things (Eph 5:20; Col 3:17)? Do we find great Isaiah's words incomprehensible: *I will mention the lovingkindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness!* (Isa 63:7)? Or what the gentle Psalmist advises his own soul: *Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.* (Pss 102/103:2)? Why, then, does God seek men's thanks, and why do men give Him thanks?

It is out of His endless love for mankind that God seeks that men give Him thanks. The thanks of men will not make God greater, more powerful, more glorious, richer or more alive, but they will make men all of these things. Man's gratitude will not add anything to God's peace and contentment, but it will add greatly to man's. Thanksgiving to God will in no way change God's state and being, but it will change these in a grateful man. God has no need of our gratitude, nor are our prayers necessary to Him. But it is this same Lord who said: *Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of; before ye ask Him* (Mt 6:8) who at the same time recommended *that men ought always to pray, and not to faint* (Lk 18:1). God may not feel the need of our prayers, but He nevertheless tells us to pray. He may not feel the need of our gratitude, but nevertheless demands it of us—the thanksgiving that is nothing other than a form of prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving to God raises us mortals out of the corruption of mortality, releases us from that from which we must all at some time be released, whether we will or not, and binds us to God the living and immortal; if we are not bound to Him in this life, then we shall never be in His presence in eternity. Thanksgiving ennobles the thankful and nourishes good works. Thanksgiving inspires benevolence in the world, and gives freshness to every virtue. The mortal tongue of man is far from being able to represent either the beauty of gratitude or the ugliness of ingratitude as graphically as both are presented in today's Gospel.

*At that time, As Jesus entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off; and they lifted up their voices, and said: "Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!"* There were ten lepers. It is terrible to see one, let alone ten at once. A body covered from head to foot firstly with

white spots and then white, festering scabs, that first itch and then burn like fire. A body that is decaying and falling apart. A body in which there is more pus than blood. A body that stinks without and within. This is a leprous man. When the leprosy strikes at the nose, the mouth, the eyes, imagine what sort of air is breathed through the pus, what the food is like that is eaten with it and what the world is like when seen through it!

According to the Law of Moses, lepers were forbidden to come into any sort of contact with other people. This is still the case today in areas where leprosy exists. To stop anyone approaching a leprous man, the leper had to cry from a distance: “Unclean! Unclean!” This is spelled out word for word in the Law: *And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry: “Unclean! Unclean!”* (Lev 13:45). His clothes rent—that the leprosy on him may be seen; bareheaded—again that it be known that he is leprous, as leprosy makes the hair fall out; with his mouth covered—again as a sign for recognition by passers-by; and over and above all this, being forced to cry out: “Unclean! Unclean!” They were driven out of the cities and villages and lived a life lower than that of the beasts, driven off, despised and forgotten. *He is unclean, it is written in the Law, he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.* (Lev 13:46). They were considered as dead, although their fate was more terrible than death.

One day the Lord Jesus, the Source of health, beauty and strength, passed by these ten ragged and stinking remnants of life. When the lepers discovered that it was He, they, from afar off, lifted up their voices, and said: *Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!* How were these wretches able to know of Jesus and His power to help them, when they had no contact with other men? Someone must, throwing bread to them on the road, have given them the news. The fame of this one new thing in the world that could be of interest to them must have come to their ears from afar. All else that happens in the world: changes of ruler and wars among nations, the building and destroying of cities, festivals, fires and earthquakes—all this was meaningless to them. Clad in suppuration, they could only think of their miserable clothing and, perhaps, of

Him who was able to strip this clothing off them and clothe them in the raiment of health. Hearing of the Lord Jesus as an almighty healer, they had also certainly heard of specific cases of Christ’s healing of lepers like themselves (Lk 5:12-13). They must therefore have longed for the happy chance that they might meet the Lord. Somewhere on the edge of the Galilean plain, where the road begins to climb into the hills of Samaria, they were awaiting Him. He was passing that way on the road to Jerusalem. And lo, the happy chance had now come, not by chance but by God’s dispensation. They saw Christ passing with His disciples and, seeing Him, they cried out with one voice: *Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!* Why did they call Him “Master”? Because it is a more dignified and meaningful word than “Teacher,” for a Mas-

ter is one who is not just a teacher but a spiritual guide, who by his words, example and care leads men onto the path of salvation. Why, then, do they not call Him “Lord”, which is an even more dignified and meaningful word than “Master”? Because they had not yet come to know of this dignity of Christ’s.

*Have mercy on us*, they cried aloud. And when He saw them, He said unto them: *Go shew yourselves unto the priests.* And it came to pass that, as they went, they were cleansed. In an earlier instance of the healing of lepers, the Lord stretched out His hand and touched the

leper, saying to him: *Be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.* (Lk 5:13). In this instance, though, He not only did not touch the lepers, but was not even close to them, for they stood afar off and cried out to Him. He had, then, to call to them from a distance.

Why did the Lord send them to the priests? Because it was the priests’ duty to pronounce lepers unclean and exclude them from society, and also to pronounce the healed clean and healthy and permit them to return to the society of men (Lev 13:34,44). The Lord will not break the law, especially as the law does not hinder His work, but rather endorses it in this case, because the priests themselves would be in a position to be convinced that the ten lepers were healed, and themselves confirm this and testify to it. Hearing, then, what the Lord said to them and whither He was sending them, the ten lepers set off to their village to do this. But lo, as they went, they looked at themselves and their leprosy



had disappeared: As they went, they were cleansed. They looked at their bodies, and their bodies were healthy and clean. They looked at each other, and were convinced of their health and cleanness. The scabs and pus and stench had all disappeared, leaving no trace of the horrific leprosy that had covered them.

Who could say that this miracle of Christ's was not greater than the raising of the dead? Go a little deeper into the fact that, at one mighty word, ten leprous human bodies, eaten up by the disease, suddenly became healthy and clean. When you go deeper into it, you will easily acknowledge that this word could not have come from a mortal man; that it must have been spoken by God through the physical lips of a man. A human tongue, it is true, pronounced this word, but the word came forth from those same depths from which there came the word of command that the world be created, *and it was so*. There are words and words. There are pure and sinless words that are therefore words of power. These words come from the primal Fount of eternal Love. The doors of all creation open before them; all things, men, sicknesses and spirits submit to them. And there are words that are fragmented, blunted, deadened by sin, that have no greater effect than the whistling of the wind through a reed-bed; and however many of these dead words are pronounced, they remain as weak as the buffeting of smoke on an iron door.

Think, moreover, what an indescribable comfort it is to us when we know in what a powerful and loving Lord we believe. *Whatever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven and in earth.* (Pss 134/135:6). He is the Lord of life, the Ruler of sickness, the Lawgiver of nature, the Conqueror of death. We are not created by mindless and irrational nature, but by Him, the Most Wise. We are not slaves of natural law, but servants of the living God who loves mankind. We are not playthings of chance but creatures of Him Who created all our elder brethren, the angels and archangels and all the immortal hosts of heaven. If we suffer in this life, He knows the meaning and goal of our suffering; if we are made leprous by sin, His word is mightier than leprosy, whether physical or spiritual; if we drown, His saving hand is near; if we die, He awaits us on the other side of the grave.

Let us now return to the Gospel story of the healing of the lepers, and take a look at this clear illustration of gratitude and ingratitude. What did these lepers do when they noticed that they were healed of their leprosy? This is what they did: only one of them turned back to thank Christ, while the other nine went on their way with no further thought for their Benefactor and Saviour:

*And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks; and he was a Samaritan.* This one grateful man, on seeing that this terrible disease

had fallen from him, took breath in his soul as though a writhing mass of vicious snakes had fallen away from him, and his first thought was to thank the One who had saved him from his inexpressible wretchedness. As he had so short a time before raised his suffering voice and cried through suppurating lips: *Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!*, so he once again raised his voice, a strong voice from a healthy breast through clean and healthy lips, and thanked God with a great cry. Even this was not enough for him, and he ran back after his Benefactor, to express his thanks to Him. When he came to Christ, he fell right down before Him, no longer on painful knees with open wounds but on healthy ones, and thanked Him. A body full of health, a heart full of joy and eyes full of tears! That is a true man. Moments before, a heap of suppurating flesh, but now a man once more. Moments before, refuse cast out from the life of men, and now once more a worthy member of human society. Moments before, a sorrowful trumpet that sounded forth only one note: "Unclean! Unclean!", but now a joyful trumpet of thanks and praise to God.

This one and only grateful man was not a Jew but a Samaritan. The Samaritans were not Jews, but were either pure-blooded Assyrians or of mixed Assyrian and Jewish stock. They were those Assyrians whom King Shalmaneser at one time settled in parts of Syria, having first re-settled the Jews from there in Assyria (2 Kings 17:3-6, 24). That this grateful man was a pure-blooded Assyrian is clear from the Lord's calling him a stranger.

*And Jesus answering said: "Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger."* Do you see how gently the Lord rebukes ingratitude? He only asked whether they were not healed, and why they had not come back to say "thank you." He did not ask because He did not know that they were all healed; no, He knew that they would be healed before He saw and met them. But He put this question as the gentlest of reprimands. How every one of us, when he gives a penny to a beggar, explodes and yells if the beggar does not thank him! And just think how every one of us would furiously denounce nine sick men were we, let us say, capable of restoring their health and they did not even say; "thank you" for such an unrepayable debt.

How full all our days are with men's fury against the ungrateful! How laden is all the air on earth with hatreds and cursings that pour forth every day from men's lips from dawn to dusk against the ungrateful! How small, however, is that which man does for man compared with the great things that God untiringly and unceasingly does for men from the cradle to the grave. And God never yells or scolds, or curses the ungrateful, but reprimands them gently, asking those who worship Him at home or in church: "Where are My other children? Have I not

given health to thousands of them, and here are only you ten at prayer? Have I not given the sun's light to millions, and only you hundred are grateful? Have I not beautified the fields with harvest and filled every man's sheepfolds, and there are just a few of you who kneel before Me in thankfulness? Where are My other children? Where are the mighty and powerful who rule over nations by My power and might? Where are the rich and successful, who have enriched themselves with My riches and come to success through My mercy? Where are the healthy and the merry, who are filled with their health and merriment from My fount? Where are the parents whose children I help to grow and become strong? Where are the teachers to whom I give wisdom and knowledge? Where are all the sick whom I have healed? Where are all the sinners whose souls I have washed from sin as if from leprosy?

See, only this stranger! He alone has returned to give thanks. But is anyone a stranger to Christ? Did He not come to save all men, and not just the Jews? The Jews were proud of being chosen by God, and of their knowledge of God, that surpassed that of all other nations on earth. But here is an example that shows their darkened minds and hardness of heart. An Assyrian, a pagan, had a more enlightened mind and a nobler heart than the self-congratulatory Jews. Sadly, this history is repeated in our day with the chosen and the non-chosen. Today, some pagans have a more open mind and grateful heart towards God than very many Christians. Many Muslims, Buddhists or Parsees can put many Christians to shame by their heartfelt prayers to God and the ardor of their thankfulness to Him.

The parable ends with the Savior's words to the grateful Samaritan: *And He said unto him: "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."* See the greatness of the Lord's humility, and also His gentleness. It is a joy to Him to call men fellow-workers in His great and good works. He desires by this to raise the dignity of the humiliated and subjugated human race. High above human pride and vanity, He desires to share His merit with others, His riches with the poor, His glory with the needy and the sorrowing. *Thy faith hath Made thee whole.* This Samaritan had indeed believed, as had the other nine lepers; had they not believed in the Lord's power, they would not have cried out: *Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!* But of what use was their faith?

They could, with the same faith, have cried out to thousands of the world's most famous doctors: "Have mercy on us, and heal us!" but all would have been in vain. If any of these thousands of earthly, mortal doctors had healed them, do you think that he would have ascribed the healing to the sick man's faith and not to his own skill? Is it not the custom with earthly, mortal doctors that each of them deliberately passes over in silence any merit on the sick man's part in his restoration to health, in order thereby to emphasize, as

strongly and exclusively as possible, himself and his own merit? This is the behavior of man to man.

But Christ the Lord deals with men very differently. Christ has provided His wagon-load of wheat, and the leprous Samaritan has thrown one grain of wheat onto the load. Christ's load of wheat is His divine power and authority, and the leper's one grain is his faith in Christ. Christ, the true Lover of mankind, will not belittle that one grain, but will, on the contrary, give it more honor than His own whole load of grain. He therefore does not say, as all mortal men would say in this instance: "My load of wheat will feed you." He does not say: "I have made you whole," but *Thy faith hath made thee whole.* What greatness of soul there is in these words! What great teaching to us all! And what a great reprimand to human selfishness and pride!

Let all who conceal another's grain of merit and lay emphasis on their own wagon-load draw near in shame and learn from Christ the Righteous One. They are no less robbers and thieves than the rich man who adds the poor man's tiny field to his own vast acres. Let all the generals who conceal the part their soldiers have played in the victory, and spread abroad the fame of their own merit, draw near in shame and learn from Christ the True One. Let all engaged in commerce and industry, who play down the merit for their success that belongs to their workers and helpers, and ascribe this entirely to their own zeal, wisdom and luck, draw near in shame and learn from Christ the Humble One. Finally: let the whole human race, who in their proud blindness ascribe all good, all skill, all success to themselves alone, and conceal or forget God's enormous share in it all, draw near in shame and learn from Christ the Lover of mankind. Let them draw near and learn how the true God does not conceal a single grain of man's merit in the great wagon-load of His merit but, on the contrary, conceals and keeps quiet about His own, emphasizing that of men.

Can there be a greater blow and a more terrible reprimand to men for their thieving, brigandry, roughness, pride and lack of love towards man and God? Truly, he who has a sense of shame will be ashamed before this humility of Christ's. He who has one spark of unextinguished conscience will repent of his vulgar and stupid self-congratulation and self-display, and will become grateful to God and men. And gratitude will teach him truthfulness, righteousness and humility.

Oh, if we Christians knew the variety and number of the spiritual diseases from which Christ the Lord heals us every day, we would quickly turn to Him, fall at His feet and thank Him from this moment to the hour of our death—which hour is not far from any one of us. To our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be glory and praise, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit - the Trinity consubstantial and undivided, now and forever, through all time and all eternity. Amen.

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## ON CHURCH DOGMAS

By Fr. John Romanides (+November 1, 2001).

The dogmas of the Church are the axioms that originate from this experience of purification, illumination and glorification. Dogmas are not the outcome of conjectures, as Western theologians, historians of dogma and our own people—who follow them—believe.

Dogmas did not result from the speculative endeavor of clever theologians indulging in philosophy. Dogmas are the formulations of the teachings of the Church produced by the Fathers of the Church to protect it from heresies. Because every time a dogma was formulated, it was done in order to counter a specific heresy.

The Church never gathered to formulate dogma for the sake of the conjectural expertise of theologians, who sit in their university chairs speculating on the basis of philosophy, sociology and so on. No such thing has ever happened. All the Ecumenical and Local Councils, whenever they were engaged in drawing up dogma, were always opposing a particular heresy.

This is the precise historical reality. From the point of view of Patristic tradition, the formulation of dogma against heresy was an expression of the mystical experience of the Church. Because heresy was opposed to the life of the Church and contrary to the experience of the Church. What is this experience? It is purification, illumination and glorification. Orthodoxy is anything that accords with this experience.

Now the therapeutic part [of the formulation of dogma] is the most important of all. Because, according to the Fathers, if someone does not pass through the treatment, the fact that he accepts dogmas is of no significance. The purpose of the dogmas is to be used as medicines for man's cure. Dogma is a medicine.

Dogma is not to be believed. Dogma is to be experienced. Because dogma without experience is heresy. The worst heresy is for people to sit at their desks and assume that they can reflect deeply and think great thoughts about dogmatic issues. That is the greatest stupidity.

The assertion by many historians that the Fathers of the Church used philosophy to understand dogmas, and that the conflict between the Orthodox and the heretics was about who had the correct rational understanding of dogma, is a myth. The Fathers of the Church never had this perception. The heretics had this perception.

The Fathers of the Church do not accept metaphysics, because metaphysics is human thought about *the immutable*. By means of concepts and words, man thinks about and expresses *the immutable*. That is the foundation of metaphysics.

In patristic theology, however, we have the famous saying of St. Gregory the Theologian, the compass for every Orthodox theologian, which tells us: *It is impossible to express God, and even more impossible to conceive Him.* We can neither describe God in words nor understand Him. For that reason, words and concepts about God do not *express* God. They are simply part of the ascetic means by which man attains—if he ever does attain—to glorification.



# Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

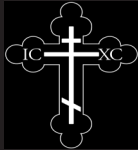
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## In This Issue:

- Devotion to Prayer (p. 7)
- Are Sins Committed after Baptism Forgiven? (p. 10)
- The 14,000 Innocents and America Today (p. 12)
- The Inviolability of Free Will (p. 21)
- Our Struggle with Passions (p. 23)
- On Lies (p. 25)
- Children: Their Joys and Their Difficulties (p. 28)
- The Nativity and Baptism - Theophany of Christ (p. 29)



- Χριστουγεννιάτικη Ἀτμόσφαιρα (σελ. 13)
- «Γνώθι Σαῦτόν» (σελ. 15)
- Ἔτοιμοι γιὰ Θάνατο! (σελ. 16)
- Νεοταξικὲς Μαγαρισιᾶς Χριστουγέννων (σελ. 18)
- Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰερώνυμος στὴ Σπηλιὰ τῆς Βηθλεὲμ... (σελ. 20)



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## THE GOSPEL ON THE FIRSTBORN

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic, from "Homilies, vol. 1," Lazarica Press, Birmingham (1996), pp. 13-23.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son; and he called his name Jesus.

[Mt 1:18-25]

He who, in obedience and humility, draws near to the Lord Jesus Christ will never again desire to be separated from Him.

The first exercise for a recruit in Christ's army is practice in obedience and humility. The new world, the new creation, the

new man: all began with obedience and humility. The old world trod obedience to God underfoot, together with humility towards Him, and by this destroyed the bridge linking earth and heaven. The spiritual materials for the rebuilding of this bridge are, before all else, obedience and humility.

While Adam was rich in obedience and humility, it was hardly possible to differentiate between his spirit and the Spirit of God, between his will and thoughts and those of God. He could feel, desire or think nothing that was not in God and of God. As the angels of God stood in the full presence of God, so did Adam (in a direct closeness), and from this closeness gazed on the Source of light, wisdom and love. He had no need to light a candle of his own, living as he did in the Sun Itself. His candle would, in the light of that Sun, neither have burned nor given light.

But when Adam violated obedience and lost humility—and those two are always gained or lost together—then his direct communication with God was cut off, the bridge was demolished and he fell into a fearsome, stagnant darkness, in which he had to light himself with his own candle, the candle that the mercy of God had given him when God's righteousness drove him out of Paradise. He then began not only to make a difference between himself and God, between his will and the will of God, his feelings and those of God, his thoughts and those of God—he not only began to make and see a difference, but was scarcely able (only now and then, in moments of enlightenment) to be aware of his likeness to God.

The Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes our readers a blessed and prosperous 2018. We completed our thirteenth year of publication, in spite of the challenges we have faced and ONLY through the prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support of our many readers, worldwide. We humbly wish to remind you that this publication is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2018 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of the next page for contribution and payment information.

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20<sup>th</sup> century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

If you wish to receive this periodical, please write or e-mail us with your address. We suggest to all that share our views and wish to assist us to donate \$24 per annum (\$48 for those outside of the US). This amount will greatly assist us in the costs it takes to bring these articles to you, as well as to aid in our other educational and philanthropic activities.

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Alas, in what a miserable and abysmal state, through his disobedience and pride, does he find himself who was originally created *in the image and likeness* of the Holy and Divine Trinity Itself! (St. Philaret of Moscow says, in his homily on the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple: *In man in a sinless state, the image of God was the source of blessing; in fallen man, it was [only] the hope of blessing*). Alas, we are all descendants of Adam, all low shoots from the stump of the felled cedar that had once majestically been raised up above all God’s creatures in Paradise; low shoots overcome by the tall weeds of cruel, brutal nature, which had grown up like a curtain between him and the Source of immortal love.

Only see how, as at the waving of a magician’s wand, the disobedience and pride of man’s forefather all at once change all creation around him, and he becomes surrounded by an army of the disobedient and the proud!

While Adam was obedient and humble before his Creator, all around him breathed obedience and humility. But what a change came about in the twinkling of an eye! At the moment of Adam’s fall, he was surrounded by the disobedient. Here was disobedient Eve beside him. Here was the chief disseminator of disobedience and pride, the spirit of disobedience—Satan. Here was the whole of nature—disobedient, rebellious and full of fury. Fruit, that had till then melted with sweetness in man’s mouth, began to smite him with its bitterness. Grass, that had wrapped itself around his feet like silk, began to scratch him like needles. Flowers, that had rejoiced in giving their scent for their lord to breathe, began to smother themselves with weeds, to keep him away from them. Wild beasts, that had fawned round him like lambs, began to spring on him with sharpened teeth and eyes aflame with fury. Everything took a wild and aggressive stance towards Adam. And the richest of all creatures felt himself to be the poorest. Clothed formerly in angelic glory,

he now felt himself humiliated, lonely and naked; so naked that he was forced to borrow clothing from nature to cover his nakedness, both physical and spiritual. For his body, he began to borrow skins from the animals and leaves from the trees; and for his spirit, he began to borrow from all creatures—from creatures!—knowledge and skills. He who had formerly drunk from the overflowing Fount of life was now forced to go with the animals, to bend down in the mud and drink at the trough in order to slake his physical and spiritual thirst.

Look now at the Lord Christ. All is obedience and humility. The Archangel Gabriel, the representative of angelic obedience and humility; the Virgin Mary—obedience and humility; Joseph—obedience and humility; the shepherds—obedience and humility; the wise men from the East—obedience and humility. Storms obedient, winds obedient, sun and moon obedient, men obedient, beasts obedient; the grave itself obedient. All is obedient to the Son of God, the New Adam, and all is humble before Him, for He also is unconditionally obedient to His Father, and is humble before Him.

It is known that, together with much that man sows in the earth and cultivates, other plants and herbs readily spring up, that have been neither sown nor cultivated. So it is with the virtues: you may carefully sow and cultivate obedience and humility in your soul, and you will see that a whole bouquet of other virtues will quickly shoot up beside them. One of the first will be simplicity, both within and without. The obedient and humble Virgin Mary was adorned at the same time with child-like simplicity. This was also true of righteous Joseph, and also of the apostles and evangelists. Only look at the unparalleled simplicity with which the evangelists record the greatest events in the history of man’s salvation, in the history of the universe! Could you imagine in what detail and with what theatricality a secular writer would write, for example, about the raising of

Lazarus, were he to have witnessed that event? Or what sort of prosy and pretentious drama he would have written about all that came to pass in the soul of the obedient, humble and simple Joseph at the moment when he discovered that the girl under the protection of betrothal to him was pregnant? This is recorded by the Evangelist in a few, simple sentences: *But the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.* Before this, the Evangelist had given the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, or, more precisely, that of righteous Joseph, from the Tribe of Judah and the House of David. In this genealogy, the Evangelist listed men, born of men in a natural way, such as all mortal men on earth are born. He then suddenly begins to record the Lord's birth, and says: *But the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise* as though, with this "but", he wants to show the unusual and supernatural nature of His birth, completely divorced from the manner of birth of all Joseph's recorded forebears. Mary, His mother, was betrothed to Joseph. In the eyes of the world, this betrothal was seen as an introduction to married life; but, in the eyes of Mary and Joseph, it could not be seen like this.

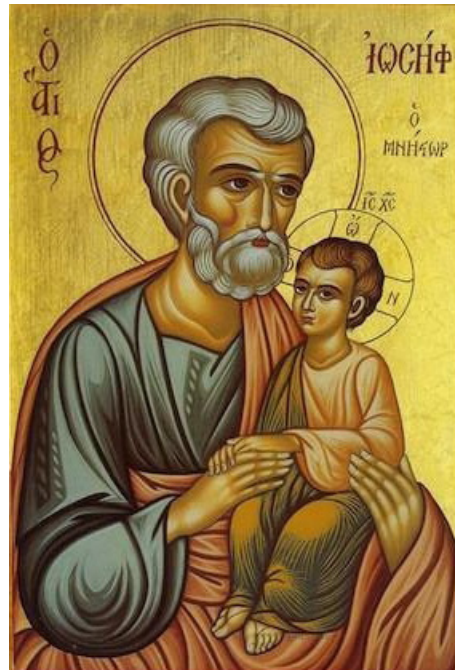
Sought with tears from God, the Virgin Mary was consecrated to God by her parents' vow. She, on her part, voluntarily took this vow made by her parents upon herself, as is seen in her many years of service in the Temple at Jerusalem. Could she have followed her own inclinations, she would undoubtedly have spent the rest of her life in the Temple, like Anna the daughter of Phanuel (Lk 2:36-37), but the law ruled otherwise, and so it had to be. She was betrothed to Joseph, not to live in marriage with him but in order to escape marriage. All the details of this betrothal, and its meaning are to be found in the Church's tradition. And if men were to value tradition with reference to the Mother of God, to righteous Joseph and to all the people involved who are mentioned in the Gospel, as much as they value traditions—some of them of the wildest—about the rulers, leaders and wise men of this world, the meaning of the betrothal of the Most Holy Virgin Mary to Joseph would be clear to all.

St Ignatius says that the Virgin was betrothed *that His birth should be concealed from the devil; that the devil should think of Him as born of a married woman, and not of a virgin.* This is also found in Jerome's *Commentary on Matthew* and in Gregory of Neocaesarea's *Second Talk on the Annunciation.*

*Before they came together...* These words do not mean that they afterwards came together as man and wife, or that this was in the Evangelist's mind. The Evangelist is, in this case, interested only in the birth of the Lord Jesus, and nothing else, and he

writes the above words in order to show that His birth was without the coming together of man and woman. Therefore understand the wise words of the Evangelist, as though he had written: *and without their coming together, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit.* Only by the Holy Spirit could He be conceived who was, in the midst of the kingdom of darkness and evil, to found the Kingdom of the Spirit of light and love. How would He be able to fulfill His divine mission on earth if He had come on earth through all the usual earthly channels, blocked as they are by sin and stinking of mortal corruption? In that case, new wine would have stunk of old wineskins, and He who had come to save the world would have been in need of salvation. The world could only be saved by a miracle from God; this was the belief of all men on earth. And when God's miracle is wrought, it must not be doubted but venerated, and healing sought from it, and salvation.

How did Joseph react to the knowledge of the Virgin Mary's



pregnancy? *And Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.* He acted, we see, in obedience to God's law. He was obedient to God's will insofar as it had, up till then, been revealed to the Israelites. He also acted in humility before God. *Justify not thyself,* warns wise Solomon (Sir 7:5). That is: do not force too much justice on those who sin, but feel your own weakness and your own sins, and strive with mercy to lighten justice towards sinners.

Imbued with this Spirit, Joseph did not consider giving the Virgin Mary over to justice for the suspected sin: *and not willing to make her a public example (he) was minded to put her away privily.* This plan of his shows us what an exemplary man Joseph was, exemplary in justice and in

mercy, such a one as the Spirit of the old Law was able to instruct. With him, all was as simple and clear as it could be in the soul of a God-fearing man.

Righteous Joseph had only just found a suitable way out when heaven intervened in his plan with an unexpected command: *But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."* The angel of God, who had earlier proclaimed to the most pure Virgin the coming into the world of the God-Man, now comes to clear the way before Him and level it out beneath His feet. Joseph's doubt was a hindrance on His way—a very great and dangerous hindrance that must be removed. In order to show how easy it is for the heavenly powers to do things that are very difficult for men, the angel did not appear to Joseph in a vision, but in a dream. With these

words to Joseph the son of David, the angel wanted both to reward him and to warn him. As a descendant of King David, you should rejoice at this divine mystery more than other men, and you should also understand better than others.

But how is it that the angel refers to the Virgin as his wife: *Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife?* In the same way that the Lord said from the Cross to His mother: *Woman, behold thy son!* and to His disciple: *Behold thy mother!* (Jn 19:26-27). Indeed, heaven is sparing with words, and says nothing superfluous. If it had not been necessary to say this, why did the angel say it? If this calling Mary the wife of Joseph is a stumbling block to some unbelievers, it is a defense of purity against the impure powers. For God's words are not listened to only by men, but by all worlds, both good and evil. He who wishes to penetrate to the heart of all God's mysteries, the same must have God's view of all things, visible and invisible.

*That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.* This is God's act, and not man's. Don't look to nature, or be fearful of the law. This is the action of Him who is greater than nature and stronger than the law, without Whom nature would have no life, nor the law force.

From this that the angel announced to Joseph, it is clear that the Virgin Mary had told him nothing of her earlier encounter with the great archangel, as it is clear that now, when Joseph intended to put her away, she did not justify herself in any way. The angel's message, as all the heavenly mysteries that were gradually revealed to her, she kept, and pondered in her heart (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51). In her faith in God and obedience to Him, she shrank from no humiliation at the hands of men. *If my sufferings are pleasing to God, why should I not endure them?*, said some of the Christian martyrs later. Living in constant prayer and pondering on God, the Most Pure was also able to say: *If my humiliation is pleasing to God, why should I not endure it? Only let me be righteous before God, who knows the heart, and the world can do what it likes with me.* She knew this: that the world could do nothing to her unless God allowed it. What gentle humility before the living God this is, and what wonderful devotion to His will! And further—what a heroic spirit is seen in this delicate maiden: *The secret of the Lord is among them that fear Him.* (Pss 24/25:13). While sinners, in our day as in all days, bring even false witnesses to testify for them, the Virgin Mary, who had no man to testify for her, but God almighty, did not justify herself; she was not disturbed, but remained silent—and waited for God, in His good time, to justify her. And God hastened to justify His chosen one.

This same angel who had revealed to her the great mystery of her conceiving, made haste to speak now in place of the silent Virgin. Explaining, then, to Joseph that which had already come to pass, the angel of God went further, and explained to him that which was to be: *And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for he shall save His people from their sins.* Chrysostom says: *He does not say: "she will bear you a son," but simply "will bear," because she does not bear for*

*him alone, but for the whole world.* The angel told Joseph to behave towards the Newborn as though he were His real father, and he therefore says: *"and thou shalt name Him Jesus.* "Jesus" means "Savior", and so the next sentence begins with "for", meaning: *thou shalt name Him "Savior", for He shall save His people from their sins.*

The Archangel is God's true messenger. He speaks that which he learns from God; he sees the truth in God. For him, nature with all its laws is as though it did not exist. He knows only the almighty power of the living God, as Adam once knew it. In saying: "He shall save His people from their sins", the Archangel foretold the greatest of Christ's acts. Christ was to come and save men, not from some external evil but from the greatest evil, from sin, that is the source of all the evil in the world. He is to save the tree of humanity, not from a host of caterpillars that descends on it one year, but from the worm at its roots, from which the whole tree withers. He comes, not to save man from men, or people from peoples, but to save all men and all peoples from Satan, the sower and lord of sin. He comes, not like the Maccabee brothers, or Barabbas or Bar-Kohba, to stir up rebellion against the Romans, who had descended like a host of caterpillars on the Israelite people to devastate them, but like an immortal and universal doctor, before whose coming the Israelites and the Romans, the Greeks and the Egyptians, and all the peoples on earth, sick and more than sick, were fading away from one and the same virus - from sin. Christ was later perfectly to fulfil the archangel's prediction. "Thy sins are forgiven" was His victorious pronouncement throughout the whole of His earthly ministry among men. These words contained both the diagnosis of the sickness and the medicine. Sin: the diagnosis of the sickness; the forgiveness of sins: the medicine. And Joseph was the first of mortal men in the New Creation to be made worthy to know the real purpose of the Messiah's coming, and the true nature of His ministry.

That which the Archangel has told Joseph up to now is enough for the latter, in obedience to this new and direct command from God, to break off his thoughts and also his plan to put Mary away. Heaven commands—Joseph obeys. But it is not heaven's usual way to give commands to men without an appeal to their understanding and free response. It was, from the beginning, God's will that man act as a free being. In freedom, in man's free decision, rests all the beauty of man's being. Without freedom, man would only be an artificial, mechanical thing of God's making, held and activated by God solely by His will and power. There are plenty of such things made by God in nature, but He destined a special place for man, giving him freedom to decide for God or against Him, for life or for death. A position full of honor, and at the same time full of danger. The command that God gives to Adam is not, therefore, just a simple one: *Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it,* and God immediately adds: *or in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.* (Gen 2:16-17). In this last sentence, God

gives man a reason for his understanding, and a motive for his will, not to eat of the forbidden tree—for *in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*. The angel acts in the same way now with Joseph. Having given this command to take and not put her away, and having explained that the fruit of her virgin womb was of the Holy Spirit, the Archangel reminds Joseph of the clear prophecy by the great prophet: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel*. (Isa 7:14), and Matthew adds this further clarification: *which being interpreted is "God with us."*

That which has already been said: *And thou shalt call His name Jesus*, does not stand in opposition to what is said here: *and shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted is: "God with us."* In the first case, Joseph is told to give Him the name Jesus (Savior), and in the second case, it is stated that the young child shall be called, by peoples and nations, Emmanuel (God with us). The one name and the other, each in its way, gives profound expression to the reason for Christ's coming into the world and His ministry within it. He will come to forgive sins, to have mercy on men and save them from sin, and so will be called the Savior—Jesus. "*Who can forgive sins but God only?*" (Mk 2:7). No-one in the world: no-one either in heaven or on earth has the right to forgive sins and save from sin but God Himself, for sin is the worm at the heart of this world's sickness. No-one knows the abysmal horror of sin as God, who is sinless; and no-one can dig out the worm of sin but God. So, as Jesus forgave sin and thus made men whole, He is God among men. If one were to place the names in order of causality, the name "Emmanuel" would come before the name "Jesus." For the Newborn to be able to carry out the work of salvation, He had to be Emmanuel—to come as God among us. But, whichever way round, they have the same meaning: Emmanuel is the Savior, and the Savior is Emmanuel. In any case, one thing is clearer than anything else in the world, and that is that there is no salvation in this world if God does not come into it, and that there is neither healing nor salvation for us men if God is not with us, not as some idea or lovely dream, but with us as we are—with a soul as we have, a body as we have, in poverty and suffering as we are and finally, in that in which we are most different from God—in death as we are.

Therefore, every faith that teaches that God did not come in the flesh, and that He cannot come in the flesh, is false, as it presents God as both weak and uncaring: it presents Him as a stepmother, and not as a mother. It presents Him as weak, because it always keeps Him back from the greatest battle—the battle with Satan, sin and death. Satan must be bound; the first growth of sin must be uprooted from the human soul; the snake's tongue of death must be crushed—a labor must be undertaken that is greater and harder than that of Atlas in bearing the world on his shoulders. Our God fought this battle, and did so victoriously. Men of other faiths fear, even in their thoughts, to allow their gods such a battle, in which their opponents might be victorious. What sort of a mother

would it be who would not bend down to the earth out of love for her child, to comfort it, rock it and croon over it? And how much the more if the child were in danger of fire or wild beasts? O Lord, forgive us such questions! How couldst Thou be the compassionate Creator of the world and not have come down in Thy mercy among us? How couldst Thou, only from a misty and painless distance, have looked on our wretchedness and placed no cool finger on us in the flames nor moved into the den where we are attacked by wild beasts? In truth, Thou hast come down among us, even lower than any sort of earthly love demands. Thou wast born in the flesh, to live and save those in the flesh; Thou didst drink of the cup of all Thy creatures' suffering, sharing with none this cup of bitter communion, but Thyself draining it. Thou art therefore our Savior, for Thou hast been God among us: Thou hast been God among us because Thou wast able to be our Savior. Glory to Thee, o Jesus our Emmanuel!

To go back to Joseph: he, with fear and trembling, saw more and more clearly that a tapestry was being woven around him, more penetrating than the sun's light and more all-embracing than the air; a tapestry of which the canvas is the Almighty, and the angels and all creation the silken strands. It fell to his lot to serve as God's instrument in the center of the tapestry of the New Creation. While a man is unaware that God acts through him, he is weak and feeble, hesitant and cautious. But when a man senses that God has taken him into His hands, as a blacksmith takes iron to make a shoe, he feels at the same time both strong and humble, decisive in his actions and upheld by his God.

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel had commanded him, and took the Virgin Mary to himself again, *and knew her not until she had brought forth her Firstborn Son, and he called His name Jesus*. When we read the Gospels, we must enter into the Evangelist's mind, and not project our mind into the Gospel. The Evangelist himself marvels as he speaks of the wonder of the Savior's birth. His main task is to show that this birth came about in a wondrous manner. This that the Evangelist Matthew emphasizes is already the fourth proof of this. **Firstly**, he says that the Virgin Mary was only betrothed to Joseph; **secondly**, that she found herself *with child of the Holy Ghost*; **thirdly**, that the angel, in a dream, showed that her pregnancy was wondrous and supernatural and, **fourthly**, we see here that the angel now repeats this same thought with the words that Joseph *knew her not until she had brought forth her Firstborn Son*. It is, therefore, as clear as day that the Evangelist has no thought of saying that, after this birth, Joseph had carnal relations with Mary. That which was not so until she had brought forth her Son was not so afterwards, when she had borne Him. If we say of someone that, during the celebration of the Liturgy in church, he paid no attention to the priest's words, we do not mean that, once the service was over, he became attentive to them. Or, when we say that a shepherd sings while the sheep graze, we do not think that he stops singing when the sheep stop grazing. St. Theophylact

says: *As it was said at the time of the Flood, that the raven did not return to the Ark while the earth had not dried out, it naturally did not return to it afterwards, or as Christ said: "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," does that mean that He will not be afterwards.* The word "firstborn" therefore applies exclusively to the Lord Jesus (Pss 88/89:28; cf. 2 Sam 7:12-16; Heb 1:5-6; Rom 8:29), who is the first among all kings and *the firstborn among many brethren* (Rom 8:29), which means: among all saved and adopted men. If the word "firstborn" were to be written with a capital letter, as a special title, there would be no doubt of its meaning. Or, if a comma were placed before the word "firstborn, there would be no doubt or confusion. This is how it must be read: as though "Firstborn" were a title, with a comma before it: *and she brought forth her Son, the Firstborn.* The Lord Jesus is the Firstborn as the Creator of the New Kingdom, as the New Adam.

It is said of St. Ammon (Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>) that he spent eighteen years in wedlock without having physical relations with his wife. The holy martyr Anastasia (Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup>) also spent a number of years married to Publius, a Roman senator, without consummating the marriage. We quote here only two instances among thousands of others. By her most pure virginity, before, during and after giving birth, the Virgin Mary has turned thousands of girls and young men to a life of virginity throughout the Church's history. Looking to her virginity, many married women have broken off their marriage and devoted themselves to virginal purity. Looking at her, many leading a deeply immoral life have turned from their immorality, cleansing their mired souls with tears and prayer. How, then, could it be imagined that the most pure Virgin, the pillar and inspiration of Christian purity and virginity through the ages, was on a lower level of virginity than that of Anastasia, Thecla, Barbara, Katharine, Paraskeve and all the rest, without number? Or, how would it be possible to imagine that she who bore in the flesh her passionless Lord could ever have known the shadow of physical passion? She who carried and gave birth to God *was a virgin, not only in the flesh but in the spirit*, as St. Ambrose says. And Chrysostom compares the Holy Spirit with a bee, saying: *As a bee will not enter a stinking vessel, so the Holy Spirit will not enter into an impure soul.*

Let us stop speaking about this, about which we should speak less and marvel more. There where obedience and humility towards God have their abode, there is purity. The Lord heals His obedient and humble servants of every earthly passion and lust. Let us give ourselves over to the cleansing of our consciences, our souls, our hearts and our minds, that we may be made worthy of the blessed power of the Holy Spirit; that the earth may once more stop sowing its seed in our inner man, so that the Holy Spirit may begin in us new life and a new man, like to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory and praise, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity consubstantial and undivided, now and forever, through all time and all eternity. Amen.

## A REFLECTION ON HIS NATIVITY...

By Fr. Dcn. Charles Joiner, December 2014.

*The Lord of David and Son of David hid His glory in swaddling clothes. His swaddling clothes gave a robe of glory to human beings.*

[St. Ephraim the Syrian]

He came in a most humble way delivered in a stable and wrapped in simple clothing. Yet as St. Ephraim says, this simple beginning gave to all mankind robe of glory. What is this robe of glory?

When we think of this robe of glory that He gave us we must first think back to His nature and the way He was brought into the world. He came in humility and left this world in humility. His robe was not made of golden threads. His birth and subsequent life had nothing to do with material well being. He lived with a pure heart, one that glorified God, one that shone for all to see.

We must begin our reflection on this day with total humility. We must admit our weaknesses, our ways that deviate from what He taught and demonstrated to us. We must acknowledge our pride and our desire to hide our dirty inner clothing with fancy outer clothing. We must admit that we do not have this robe of glory that He brought for all humankind. We must make ourselves feel His humility.

With this reflection we must also remember the unending and limitless love He has for all His children. Acknowledging His love for us we can be joyful that we are held in His loving and merciful arms. We can be joyful that we are so important to God and in our knowledge that He will do anything to guide us towards His perfection. He holds for us a robe of glory.

Let us rejoice in this glory that awaits us. Let us recognize Jesus for Who He really is, God Incarnate. Let us lay aside all our doubts about God and His Church. Let us for a short moment try on that robe of glory. Let us experience His peace and love of all humankind. Joy to the world, the Lord has come! Glorify Him. Follow Him.

† † †

*This Christmas night bestowed peace on the whole world; let no one threaten. This is the night of the Most Gentle One; let no one be cruel. This is the night of the Humble One; let no one be proud.*

*Now is the day of joy; let us not revenge. Now is the day of Good Will; let us not be mean. In this Day of Peace; let us not be conquered by anger.*

*Today the Bountiful impoverished Himself for our sake; so, rich one, invite the poor to your table. Today we receive a Gift for which we did not ask; let us give alms to those who implore and beg us. This present Day cast open the heavenly doors to our prayers; let us open our door to those who ask our forgiveness.*

*Today the Divine Being took upon Himself the seal of our humanity, in order for humanity to be decorated by the Seal of Divinity.*

[St. Isaac the Syrian]

## DEVOTION TO PRAYER

By Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra, from "The Church at Prayer: The Mystical Liturgy of the Heart," Holy Convent of the Annunciation, Ormylia, Greece (2005), pp. 54-63.

If we wish to devote ourselves to the Jesus Prayer, we must also recognize that we have a problem. We are imprisoned within the confines of our worries and concerns. We are always in a hurry. We get tired. We become disillusioned. We live with stress, we are troubled by disturbing thoughts, by our passions, by inner storms. In order to sleep, we need to be on the point of exhaustion; and in order to be happy, we have to listen to music, or find some other amusement. This is no life at all! It tires us out, and doesn't allow us to pray as much and in the way that we want.

This is why the Fathers assure us that the words of God *refresh and strengthen the soul, as wine strengthens the body* (Ephraim the Syrian, cited in Paul the Monk, Evergetinos, vol. 2). Know that the word of God is to be found both in Scripture and in the Holy Fathers. We must diligently study both; and among the latter, the ascetic Fathers particularly. We must likewise always be attentive to our work, not squandering our strength needlessly, but expending it responsibly on the duties which are before us. In this way our life will become a daily spiritual exercise, and, coupled with spiritual study, will smooth the ground of the soul, rendering it capable of rising upwards.

In order to pray, you need to cultivate one important quality. Just as we look after the health of our body, so too should we attend to the health of the soul. It is necessary that we should be joyful. When we become accustomed to pray, the joy of Christ is granted to us, along with much else besides. If you're sad when you're praying, if you're depressed, then something inside you isn't right. You should look to it, give it your attention, because a person's character plays an important role in prayer.

Listen to what fine things were said about St. Savvas of Vato-paidi, who underwent the greatest sufferings: *He was most joyful in conversation, and in appearance exceedingly gentle and charming.* (Philotheos Kokkinos, "Life of St. Savvas the Younger"). In his dealings with others, he always had a bright smile, the sweetest face, and the whole of him was filled with grace. How much more so in his dealings with God, when, during prayer, he became like a bright sun!

Another ascetic Father, St. Neilos, tells us *that prayer is a matter of joy and thanksgiving.* Do you want to know if your prayer is true? Take note of this: does exultation spring from your heart, does it move you to thanksgiving? For *when you are at prayer, and it produces a joy beyond all else, then you have truly found prayer.* (Philokalia, "On Prayer 15").

Prayer, then, because it is communion with God, brings joy. Of course, we need to struggle against sin, and against our passions. But this should not discourage us, since we have surrendered our life to Jesus Christ. However, struggle is necessary if our

life is to be blessed. If we wish to succeed at prayer, we should not harbor any bitterness against anyone, we should not get mixed up in another person's life, create stress for them, or hurt anyone's feelings or upset them. Neither should we be upset by anyone else. All our social interactions should be natural and simple. We should feel that all people are one and the same, considering ourselves to be *one self with all*, without, of course, denying our beliefs or departing from our proper conduct. Then prayer is easy. It is enough for us to let God work in us, just as the farmer sows the seed and waits for the gentle rain.

We will therefore continue to struggle. We will call to mind the Name of Jesus, some with the lips, others with the mind, still others with the mind in the heart, and others as divine grace grants them when it visits them, when their spirit flashes like lightning, and, crying out, they encounter God. If we do all these things, God will drop the dew of Hermon into our soul and will make us joyful and true.

It is worth devoting much time, indeed as much time as we can, to putting into practice the patristic saying: *compel yourself to pray much* (Abba Isaiah, "Discourse 4.1), leaving everything else to the Lord. And if we can say only one prayer, even this has value. Moreover, St. Isaac the Syrian says, *consider every prayer which you utter in the night to be of greater worth than, all the activity of the day.* ("Ascetical Homily 64"). And thus our one, small prayer is even more precious when it is offered during the night.

Leave everything to God. Get on with your work and let your mind be on prayer! And choose a good guide, who can lead you by the hand to Christ. We must, however, stress that with respect to the spiritual life, all things are done for us by the grace of God, and thus we should be at peace.

The Fathers tell us that the invocation of the Name of Jesus, the practice of the prayer of the heart, is like a flask of myrrh. You open it, you pour some out, and the place is filled with fragrance. When you cry out: *Lord Jesus Christ*, the fragrance of the Holy Spirit is given off, and you receive a *pledge of the divine Spirit.* This is because the *Holy Spirit, suffering together with us, descends, and is moved to the desire for spiritual prayer.* (Philokalia, "On Prayer 63"). Moreover, the Spirit prays instead of us, if we are able forget about ourselves. Then he takes on our failings, our impurities, and the whole poverty of our existence. When we pray, we become temples of God, and priestly ministers of a great mystery. In the beautiful words of one Church Father, *"take a censer and offer incense, because Christ is here in your heart, from which the words "Lord Jesus Christ" rise like the sun.* Elsewhere he says that *when we hear the sound of the censer, let us remember that we are a temple, and let us feel in our minds that we are offering incense to Christ, who is within us, and thus let us venerate the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit.* (St. Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Life of Moses").

Just think: within us is the kingdom of God, his dwelling place, where we "confine that which has no body within a

body”, so that the “worship of heavenly things” takes place within our hearts”. We acquire God, and God is inseparably bound up with all the saints, for they, like us, have all been nourished on the same milk, having been fed at the breast of the Holy Spirit. Thus the saints are our brothers and friends. They wait for us, love us, and secure our blessedness, as the Prophet Isaiah says: “Blessed is he who has relatives and friends in Jerusalem” (Isa 31.9). We acquire as our friends and relatives all the saints of Christ, who live above, in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Do you remember the words of Christ? *There are some standing here, who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come with power.* (Mk 9:1). This is applicable to us, too. We live, that is, we experience “in power,” the kingdom of God, when we say the Prayer of Jesus. And when we do, the Spirit makes us worthy to know God. And the saints attain to Christ, about whom some think that no one sees, and no one knows. And yet!... through prayer we understand that which is beyond understanding, namely, the *incomprehensible and transcendently radiant content of our God* (St. Dionysios the Areopagite, “On the Divine Names”), because the grace of the Spirit wells up from every fount, initiating us into the unspeakable beauty of God.

And if we don’t reach as far as that, the Prayer of the Heart will nevertheless bring us abundant blessings, consolation, pleasure, forgiveness, and salvation, to each as it is best for him. This is what God gives.

And if we have not enjoyed such fruits, it does not mean that others have not tasted of them. The saints many times beheld the glimmerings of the Godhead, for God revealed self to them as light! God is hidden. No one sees him. This is why he is said to be within a *thick cloud*, or *shrouded in darkness*. (Exod 19.9). God is light, but to us he is invisible. Even so, to the extent that God has revealed himself, many saints have seen God, who filled them with his own, holy light.

This is clear from the Life of St. Savvas (“Life of St. Savvas”), whom we mentioned a moment ago. He was filled with divine longing. And while he sat in silence, his heart seeking God, suddenly God appeared to him, and said *I am here!* Look at me, it is I! How grand and godlike! And how did God appear to him? In what manner? In what form? How? As *light flowing from heaven in abundance*. Light, we are told, enveloped everything. It entered into him, first dominating his mind, afterwards his senses, and then covered all the members of his body.

After that, the saint was so radiant, so fragrant, that people flocked in the thousands to see him, to imbibe the fragrance,

to partake of it, and they painted his image on planks—on *planks and boards*, it says—while he was still alive. They treated him and honored him as a saint, because they saw the sanctity portrayed on his face.

And the *Life* goes on: *Take care, because these are the mysteries of the Lord. The Godhead appears in all its beauty, in all its glory, in all its unspeakable delight, and its light transforms the man upon whom it is poured forth.* Such a man can see God, and all those things beyond the heavens which eye has not seen.

After this, the saint, *wounded by the sweet arrow of the Lord*, speaks to the light: *Where do you dwell, and upon whom do you look? Show me your glory, so that I may know you (Ex 33.13). I want to see you as you are.* And then he heard a voice: *But you have been completely divinized by partaking in due measure of the Godhead. There is no need for me to tell you where I dwell—I who am God—for you yourself have become god, receiving my light from me.*

How many times, my dear friends, have the saints seen this light, even if we have never seen it ourselves? But it is enough that you say the Prayer, and abide with Christ. These are the fruits of the Prayer of the Holy Mountain.

Finally, let us see how prayer is lived and experienced on the Holy Mountain.

There is an ascetic on the Holy Mountain—I won’t give you his name; he is still living—who is given to saying: “Ach! Twenty-four hours a day aren’t enough for me to pray!” Do you sense what sort of prayer this man practices? Do you realize how far above the earth he is? Can you imagine what sweetness he feels as

he turns his eyes and his heart increasingly toward God?

Yes, they pray on the Holy Mountain, in the monasteries and outside the monasteries. Great figures have emerged in recent years, such as Daniel Katounakiotes (+1929); Kallinikos the Hesychast (+1930), and so many others. One of our own monks, blessed Old Arsenios, who fell asleep a few years ago, didn’t even want to sleep, but rigged himself up by a rope, and leaned on a piece of wood, in order to pray without ceasing.

Many monks have done this. When he prayed and made prostrations, he would hang his head on the floor. He said: “I’m a sinner and God won’t hear my prayer, but at least let him hear the hanging of my head. My sin is so great that prayer doesn’t dare come out of my mouth!” And yet he had such grace! He prayed constantly. You should have seen his face. And if you could have seen how he fell asleep, you would have said, “truly, the death of a righteous man is blessed.”





More recently there was another ascetic. He often needed hours to celebrate the liturgy, because he was visited by the saints, who celebrated with him. Sometimes he took so long that he sent his disciples away, so that he could be alone, and they wouldn't be startled. And when his ecstasy ended, he would open the door and say, "let's resume the Liturgy..."

Another monk was praying at night, during the office, when a remarkable thing happened. His mind left his body and flew out over the sea, it went to the mountains and the valleys, looked at the trees, the flowers, the fish of the sea, and saw and heard that everything in creation glorifies God. From that day forward he was unable to stand at all, and from his darting eyes, tears never ceased to flow. He saw, and said, that creation, even though it lacks a soul, pours out tearful praises to God, "whereas I, who have a soul, am lost in sin."

Hesychasts and ascetics, in unbroken succession, have never been absent from the Holy Mountain, down to the present day and hour. Let us call to mind St. Silouan (+1938), whose entire life was a constantly flourishing prayer. More recently, Elder Joseph Spelaiotes (the Hesychast, +1959) devoted his life to prayer, which he absorbed deeply. He made it his strength, and experienced it as the sweetness of Paradise. He is survived by many spiritual children and grandchildren.

From the Holy Mountain, the Prayer of Jesus has been communicated to the world. It was from here that St. Paisius Velitchkovski (+1794) gave the Prayer to the Slavs. Father Sophronios, also an Athonite, has done the same thing in Europe.

Athos also influenced St. Athanasios of Meteora, as well as St. Dionysios of Olympus, and they inspired many others, who cannot be numbered. Symeon Monochiton, Iakovos the Elder, St. Theonas, the Kollyvades ... the Prayer has hastened into the entire world. And so there are Holy Mountains in Russia! And in Serbia there are Holy Mountains! Wherever you go. In Europe there are now monasteries populated by Athonites, and they do nothing else but disseminate the Jesus Prayer, as much as they are able.

What would our life be like, dear friends, without the Prayer of Jesus? And what would the world be without it? A heart which does not have this prayer seems to me to be like a plastic bag—now you put something into it, but it will soon tear and you'll throw it away. That which gives meaning to our life, to our existence, is prayer, because it is prayer which gives us God. They say that life will come to an end when men cease to pray. But is it possible for them ever to stop praying? No. Because there will always be those who love the Lord. And as long as such souls exist, the world will not be lost. Unceasing prayer is the hidden life of the world. And thus the world will not perish, but will be renewed, and just as it now *groans in travail* because of the corruption of nature (cf. Rom 8.22), so too, when *the new earth and the new heaven* appear (2 Pet 3:13), it will rejoice in the eternal joy and glory of the human race, made radiant in the outpouring of divine light.

Let us pray. Let us mystically keep our censers burning, because, as we said, when we keep the Name of Jesus on our lips or in our heart, we become tabernacles of God, we become Godhearers.

Solomon says somewhere that God chose for his dwelling place the sun, the created light—but God, who is uncreated light—left it! It was not possible even for a vast and dazzling star to be the dwelling place of the great God. And so God left the sun, and made the "dark cloud" his dwelling place, clothing himself in darkness and invisibility. Now, if we cannot look at the sun, how would we look at Christ, full of light, the sun of life, who transcends all creation? And so he hides himself in invisibility, so that we can be free, and believe, and choose God. When Solomon set about building his temple, he gathered together materials of gold, silver, emeralds, and whatever else was most precious, expending more wealth than any one since in order to make a house for God. When he was finished, however, he said that he had prepared another house for God "*to dwell in anew*" (1 Kgs 8:53). That new house is the Church.

My dear friends, we too have a house for the Lord to dwell in: our heart. Do you remember what the Lord said when he ascended into heaven? *I will be with you always*. (Mt 28:20). And this is why, during the last living act of the Liturgy, the elevation of the sacred Chalice, the priest says: *Forever, now and always, and unto the ages of ages*. What does that mean? It is as if Christ is saying: I am going away. I am entering into My dark cloud, I am returning to My invisibility, and you will lose sight of Me. But remember that I am always before you, I am always within you. I will remain here unseen, unobserved, in the innermost parts of the sanctuary, to be consumed by the priest, so that you can consume Me as well, whenever you want.

And so, my dear brothers, make ready your spiritual censers, and procure fragrances for your souls, because God has chosen neither the sun, nor the temple of Solomon, which he permitted to be destroyed. Why? Because He wanted His house to be, through prayer, the heart of each of us.



The Christian, approaching God with a prayer to Him, or to His most pure Mother, or to the angels and saints, in order to insure the success of his prayer, ought to try to resemble as far as possible the Lord Himself, or His most-pure Mother, or the angels and saints. In this lies the secret of drawing near to God, and of His speedily hearing our prayers.

**St. John of Kronstadt**

## ARE SINS COMMITTED AFTER BAPTISM FORGIVEN?

By St. John Damascene, from "The Precious Pearl: The Lives of Saints Barlaam and Ioasaph," *Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, MA (1997), pp. 137-143.*

Ioasaph said to the elder, "Well then, as the strictness of these doctrines demands such chaste conversation, if after baptism I chance to fail in one or two of these commandments, shall I therefore utterly miss the goal and shall all my hope be in vain?"

Barlaam answered, "Deem not so. God, the Word, made man for the salvation of our race, aware of the exceeding frailty and misery of our nature, has not even here suffered our sickness to be without remedy. But, like a skillful leech, he has mixed for our unsteady and sin-loving heart the potion of repentance, prescribing this for the remission of sins. For after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, and have been sanctified by water and the Spirit, and cleansed without effort from all sin and all defilement, if we should chance to fall into any transgression, there is, it is true, no second regeneration made within us by the spirit through baptism in the water of the font, and wholly recreating us (that gift is given once for all): but by means of painful repentance, hot tears, toils and sweats, there is a purifying and pardoning of our offenses through the tender mercy of our God. For the fount of tears is also called baptism, according to the grace of the Master; but it needs labor and time; and many has it saved after many a fall; because there is no sin too great for the clemency of God, if we are quick to repent and purge the shame of our offenses, and death does not overtake us and we do not depart from this life still defiled; **for in the grave there is no confession nor repentance.** But as long as we are among the living, while the foundation of our Orthodox Faith continues un-shattered, even if somewhat of the outer roof-work or inner building be disabled, it is allowed to renew by repentance the part rotted by sins. It is impossible to count the multitude of the mercies of God, or measure the greatness of his compassion: whereas sins and offenses of whatever kind are subject to measure and may be numbered. So **our offenses, being subject to measure and number, cannot overcome the**



immense and unmeasurable compassion and innumerable mercies of God.

immense and unmeasurable compassion and innumerable mercies of God.

"Therefore we are commanded not to despair for our trespasses but to acknowledge the goodness of God and condemn the sins whereof forgiveness is offered us by reason of the loving-kindness of Christ who for our sins shed his precious blood. In many places of Scripture we are taught the power of repentance, and especially by the precepts and parables of our Lord Jesus Christ. For it says, *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Moreover, he set before us, in a parable, a certain son that had received his father's substance and taken his journey into a far country and there spent all in riotous living. Then, when there arose a famine in that land, he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that land of iniquity<sup>[1]</sup>, who sent him into his fields to feed swine, thus does he designate the most coarse and loathsome sin. When, after much labor, he had come to the

utmost misery, and might not even fill his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, at last he came to perceive his shameful plight, and, bemoaning himself, said, *How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you and am no more worthy to be called your son: make me as one*

*of your hired servants."* And he arose and came to his father. But, when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him tenderly, and restoring him to his former rank, made a feast of joy because his son was found again and killed the fatted calf. Lo, this parable, that Jesus spoke to us, concerns such as turn again from sin and fall at his feet in repentance.

"Again, he represents a certain good shepherd that had a hundred sheep, and when one was lost left the ninety-nine and went forth to seek that which had gone astray until he found it: and he laid it on his shoulders and folded it with those that had not gone astray and called together his friends and neighbors to a banquet because it was found. *Likewise, says the Savior, joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents more than over ninety-nine just persons which need no repentance.*

“And, in sooth, even the chief of the disciples Peter, the Rock of the Faith, in the very season of the Savior’s Passion, failing for a little while in his stewardship, that he might understand the worthlessness and misery of human frailty, fell under the guilt of denial. Then he straightaway remembered the Lord’s words and went out and wept bitterly, and with those hot tears made good his defeat and transferred the victory to his own side. Like a skillful man of war, though fallen, he was not undone nor did he despair, but, springing to his feet, he brought up as a reserve bitter tears from the agony of his soul; and straight away when the enemy saw that sight, like a man whose eyes are scorched with a fierce flame, he leaped off and fled afar, howling horribly. So the chief became chief again, as he had before been chosen teacher of the whole world, being now become its pattern of penitence. And after his holy resurrection Christ made good this three-fold denial with the three-fold question, *Peter, do you love me?* the Apostle answering, *Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*

“So from all these and many other examples beyond count we learn the virtue of tears and repentance. Only the manner of it must be noted—it must arise from a heart that abominates sin and weeps, as says the prophet David, *I am weary of my groaning: every night will I wash my bed and water my couch with my tears.* Again the cleansing of sins will be wrought by the blood of Christ<sup>[2]</sup>, in the greatness of his compassion and the multitude of the mercies of that God who says, *Though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white as snow,* and so forth.

“Thus therefore it is, and thus we believe. But after receiving the knowledge of the truth and winning regeneration and adoption as sons, and tasting of the divine mysteries, we must strive hard to keep our feet for fear we fall. For to fall becomes not the athlete, since many have fallen and been unable to rise. Some, opening a door to sinful lusts, and clinging obstinately to them, have no more had strength to hasten back to repentance; and others, being untimely snatched by death, and having not made speed enough to wash them from the pollution of their sin, have been damned. And for this cause it is hazardous to fall into any kind of sinful affection whatsoever. But if any man fall, he must at once leap up and stand again to fight the good fight: and, as often as there comes a fall, so often must there at once ensue this rising and standing, to the end. *For, Turn you to me and I will turn to you,* says the Lord God. (Zech 1:3).

† † †

[1]: The land to which the prodigal son went is called “The land of Iniquity.” It is a land that has various and countless ways to sin at any moment of time. Remember, dear reader, the vision of our father among the saints, St. Anthony, in which the whole world was filled with traps to catch and

destroy man. And who was saved? The one who was very humble; this was the answer that was given to the Saint. And it is true! Without this virtue the devil triumphs over proud souls.

[2]: The expiatory sacrifice of Christ is the source of remission of sins. *The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.* (1 Jn 1:7) This is one of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. Without the blood of Christ, 20, 30, 50, even a thousand years of strict ascetic living will not erase the least spot of sin. The author of this ascetic work feels this very deeply, that is why he repeatedly speaks about the remission of sin by the blood of the Lord. But emphasis on this truth by the Orthodox preacher does not mean acceptance of the Protestant belief that good works are unnecessary, because besides the above truth Orthodox teaching does not stop emphasizing that other spiritual truth that he who has faith and is honestly repentant is obligated to prove his faith by producing fruit worthy of his repentance in his everyday life in the world. Faith and good works are joined together unbreakably as the root and the fruit of a bountiful tree.



Fasting is a medicine; but a medicine, though it be never so profitable, becomes frequently useless owing to the unskillfulness of him who employs it. For it is necessary to know, moreover, the time when it should be applied, and the requisite quantity of it; and the nature of the country, and the season of the year; and the corresponding diet; as well as various other particulars; any of which, if one overlooks, he will mar all the rest that have been named. Now if, when the body needs healing, such exactness is required on our part, much more ought we, when our care is about the soul, and we seek to heal the distempers of the mind, to look, and to search into every particular with the utmost accuracy.

**St. John Chrysostom**

Hence, the Shepherds of the Church must not speak only about the Antichrist and his forerunners, but first and foremost they must help Christians to live in such a way that the Grace of Baptism and Chrismation is activated, by the keeping of Christ’s commandments and doctrines, by experiencing these in one’s life in an Orthodox manner, by repentance, and by inner noetic prayer of the heart; for in this way they will be able to distinguish between the energies of Christ and the energies of the Antichrist.

**Metropolitan Hierotheos of Navpaktos**

## THE 14,000 HOLY INNOCENTS AND AMERICA TODAY

By Fr. Demetrios Carrellas, Dec. 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

*A woman who destroys the fruit of her womb commits a great sin. She is destroying life itself, for God alone is the Giver of life and He makes possible the conception of a human being in the womb. He gives life and a woman destroys it. Great repentance is necessary, from the depths of her soul. She must change and never commit this sin again. Otherwise, she will be condemned as a murderess. No creature on earth kills its young—only man, the rational being. This is a great sin, and if a woman does not repent from the depth of her soul, she will be condemned as a murderess. Will she pass through the toll-houses? There is no sin that cannot be forgiven but the sin of unrepentance. True and sincere repentance is required for such a sin, and it must never be repeated again.*

[St. Thaddeus of Vitovnica]

† † †

My beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus, On December 29<sup>th</sup>, our Holy Orthodox Church commemorates the 14,000 Holy Innocents, and many of their mothers, who were slaughtered by Herod's soldiers in one day. In the United States, because of a disgusting, satanic "law," we "**legally**" slaughter an average of over 3,300 pre-born—and occasionally born—babies every day; but we have been doing this ungodly infanticide for the past 42 years, 11 months and 29 days. Therefore, we have killed over 57 million more babies than Herod. [The 2017 updated number is over 60 million..., *Ed.*].

What has happened to our Nation, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ? How can we continue to ignore the silent screams of God's innocent ones, who are being brutally murdered at an average of one baby every 15 seconds? How can we waste time talking about "global warming" (recently renamed, "climate change"), when so many of our citizens—especially doctors, lawyers, judges, politicians, and not a few "clergy"—are preparing to spend eternity in the lake of fire, prepared for the devil and his demons? Why are we failing to realize that with the murder of every pre-born child, in addition to the demonic 'hit man' (the abortionist) and his/her assistants, there are a number of other souls that are committing spiritual suicide: the baby's parents, the family members and friends who urged the mother to have the abortion, the psychiatrist, psychologist, counselor and/or clergy who supported the decision to have the child offered as a living sacrifice upon the demonic altar of privacy, profit and choice. Do you not see how many souls "die" with every single abortion?

Our Most Sweet Lord Jesus is All-Merciful; and whenever a woman comes to Him with tears of repentance for having allowed herself to abort her child, whenever a doctor repents of his evil actions, whenever a politician comes to himself and

changes from being pro-choice to pro-life, such people can receive forgiveness and healing. For our God's love for each one of us is limitless, unconditional and never-ending. Orthodox Christians are blessed with the Sacrament of Holy Confession, during which God, through His priests, grants His forgiveness of this terrible sin to those who come in repentance.

However, as St. Paul reminds us in his Epistle to the Galatians: *Cease being led astray, God is not mocked; what a man soweth, that also shall he reap.* (Eph 6:7). And those who perform and/or support abortion are mocking God; and a Nation that legalizes this horrific infanticide is mocking God! As a Nation we have "sowed" the blood of 57 million innocent babies. What will we "reap" as a Nation? What will those unrepentant abortionists and supporters of abortion be reaping on that terrible Day?

As a priest of the Holy Orthodox Church, the Bride of Christ, I am compelled to make the following statements to all Orthodox Christians: If you are: an abortionist, one who assists in abortions, counsels women to have abortions; a woman who has had an abortion(s); a father who has either demanded his wife/girl friend to abort their child, or supported her decision to do so; a family member, or friends, who either approved of—or were indifferent to—a family member's/friend's decision to have an abortion; a politician who votes in favor of abortion; a lawyer or judge who has defended the ungodly "right to choose" abortion, then you need to beg God for tears of repentance, change your evil ways and seek God's forgiveness through the Sacrament of Holy Confession. And you should not receive Holy Communion until you repent and undergo a soul-healing penance after your confession. If you simply believe that abortion is a woman's "right," and/or consistently vote for people who support abortion, then I strongly urge you not to receive Holy Communion until you can repent of this immoral philosophy, and seek God's forgiveness through Holy Confession.

I know that you hear all kinds of pleasantly phrased statements in which the child in the womb is regarded as a woman's property, or is dehumanized—treated as a non-entity. They are all lies! They are all born from the "father of lies": the evil one. Here is the one FACT that all Christians need to believe and proclaim: Every abortion kills a human being who is created in the image of God! I was told several years ago that the great and powerful Roman Empire fell 50 years after legalizing abortion. In just 7 more years, the USA will reach the 50 year mark. Will history repeat itself? Will we daily bend the knee of our hearts before Jesus, and beg Him to intervene and deliver us from this demonic slaughter of His babies? Or will we continue to ignore the millions of silent screams that our Lord DOES hear. And how many more of those screams will it take before He replaces His mercy with His righteous judgment?

*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

## Ἡ Χριστουγεννιάτικη Ἀτμόσφαιρα Μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ Διηγήματα τοῦ κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρου Παπαδιαμάντη!

Δ. Πανταζής, ἄρθρο στὸ περιοδικὸ Φιλολογικὰ Περιθώρια.



**Τ**ὰ Χριστούγεννα δὲν ἐκφράζουν μόνον τὴ μεγάλη χαρὰ γιὰ τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Εἶναι συγχρόνως καὶ ἡ ἀτμόσφαιρα μιᾶς εὐτυχίας, ποὺ στὴν περίπτωση τῶν διηγημάτων τοῦ κορυφαίου συγγραφέα τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν γραμμάτων Ἀλέξανδρου Παπαδιαμάντη ἀποκτᾶ ὅλη τὴ συγκίνηση, ποὺ προκαλεῖ ἡ σκηνογραφία τῆς ἰδιαίτερης πατρίδας του, τῆς Σκιάθου, σὲ συνάρτηση καὶ μὲ τὸ μεγάλο γεγονός τῆς Γέννησης τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

«Στὸ Χριστό, στὸ Κάστρο» ἡ ἀτμόσφαιρα φορτίζεται ἀπ' τὴν ἀρχὴ μὲ τὰ λόγια τοῦ παπα-Φραγκοῦλη τὸ βράδυ τῆς 23<sup>ης</sup> Δεκεμβρίου:

– Τὸ Γιάννη τὸ Νυφιώτη καὶ τὸν Ἀργύρη τῆς Μυλωνοῦς τοὺς ἔκλεισε τὸ χιόνι ἀπάν' στὸ Κάστρο.

Ὅποτε μπλέκεται μίαν ὀλόκληρη περιπέτεια γιὰ τὴ διάσωσή τους, ποὺ συνοδεύεται ἀπὸ ἐπικίνδυνες προσπάθειες, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ἀστεϊσμούς ποὺ ἔλαβαν μέρος μεταξὺ τοῦ παπᾶ καὶ τοῦ ψάλτη. Καὶ ποὺ κατάφεραν τελικὰ νὰ φέρουν σὲ καλὸ τέλος τὸ μόχθο τους, ποὺ κατέληξε νὰ λειτουργήσουν στὸ ἐκκλησάκι τῆς Γέννησης τοῦ Χριστοῦ μέσα σὲ μιὰ ἀτμόσφαιρα ἀγωνίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ πίστεως μὲ τὴν ὑποβλητικὴ λειτουργία τῶν Χριστουγέννων.

Ἀνάλογη ἀτμόσφαιρα δημιουργεῖται στὸ «Ἀγνάντεμα», ποὺ ἀρχίζει μὲ μιὰ ἀξιόλογη περιγραφή: «Ἐπάνω στὸ βράχο τῆς ἐρήμου ἀκτῆς, ἀπὸ παλαιούς λησμονημένους χρόνους, εὕρισκετο κτισμένον τὸ ξωκλήσι τῆς Παναγίας τῆς Κατευοδώτρας. Ὅλο τὸ χειμῶνα παπᾶς δὲν ἤρχετο νὰ λειτουργήσῃ. Ὁ βοριάς μαίνεται καὶ βρυχᾶται ἀνὰ τὸ πέλαγος τὸ ἀπλωμένον μαυρογάλανον καὶ βαθύ, τὸ κύμα λισσᾶ καὶ ἀφρίζει ἐναντίον τοῦ βράχου. Καὶ ὁ βράχος ὑψώνει τὴν πλάτη του γίγας ἀκλόνητος, στοιχειδὸ ριζωμένον βαθιὰ στὴν γῆν,

καὶ τὸ ἐρημοκλήσι λευκὸν καὶ γλαρόν, ὡς φωλεὰ θαλασσαιτοῦ, στεφανώνει τὴν κορυφὴν του».

Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ καλλίτερα διηγήματα τοῦ Παπαδιαμάντη εἶναι ὁ «Ἀμερικάνος». Ξεκινᾶ μὲ τὴν περιγραφή τοῦ μαγαζιοῦ τοῦ Δημήτρη τοῦ Μπέρδε, ὅπου: «Ὁμοιάζε τὴν ἐσπέραν ἐκείνην μὲ βάρκαν κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον φουρτουνιασμένη, δευτερόπριμα πλέουσαν, πληττομένην ὑπὸ τῶν κυμάτων τὴν μίαν πλευράν, μὲ τὸ ὕδωρ εἰσπηδὸν ἀπὸ τὴ κουπαστὴ καὶ ραντίζον τοὺς δυστυχεῖς ἐπιβάτας· ὅπου ὁ κυβερνήτης τῆς καὶ ὁ ναύτης τοῦ φαίνονται περιφρόντιδες, δίδοντες καὶ λαμβάνοντες προστάγματα εἰς ἀκατάληπτον γλώσσαν, ὁ μὲν ἰθύνων μετὰ βίας τὸ πηδάλιον, ὁ δὲ λύων καὶ δένων τὰ ἰστία, βοηθὸν διὰ τῆς κώπης ἐκ τοῦ ὑπηνέμου, ἀμφοτέρωι τρέχοντες ἀπὸ τὴν πρύμνην εἰς τὴν πρῶραν, καταπτόντες τοὺς ἀπειροτέρους τῶν ἐπιβατῶν, περιοραιομένους ἀπὸ τὸ ἀφρίζον κύμα, ὄσφραιομένους ἐγγύθεν καὶ γευομένους τὴν ἄλμην. Ἐξημέρωναν Χριστούγεννα καὶ ἕκαστος τῶν πελατῶν ἐπεθύμει νὰ κάμει τὰ ὀψώνιά του».

Στὴ συνέχεια «ὁ καπετὰν Γιάννης διηγεῖτο διὰ μακρῶν τὰ τοῦ τελευταίου ταξιδίου του». Καὶ τοῦ

θέτει ἡ παρέα τὴν ἐρώτηση:

– Ἐπῆρες κανένα ἐπιβάτη ἀπ' τὸ Βόλο;

Τὴν στιγμὴν ἐκείνην ὁ καπετὰν Γιάννης (...) ἀνέκραξεν:

– Ἄ! Νά το!

Ὅλοι ἐστράφησαν πρὸς τὴν θύραν.

Εἶχεν εἰσέλθει ἄνθρωπος ὑψηλός, καλοφορεμένος, ὡς σαράντα πέντε ἐτῶν, ὠραῖος, ἀνοικτοπρόσωπος, ἐξυρισμένος μύστακα καὶ γένειον, πλὴν ὀλίγον

τριχῶν ὑπὸ τὸν πώγωνα καὶ πρὸς τὸν λαϊμόν, μὲ παχειὰν χρυσοῦν καδένα ἐπὶ τοῦ στήθους (...)

Ἐξελθὼν τοῦ καπηλειοῦ ὁ ξένος διηυθύνθη πρὸς τὴν Κολώναν τὴν ἰστάμενην ἀπέναντι τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν (...) Ἐστρεψε τὸ βλέμμα δεξιὰ καὶ ἀριστερὰ καὶ τέλος τὸ προσήλωσεν ἐπιμόνως εἰς τινὰ μικρὰν οἰκίαν, τὴν ὁποίαν ἐκοίταζε πρὶν, ὅπου μεταξὺ δυὸ οἰκιῶν ἐσηματίζετο κενὸν τε, ἐν μέρει θαπτόμενον ἀπὸ λείψανα δύο τοίχων.

Ἐφαίνετο ὅτι ἦτο χάλασμα, ἐρείπιον οἰκίας τινός, οὐ πρὸ πολλοῦ κατεδαφισθείσης. Ὁ ξένος, ἀφοῦ ἐκοίταξε τριγύρω νὰ ἴδῃ μήπως τὸν παρετήρει τις, εἰσήλθε δειλῶς εἰς τὸ χάλασμα ἐκεῖνο, ὅπου εἰς τὴν γωνίαν τῶν δυὸ τοίχων ἐφαίνετο κόγχη τις μαυρισμένη, ὡς νὰ ὑπῆρχεν ἐστία ἐκεῖ τὸ πάλαι.



Εἰσήλθεν ἀσκεπῆς κρατῶν τὸν πῖλον εἰς τὰς χεῖρας, ἐγονάτισε καὶ ἐστήριξε τὸ μέτωπον ἐπὶ τῶν ψυχρῶν λίθων τῆς γωνίας ἐκείνης, καί, ἀφοῦ ἔμεινεν ἐπὶ τρία λεπτά γονυκλινῆς, ἠγέρθη, ἐσπόγγισε τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ ἀπεμακρύνθη βραδέως.

Ἐπανελθὼν πάλιν χαμηλότερον ἐστάθη τὸ μέσον τοῦ δρομίσκου, οὐ μακρὸν τῆς οἰκίας, τὴν ὁποίαν πρὶν ἐφαίνετο ὅτι ἐκοίταξε. Ἐστάθη, καί, ἀφοῦ ἔριξε βλέμμα ὀλόγυρα νὰ ἴδῃ μή τις τὸν παρηκολούθει, ἔτεινε τὸ οὖς. Τί ἤκουεν ἄραγε; Ἴσως ἤκουε τὰ διασταυρούμενα καὶ φεύγοντα κατὰ διαφόρους διευθύνσεις, ὡς λάλημα χεμιερινῶν στρουθίων, ἄσματα τῶν παίδων τῆς γειτονιάς, οἵτινες ἐπισκεπτόμενοι τὰς οἰκίας ἔψαλλον τὰ Χριστοῦγεννα. Ἐδῶ μὲν ἠκούοντο οἱ στίχοι:

**Χριστοῦγεννα, πρωτούγεννα, πρώτη γιορτὴ τοῦ χρόνου, ἐβγάτ', ἀκούστε, μάθετε, τώρα Χριστὸς γεννιέται...**

Ἐκεῖ δὲ ἀντήχει:

**Κυρά μ', τὴ θυγατέρα σου, κυρά μ', τὴν ἀκριβή σου.**

Αἴφνης ὁ ξένος ἠναγκάσθη νὰ παραμερίσῃ, διότι ζεῦγος παιδίων, ὧν τὸ ἓν ἐκράτει φανάριον, ἀρτίως καταβάντα ἀπὸ μίαν κλίμακα, ἤρχοντο πρὸς τὰ ἐδῶ. Ἐστρεψε βήματα τινὰ ὀπίσω, πρὸς τὸ μέρος ὅπουθεν εἶχεν ἔλθει. Τὰ παιδιά ἤλθον πλησίον καὶ οὐδὲ τὸν παρετήρησαν κἄν. Ἀνέβησαν τὴν κλίμακα ἐκείνης ἀκριβῶς τῆς οἰκίας, τὴν ὁποίαν εἶχε κοιτάξει διὰ μακρὰν ὁ ξένος. Τοῦτο ἰδὼν ἔκαμε κίνημα καὶ ἐστράφη ὀπίσω πάλιν μετὰ ζωηροῦ ἐνδιαφέροντος. Ἐστάθη καὶ ἔτεινε τὸ οὖς.

Τὰ παιδιά ἔκρουσαν τὴν θύραν.

— Νὰ ῥθοῦμε νὰ τραγουδήσουμε, θειά;

Μετὰ μίαν στιγμὴν ἠκούσθη ἐνδοθεν βῆμα, ἠνοιχθὴ ἡ θύρα, καὶ γραϊὰ τις μὲ μαύρην μανδήλιαν προκύψασα, εἶπε μὲ θλιβερὰν φωνήν:

— Ὅχι, παιδάκια μ', τί νὰ τραγῶδηστε ἀπὸ μᾶς;

Ἐχομε μεῖς κανένα; Καλὴ χρονίτσα νὰ ἔχετε, κὶ σῦρτε ἄλλοῦ νὰ τραγῶδηστε (...)

Ὅταν οἱ γείτονες τῆς θεῖα Κυρατσῶς τῆς Μιχάλαινας ἐξύπνησαν μετὰ τὰ μεσάνυκτα διὰ νὰ ὑπάγουν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, τῆς ὁποίας οἱ κώδωνες ἐκλάγγαζαν θορυβωδῶς, πόσον ἐξεπλάγησαν ἰδόντες τὴν οἰκίαν τῆς πτωχῆς χήρας, ἐκεῖ ὅπου δὲν ἐδέχοντο τὰ παιδιά νὰ τραγουδήσουν τὰ Χριστοῦγεννα, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἀπέπεμπον μὲ τὰς φράσεις «δὲν ἔχομε κανένα» καὶ «τί θὰ τραγουδήστε ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς» κατάφωτον, μὲ ὅλα τὰ παραθυρόφυλλα ἀνοικτὰ (...)

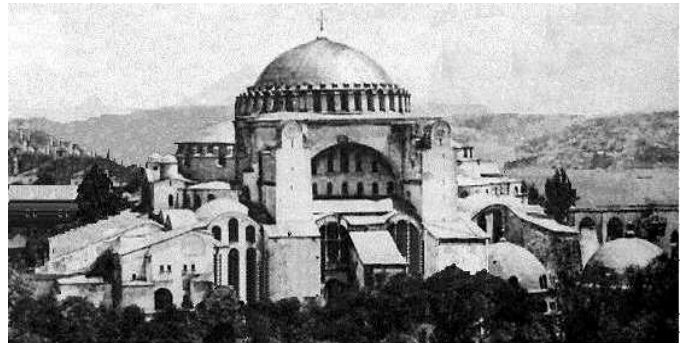
Τί τρέχει; Τί συμβαίνει; Δὲν ἤργησαν νὰ πληροφορηθοῦσιν (...). Ὁ ξενιτευμένος γαμβρός, ἀπὸ εἰκοσαετίας ἀπὼν, ἀπὸ δεκαετίας μὴ ἀφήσας ποὺ ἔχνη (...), εἶχε γυρίσει πολλὰ μέρη εἰς τὸν Νέον Κόσμον, εἶχεν ἐργασθῆ ὡς ὑπεργολάβος εἰς μεταλλεῖα καὶ ὡς

ἐπιστάτης εἰς φυτείας καὶ ἐπανήλθε μὲ χιλιάδας τινὰς ταλλήρων εἰς τὸν τόπον τῆς γεννήσεώς του, ὅπου ἐπανεῦρεν ἠλικιωθεῖσαν, ἀλλ' ἀκμαίαν ἀκόμη τὴν πιστὴν του μνηστὴν.

Μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας, τὴν Κυριακὴ μετὰ τὴν Χριστοῦ γέννησιν, ἐτελοῦντο ἐν πάσῃ χαρᾷ καὶ σεμνότητι οἱ γάμοι τοῦ Ἰωάννου Εὐσταθίου Μοθωνιοῦ μετὰ τῆς Μελαχροινῆς Κουμπουρτζῆ.

Ἡ θεῖα Κυρατσῶ, μετὰ τόσα ἔτη, ἐφόρεσεν ἐπὶ ὀλίγας στιγμὰς χρωματιστὴν πολίτικην μανδήλιαν, διὰ ν' ἀσπασθῆ τὰ στέφανα. Καὶ τὴν παραμονὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Βασιλείου, τὸ ἐσπέρας ἰσταμένη εἰς τὸν ἐξώστην ἠκούσθη φωνοῦσα πρὸς τοὺς διερχομένους ὁμίλους τῶν παίδων:

— Ἐλάτε, παιδιά, νὰ τραγῶδηστε!...



Γιατί ποῖος μπορεῖ, θαρρώντας σὲ λογικὲς ἀποδείξεις, νὰ πεῖ πῶς γίνεται ἡ σύλληψη τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου; Πῶς γίνεται σχηματισμὸς σάρκας χωρὶς σπορά; Πῶς γίνεται γέννηση χωρὶς φθορὰ παρθενίας; Πῶς εἶναι μητέρα ἐκείνη ποὺ καὶ μετὰ τὸν τοκετὸ ἔμεινε παρθένος; Πῶς ὁ ὑπερτέλειος προόδευε καὶ μεγάλωνε στὸ σῶμα; Πῶς ὁ καθαρὸς βαπτιζόταν; Πῶς ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πεινοῦσε ἔτρεφε τοὺς ἄλλους; Πῶς ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ κοπίαζε χάριζε δύναμη; Πῶς ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἔπασχε ἔκανε θεραπείες; Πῶς ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πέθαινε ἔδινε ζωὴ; Καὶ νὰ τὸ πῶ τὸ πρῶτο καὶ τὸ τελευταῖο, πῶς ὁ Θεὸς γίνεται ἄνθρωπος; Μόνο ἡ πίστη χωρεῖ αὐτὰ τὰ μυστήρια, γιατί αὐτὴ κάνει χειροπιαστὰ τὰ πράγματα ποὺ ὑπερβαίνουν τὸ νοῦ καὶ τὴν λογικὴν.

**Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητῆς**

Ὁ προφήτης Ἡσαΐας εἶπεν «οὐ πρέσβυς, οὐδὲ ἄγγελος, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἔσωσεν αὐτούς», Αὐτὸς, Ποιός; ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Κύριος ἡμῶν, ὅστις εἶχε καὶ δύναμιν ἄπειρον διὰ νὰ μᾶς ἐλευθερώσῃ καὶ σοφίαν ἄπειρον διὰ νὰ εὕρῃ τὸν τρόπον τῆς ἐλευθερίας μας καὶ δικαιοσύνην ἄπειρον διὰ νὰ μὴ κάμῃ τυραννικὴν τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῶν θεληματικῶς δεδουλωμένων εἰς τοὺς δαίμονας, καὶ ἀγαθότητα ἄπειρον διὰ νὰ μεταδώσῃ εἰς ὅλους ὁμοῦ τοὺς αἰῶνας τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς θείας του χάριτος καὶ τῆς δόξης καὶ νὰ γίνῃ ὁ αὐτὸς πηγὴ ἁγιασμοῦ καὶ χάριτος εἰς ὅλην τὴν ἀνθρώπινον φύσιν, ὄχι μόνον καθὸ Θεὸς, ἀλλὰ καὶ καθὸ ἄνθρωπος.

**Ἅγιος Νικόδημος**

## «Γνώθι Σαυτόν»

### Τὸ Μεγάλο Μάθημα τῆς Αυτόγνωσίας

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαὴλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, Θεολόγου.

Ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι ἓνα σχολεῖο. Τὰ μαθήματα πολλά· πάρα πολλά. Κάθε μέρα, κάθε ὥρα καὶ κάθε στιγμή, ὁ ἄνθρωπος διδάσκεται. Καὶ διδασκόμενος, διδάσκει. Καὶ διδάσκοντας γίνεται σοφώτερος καὶ ὁ ἴδιος καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι. Κατὰ τὸ λόγο τοῦ σοφοῦ παροικιαστῆ: «*Δίδου σοφῶ ἀφορμὴν καὶ σοφώτερος ἔσται*». (Παροιμ 9:9).

Ὁ ἀληθινὰ σοφός, εἶν' ἐκεῖνος, πὺν γνωρίζει, ἢ τοῦλάχιστο, πασχίζει νὰ γνωρίσει τὸν ἑαυτὸ του μὲ κάθε τρόπο καὶ μὲ κάθε εὐκαιρία. Αὐτὴ ἡ γνώση τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μας—ἡ αὐτογνωσία—εἶναι τ' ὠραιότερο καὶ μεγαλειωδέστερο κατόρθωμα τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς.

Ἀπ' τὰ μαθητικά χρόνια μαθαίνει κανεὶς τὸ πασίγνωστο καὶ θαυμάσιο γνωμικὸ τῶν ἀρχαίων προγόνων μας: «Γνώθι σαυτόν». Τόσο σπουδαῖο, ὥστε χαρακτήρηκε στὸ ναὸ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα στοὺς Δελφούς. Κάποιοι τὸ ἀποδίδουν στὸ Χεῖλωνα τὸ Λακεδαιμόνιο καὶ ἄλλοι στὸ Θαλῆ τὸ Μιλήσιο.

Τι σημαίνει λοιπόν, τὸ «γνώθι σαυτόν»; Μάθε καλὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου, μάθε ποιὸς εἶσαι. Ἐρεῦνα τὸν ἐσωτερικὸ σου κόσμο, καὶ φωτίζοντάς τον, πρόσεξε ἰδιαίτερα τὶς ἀτέλειες καὶ τὶς ἀδυναμίες τοῦ χαρακτήρα σου, ὥστε νὰ λάβεις τὰ μέτρα σου γιὰ βελτίωση καὶ προκοπή.

Ὁ πασίγνωστος ἐπίσης, λόγος τοῦ Σωκράτη «ἐν οἴδα, ὅτι οὐδὲν οἶδα», εἶναι ἀπόδειξη ἀληθινῆς σοφίας καὶ αὐτογνωσίας. «Ἡ γνώση τῆς ἄγνοιας εἶναι ἡ ἀληθινὴ γνώση».

Εἶναι ἐκπληκτικὸ πὺς τὸν ἴδιο περίπου λόγο τοῦ «γνώθι σαυτόν» τὸ βρισκόμε στὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Ἰώβ 5:27, ὅπου διαβάζουμε τὸν ἀντίλογο τοῦ Ἐλιφάζ: «Γνώθι σεαυτῶ εἴ τι ἔπραξας», λέγει στὸν Ἰώβ. Σὰ νὰ τοῦ ἔλεγε: «Σκέψου καὶ μάθε· μήπως ἔπραξες κάτι κακό?».

Οἱ μηχανισμοὶ τῆς αὐτογνωσίας λειτουργοῦν συνειρμικὰ καὶ αὐτόματα στὸν κάθε ἄνθρωπο, ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπὸ τὸ βαθμὸ νοημοσύνης ἢ μάθησης. Καὶ τοῦτο, γιὰτὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος—κάθε ἄνθρωπος—εἶναι ὑπαρξὴ λογικὴ καὶ ἠθικὴ. Ἔχει καὶ γνώση καὶ ἐπίγνωση καὶ αὐτογνωσία.

Ἀντίθετα, δίχως αὐτεπίγνωση, ἡ ὑποκειμενικότητα δημιουργεῖ παραπονήσεις καὶ παραισθήσεις. Κατὰ τὴν παροιμία: «Ἡ χελώνα τὸ παιδί τῆς ἀγγελόπουλο τὸ κρᾶζει...». Κρίνει «ἄψογα», ὅποιος κατέχει τὸ «γνώθι σαυτόν». Ἀλλιῶτικα, προδίδεται καὶ γελοιοποιεῖται!

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι στὴ ζωὴ του ἐρευνητής. Ἐρευνᾷ τοὺς πάντες καὶ τὰ πάντα. Ἀλλοίμονο ὅμως! Ἐκεῖ πὺν χωλαίνει, εἶναι ἡ ἔρευνα τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ του. Αὐτὸς ὁ ἐξερευνητής τοῦ διαστήματος καὶ τοῦ σύμπαντος,

εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ ἔχει τὶς πὺν μεγάλες ἀποτυχίες στὸν ἑαυτὸ του. Ἄλλωστε, ἐκεῖνο πὺν γνωρίζουμε εἶναι μηδαμινό, μπροστὰ σ' αὐτὰ πὺν ἀγνοοῦμε.

Οἱ ἀληθινὰ μεγάλοι ξεκινοῦν ἀπὸ μηδενικὴ βάση καὶ φτάνουν στὴν τελειότητα. Αὐτό, πὺν καταστρέφει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, λέγει ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, εἶναι «*τὸ μὴ βούλεσθαι τῆς οἰκειᾶς φύσεως ἐπιγινώσκειν τὰ μέτρα*». Καταστρέφει τὸν ἑαυτὸ του ὅποιος δὲν ἔχει ἐπίγνωση τῶν δυνατοτήτων του καὶ ἀλαζονεύεται. Ὡστόσο: «*Οὗτος γὰρ μάλιστα ἐστὶν ὁ ἑαυτὸν εἰδώς, ὁ μηδὲν εἶναι ἑαυτὸν νομίζων*». Αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ ὀξύμωρα σχήματα στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πνευματικὴ ζωὴ: Αὐτὸς πὺν γνωρίζει ἄριστα τὸν ἑαυτὸ του, εἶναι ὅποιος τὸν θεωρεῖ γιὰ τίποτε: Ὁ «*πτωχὸς τῷ πνεύματι*». Ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀληθινῆς αὐτογνωσίας.

«*Ἐνδον σκάπτετε*». Ὡραῖο σύνθημα γιὰ ὠραίους ἀνθρώπους. «Ὁργωνε βαθιὰ, νὰ ἔχεις πολὺ σιτάρι», λέει μιὰ ἀγγλικὴ παροιμία. Ὅσο βαθύτερο τὸ σκάψιμο, τόσο καὶ πλουσιότερη ἡ συγκομιδὴ. Ὅσοι σκάβουν βαθιὰ, βρίσκουν «*merus aurum*» (καθαρὸ χρυσάφι). «Ἀρχαῖο ἀνεξερεύνητο ὄρυχεῖο μὲ κοιτάσματα ἄγνωστα, ἡ ψυχὴ σου. Σκάψε βαθιὰ νὰ βρεῖς τὸ χρυσάφι σου».

«Ad Intra», πρὸς τὰ μέσα. Στὰ ἐνδότερα. Μονάχα σὰν περάσεις τὸ τοῦνελ τῆς ἐνδοσκοπήσης, θ' ἀντικρύσεις τὸ ξέφωτο μιᾶς καινούργιας ἐλπίδας. Ὁ μέσα κόσμος εἶναι τόσο ἀπέραντος, ὅσο καὶ ὁ ἔξω κόσμος. «*Βαθεῖα ἡ καρδιὰ παρὰ πάντα, καὶ ἄνθρωπός ἐστι καὶ τὶς γνώσεται αὐτόν;*» (Ἰερειμ 17:9). Ἡ καρδιὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι βαθιὰ καὶ ἀνεξερεύνητη, περισσότερο ἀπὸ κάθε ἄλλο πρᾶγμα στὸν κόσμο. «Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, αὐτὸς ὁ ἄγνωστος», ὅπως τὸν ἀποκάλεσε κάποιος ξένος.

Ἡ αὐτογνωσία εἶναι πορεία πρὸς τὴν τελειότητα. Εἶναι μέσον Ὁρθόδοξης ὑπαρξιακῆς κάθαρσης καὶ φωτισμοῦ, πὺν δὲν ἔχει καμιὰ σχέση μὲ τὴν αὐτογνωσία—αὐτοσυγκέντρωση βουδδιστικοῦ ἢ ἄλλου ἀνατολικοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ τύπου. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ προσοχὴ ἀπὸ λαθεμένες ψευδογνωστικὲς τεχνικὲς. **Μᾶς ἀρκεῖ ν' ἀποκτήσουμε «Νοῦν Χριστοῦ». Ὑπέροχος ὀραματισμός!**



Ἄν νόμιμα ἀσκήσετε νηστεύοντας, μὴ τὸ παίρνετε ἐπάνω σας. Ἄν δὲ γιὰ αὐτὸ κομπάζετε, καλύτερα ἄς τρώτε κρέας. Γιατὶ εἶναι προτιμότερο νὰ τρώγῃ κανεὶς κρέας παρὰ νὰ τὸ παίρνῃ ἐπάνω του καὶ νὰ ἔχῃ μεγάλη ἰδέα γιὰ τὸ ἑαυτὸ του.

**Ἀββᾶς Ἰσίδωρος ὁ Πρεσβύτερος**

## Έτοιμοι για Θάνατο!

Μακαριστοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Ἀγίουστίνου, Μητροπόλιτη Φλωρίνης (+2010).

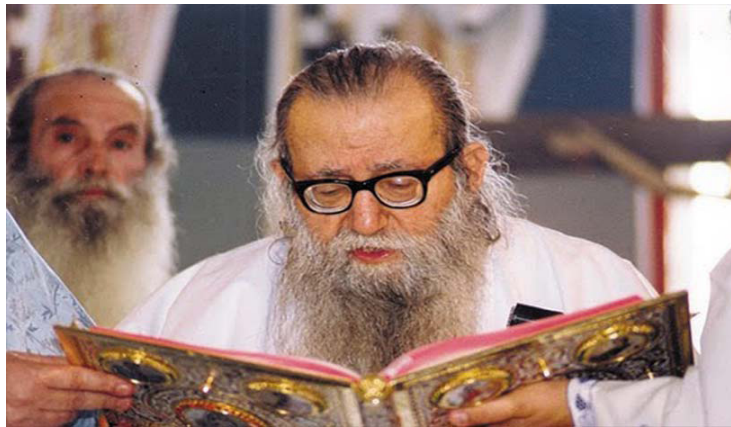
**«Εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἐλθεῖν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀκολουθείτω μοι.»**

[Μάρκ 8:34]

Ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἀγαπητοί μου, δὲν στρατολογεῖ ὁπαδοὺς διὰ τῆς βίας. Μολονότι περισσότερο ἀπὸ κάθε ἄλλον αὐτὸς θὰ εἶχε τὸδικαίωμα καὶ τὴν ἀξίωσι νὰ ἀπαιτήσῃ, ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, τοὺς ὁποίους δημιούργησε καὶ ἔφερε στὴν ὑπαρξί, νὰ ὑποταχθοῦν στὸ θέλημα καὶ τὸ κέλευσμά του καὶ νὰ προσέλθουν νὰ καταταχθοῦν στὸ στράτευμά του, ἐν τούτοις ἀφήνει τὸν καθένα ἐλεύθερο νὰ κἀνὴ μόνος του τὴν ἐπιλογή, νὰ πάρῃ τὴν ἀπόφασιν ποὺ κρίνει σωστὴ καὶ νὰ πῆ ἂν θέλῃ νὰ γίνῃ ἀκόλουθος καὶ ὑπήκοός του.

«Ὅστις θέλει», λέει, «ὀπίσω μου ἐλθεῖν» (Μάρκ 8:34). Τὸ εἶπε τότε στοὺς μαθητὰς του, τὸ εἶπε σὲ ὅλο τὸν ὄχλον

ποὺ τὸν περιστοιχίζε τὴ στιγμὴ ἐκείνη, τὸ λέει καὶ σ' ἐμᾶς σήμερα. Εἴμαστε λοιπὸν ἐλεύθεροι νὰ ποῦμε ποιά ἀπὸ τὶς δύο σημαῖες διαλέγουμε—γιατὶ δὲν ὑπάρχει τρίτη ἔχουμε μπροστά μας ἢ τὴ σημαία τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἢ τὴ σημαία τοῦ σατανᾶ καὶ τοῦ δαμονικοῦ κόσμου. Ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τὴ στιγμὴ ποὺ ἡ θεία χάρις θὰ μᾶς φωτίσῃ



νὰ πάρουμε τὴ σημαία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ νὰ ἐκλέξουμε τὸ δικό του δρόμο, στὸ ἐξῆς ὀφείλουμε σὲ ὅλη μας τὴ ζωὴ νὰ ἐφαρμόζουμε τὸ δικό του πρόγραμμα, τὸ πρόγραμμα ποὺ αὐτὸς ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς συνέταξε καὶ τὸ ὁποῖο ἰσχύει γιὰ ὅλα τὰ παιδιά του, γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς ἀκολουθούς του. Καὶ τὸ πρόγραμμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ τί προβλέπει; Τὸ εἶπε ὁ ἴδιος «Ὅστις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἀκολουθεῖν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀκολουθείτω μοι».

Ἀπαιτεῖ λοιπὸν τρία πράγματα. Πρῶτον, νὰ μισήσουμε τὴν ἁμαρτία, τῆς ὁποίας τὸ φαρμακερὸ κεντρὶ καὶ ἡ πικρὴ ρίζα βρίσκονται μέσα στὴν καρδιά μας (αὐτὸ σημαίνει τὸ «ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτόν»). Δεύτερον, νὰ εἴμαστε ἔτοιμοι γιὰ θάνατο (αὕτὴ τὴν ἔννοια ἔχει τὸ «ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ»). Καὶ τρίτον, νὰ βαδίζουμε μὲ εὐλαβικὴ ὑπακοὴ ἐπάνω στὰ ἴχνη τῆς δικῆς του ἀγίας ζωῆς (αὐτὸ σημαίνει τὸ «ἀκολουθείτω μοι»).

Σὲ ἓνα σύντομο κήρυγμα δὲν προλαβαίνουμε ν' ἀναπτύξουμε καὶ τὰ τρία αὐτὰ σημαντικὰ μέρη τοῦ

προγράμματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀφήνοντας λοιπὸν τὸ πρῶτο καὶ τὸ τρίτο μέρος, καὶ μέσα στὸν χρόνον ποὺ διαθέτουμε, θὰ στρέψουμε τὴν προσοχή μας στὸ δεύτερο. Ἡ δεύτερη ἀπαιτήσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ «ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ», βρίσκειται, ὅπως βλέπουμε, ἀνάμεσα στὶς δύο ἄλλες ἀπαιτήσεις του, τὴν πρώτη καὶ τὴν τρίτη, καὶ τρόπον τινὰ τὶς ὑποβαστάζει καὶ τὶς ἐνισχύει. Αὕτην θὰ προσπαθήσουμε ν' ἀναπτύξουμε σ' αὐτὸ τὸ σύντομο κήρυγμά μας ἐπὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου.

«Ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ»... Ὁ ἀκόλουθος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀγαπητοί μου, πρέπει νὰ σηκώσῃ τὸν σταυρό του. Ὁ τίμιος σταυρός, ἐπάνω στὸν ὁποῖο θυσιάστηκε χάριν τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ κόσμου ὁ «ἀρχηγὸς τῆς πίστεώς» μας (Ἑβρ 12:2), εἶναι τὸ σύμβολο τῆς ὑπερτάτης θυσίας. Συμβολίζει καὶ ἐκφράζει τὴν μεγαλύτερη καὶ μοναδικὴ θυσία, τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μας.

Ὅσοι λοιπὸν τιμοῦν καὶ ἀσπάζονται αὕτη τὴν ἄμωμη καὶ ἀκήρατη θυσία, αὐτοὶ ἐλκύονται καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι ἀπὸ τὴ

χάρι τῆς, συγκινοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς. Ἐξοικειώνονται μὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ σταυροῦ, αἰσθάνονται ἀλληλέγγυοι μ' αὐτό, ξεπερνοῦν τὸν φόβο τῆς κακοπαθείας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ φιλοτιμοῦνται, ὅπως ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, νὰ «ἀνταναπληρῶν τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν

θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ» (Κολ 1:24), ν' ἀναπληρῶνουν στὴν καθημερινὴ ζωὴ τους ὅσα θὰ πάθαινε ὁ Χριστὸς ἂν ἦταν ἀκόμη ἐπάνω στὴ γῆ σωματικῶς.

Ὁ πόθος καὶ ἡ λαχτάρα τους τοὺς ἐμπνέει νὰ ἐπιθυμοῦν «τὸ ἀναλῦσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι», νὰ πεθάνουν γιὰ νὰ βρεθοῦν μιὰ ὥρα γρηγορώτερα κοντὰ στὸ Χριστό (Φιλ 1:23). Φτάνουν ἀτρόμητοι στὸ σημεῖο νὰ κινδυνεύουν καὶ ν' «ἀποθνήσκουν καθ' ἡμέραν», νὰ πεθαίνουν καθημερινῶς (Α' Κορ 15:31).

Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια λοιπὸν κ' ἐμεῖς, ἐφ' ὅσον μὲ τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ καταταχθήκαμε στὸ στράτευμα τοῦ Κυρίου, πρέπει νὰ εἴμαστε ἔτοιμοι γιὰ τὰ πάντα· ἔτοιμοι νὰ θυσιάσουμε ὄχι μόνον ἀναπαύσεις καὶ τιμὲς καὶ δόξες καὶ πλοῦτη, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὕτη τὴ ζωὴ μας ἀκόμη· ἔτοιμοι γιὰ πόλεμο, ἔτοιμοι γιὰ θάνατο. Ἄς λέμε κ' ἐμεῖς μαζὶ μὲ τὸν ψαλμωδὸ καὶ τὸν ἀπόστολο: Γιὰ σένα, Κύριε, πεθαίνουμε κάθε μέρα, μᾶς ἔχουν σὰν τὰ πρόβατα ποὺ πάνε γιὰ σφαγὴ· «ἐλογίσθημεν ὡς πρόβατα σφαγῆς». (Ψαλμ 43:23, Ῥωμ 8:36).



Τὸ στράτευμα τοῦ Κυρίου δὲν ἔχει προορισμὸ νὰ ἀδρανή, νὰ διασκεδάξῃ καὶ νὰ κοιμᾶται. Πρόκειται νὰ περάσῃ μέσα ἀπὸ χώρες ἐχθρικές, ἀνάμεσα ἀπὸ «λύκους». (Ματθ 10:16. Λουκ 10:3). Θὰ ὑποχρεωθῇ νὰ δίνη μάχες, νὰ γκρεμίσῃ τὰ ὀχυρώματα τοῦ σατανᾶ, νὰ συγκρούεται μὲ τοὺς ἀντιχριστοὺς, νὰ προχωρῇ πάντα μπρὸς.

Πῶς ὅμως θὰ γίνουν ὅλα αὐτά, ἂν οἱ στρατιῶτες τοῦ Κυρίου εἶνε δειλοί; Ὁ δειλὸς στρατιώτης ὄχι μόνο ὁ ἴδιος κινδυνεύει νὰ συλληφθῇ ἀπὸ τὸν ἐχθρὸ, ἀλλὰ γίνεται καὶ πρόσκομμα καὶ ἐμπόδιο στοὺς συμπολεμιστὰς του· διότι καὶ ἕνας μόνο νὰ δειλιάξῃ, προκαλεῖ τὸν πανικὸ καὶ στοὺς ἄλλους. Ἔτσι καὶ ὁ δειλὸς Χριστιανὸς, αὐτὸς ποὺ τρέμει μπροστὰ στὶς θυσίες καὶ ὁ ἴδιος θὰ κινδυνεύσῃ τὸν ἔσχατο κίνδυνο, νὰ χάσῃ δηλαδὴ τὴν ψυχὴ του καὶ νὰ γίνῃ αἰχμάλωτος τοῦ σατανᾶ, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρόσκομμα στὴν ὁδὸ τῆς σωτηρίας καὶ ἄλλων ἀδελφῶν του θὰ γίνῃ, διότι ἡ δειλή του στάσι σὲ ζητήματα πίστεως καὶ ἠθικῆς θὰ ἐπηρεάσῃ καὶ θ' ἀπογοητεύσῃ πολλοὺς.

Γι' αὐτὸ χρειάζεται νὰ πάρῃ ἡρωικὴ ἀπόφασι καὶ νὰ πῇ: Θὰ πεθάνω στὸ πεδίο τῆς μάχης τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Δὲν θ' ἀρνηθῶ τὴν πίστι μου, δὲν θὰ παραβῶ τὸ καθῆκον μου, δὲν θὰ καταπατήσω τὴν ἠθικὴ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ἔστω καὶ ἂν οἱ ἀντίπαλοί μου (ὁ κόσμος, ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὁ σατανᾶς) μοῦ δείχνουν ἕνα σταυρό, ἐπάνω στὸν ὁποῖο πρέπει κ' ἐγὼ ν' ἀφήσω, ὅπως ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος, τὴν τελευταία μου ἀναπνοή.

Αὐτὴ τὴν ἀπόφασι πρέπει νὰ πάρῃ κάθε Χριστιανὸς, ἂν θέλῃ νὰ εὐαρεστήσῃ στὸν ἀρχηγὸ τῆς στρατιάς, τὸν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν. Ἐὰν ἕνας ἐπίγειος βασιλιάς τιμᾷ τοὺς γενναίους στρατιῶτες του μὲ παράσημα, καὶ ὁ Κύριος θὰ τιμῆσῃ τοὺς ἀνδρείους Χριστιανοὺς «μετὰ δόξης αἰωνίου» (Β' Τιμ 2:10), γιατί ἀναδείχθηκαν «πιστοὶ ἄχρι θανάτου» καὶ ἀξίζουσιν νὰ τοὺς δώσῃ «τὸν στέφανον τῆς (αἰωνίου) ζωῆς». (Ἄποκ 2:10). Ἄκουσαν καὶ ἐκτέλεσαν τὴν προσταγὴ τοῦ Κυρίου «ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ» καὶ «γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς».

Ὅποιος φθάνει μὲ τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴν ἀπόφασι αὐτῇ, αὐτὸς ἔχει ξεπεράσει κάθε ἄλλο ἐμπόδιο. Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πῆρε τὴν ἀπόφασι, χάριν τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἠθικῆς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, νὰ θυσιάσῃ—ἂν παραστῇ ἀνάγκη—καὶ αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ του, αὐτὸς ὁ Χριστιανὸς θὰ ἔχῃ πάντοτε εἰρήνη στὴν ψυχὴ καὶ θὰ βαδίζῃ ἀτάραχος τὴν ὁδὸ τοῦ Κυρίου. Καὶ πῶς ὄχι; Ἀφοῦ ἀποφάσισε νὰ θυσιάσῃ τὴ ζωὴ του, τὸ πολυτιμότερο ἀπὸ τὰ ἐπίγεια ἀγαθὰ, τί ἔχει πλέον νὰ φοβηθῇ; Αὐτὸς ποὺ μπορεῖ καὶ περιφρονεῖ τὸν μεγαλύτερο ἐχθρὸ τῆς ζωῆς, τὸν θάνατο, πῶς δὲν θὰ περιφρονήσῃ εὐκόλα καὶ τοὺς μικρότερους ἐχθροὺς τῆς ζωῆς του, τὶς θλίψεις καὶ τὶς ποικίλες στενοχώριες;

Ὅποιος ἔχει τὴ δύναμι νὰ θυσιάξῃ τὸ μεγαλύτερο κεφάλαιο πῶς δὲν θὰ θυσιάσῃ σὲ δεδομένη στιγμή μικρὰ καὶ ἀσήμαντα ποσά; Ὁ στρατιώτης ποὺ πέφτει μὲ θάρρος στὴ φωτιὰ τοῦ θανάτου κ' εἶναι ἔτοιμος γιὰ τὴν τιμὴ τῆς πατρίδος καὶ τὸ αἷμα του νὰ χύσῃ, πῶς δὲν θὰ ὑποφέρῃ εὐκολώτερα κάθε ἄλλη κακουχία τοῦ πολέμου;

Νὰ λοιπὸν, ἀγαπητοί μου, γιατί κάνω σήμερα αὐτὸ τὸ τολμηρὸ κήρυγμα. Ἡ ἀπόφασι νὰ πεθάνουμε γιὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου θὰ μᾶς κἀνῃ βράχους ἀκλόνητους σὲ κάθε πειρασμό. Μένοντας σταθεροὶ στὶς Χριστιανικὲς μᾶς ἀρχὲς καὶ πεποιθήσεις, θ' ἀντικρούζουμε ἄφοβα κάθε ἄλλο κίνδυνο. Ἔτοιμοι γιὰ τὸ θάνατο, ἔτοιμοι γιὰ σφαγὴ, θὰ εἴμαστε συγχρόνως ἔτοιμοι καὶ γιὰ κάθε ἄλλη μικρότερη θυσία ποὺ θὰ ζητήσῃ ἀπὸ μᾶς ὁ Χριστός. Ἄν εἴμαστε κοντὰ στὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, θὰ διατελοῦμε δὲ διαρκῆ ἐπιστράτευσι. Πεθαίνοντας κάθε μέρα καὶ στιγμή γιὰ τὸν γλυκύτατο Κύριό μας καὶ συνοδεύοντάς τον στὸ δρόμο τοῦ σταυροῦ του, θὰ ἔχουμε τὴν ἐλπίδα νὰ γίνουμε μέτοχοι καὶ τῆς αἰωνίου δόξης καὶ χαρᾶς.

Ἀδελφοί μου! Ἄς παρακαλέσουμε τὸν Κύριο νὰ μᾶς φωτίσῃ, γιὰ νὰ λάβουμε τὴν ἡρωικὴ ἀπόφασι καὶ νὰ ἐκτελέσουμε κ' ἐμεῖς τὴν ἐντολή του «ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ». Ἀμήν.



Μόνο ὁποῖος ζεῖ μὲ τὴν πίστη καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ πίστη τοῦ διαποτίζει ὅλη τὴν ψυχὴ, ὅλο τὸν νοῦ, ὅλη τὴν διάνοια καὶ ὅλη τὴν καρδιά, ὥστε νὰ ζεῖ ὅλος μὲ Αὐτὸν καὶ σὲ Αὐτόν, μόνο αὐτὸς μπορεῖ νὰ γνωρίζῃ ποῖος εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ τί εἶναι ὁ Χριστός. Μόνο μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ οἱ Χριστιανοὶ γνωρίζουν ὅτι τὸ «κεφαλαιῶδες» εἶναι ἡ Ἀλήθεια τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ὅτι Αὐτὸς εἶναι ἡ «Μόνη Ἀλήθεια». Μόνο στὸν Ἰησοῦ εἶναι ἡ Ἀλήθεια γιὰ τὸν Θεό, γιὰ τὸν κόσμο καὶ γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γιὰ τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ γιὰ τὰ ἀόρατα ὄντα. Καὶ «γνωρίζεται» μόνο ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ζεῖ σὲ Αὐτόν· καὶ ζεῖ σὲ Αὐτόν ὁποῖος ζεῖ στὸ Σῶμα του, τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Ἔτσι, μόνο στὴν Ἐκκλησία μπορεῖ νὰ «γνωσθεῖ», νὰ «μαθευτεῖ» ἡ ἀλήθεια «περὶ τοῦ παντός». Γιατί ἡ Παναλήθεια=Ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Χριστός.

Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς

## Νεοταξικές Μαγαρισιές (στά σχολικά βιβλία) για τη Γιορτή τῶν Χριστουγέννων

Δημήτρης Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος-Κιλκίς

**Θὰ βγοῦν πράγματα ἀπὸ τὰ σχολεῖα ποὺ ὁ νοῦς σας δὲν φαντάζεται...**

[Ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός]

† † †

Ἦλεγε ὁ γέροντας Παῖσιος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης, ὁ ὁσιακῆς μνήμης ἀθλητῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ: «Σοῦ φτιάχνω μία ἐξαιρετικὴ, πεντανόστιμη ὀμελέτα, ἀλλὰ ρίχνω καὶ μία κουτσουλιὰ μέσα. Τὴν τρώς; Δὲν τὴν τρώς, ἔχει μαγαριστεῖ ὀλόκληρη».

Ἡ ἀγία μας Ἐκκλησία, διὰ στόματος τῶν Ἁγιορειτῶν Πατέρων, ὅταν ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ Μιχαὴλ Η΄ ὁ Παλαιολόγος, ἐπιζητοῦσε ἔνωση καὶ ὑποταγὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας στὴν παναίρεση τοῦ Παπισμοῦ, «κανοναρχεῖ»: «Ὁ τῆς ὑγιῶς πίστεως καὶ τὸ βραχὺ ἀνατρέπων τὸ πᾶν λυμαίνεται». Μία «μικρὴ» ὑποχώρηση, μία ἐλάχιστη κηλίδα, ἀνατρέπει ὅλη τὴν πίστη. Γιατί τὰ γράφω αὐτά; Χριστούγεννα ἔρχονται σὲ λίγες μέρες. Στὰ σχολεῖα ἐτοιμαζόμαστε. Ἡ γιορτὴ, τὰ κάλαντα, τὰ ποιήματα. Προσμένουμε, δάσκαλοι καὶ μαθητές, τὴν συγκινητικότερη γιορτούλα μας. Ὑπάρχει, ὅμως, ἡ παραφρονία, καὶ ὁ σπίλος, ἡ «κουτσουλιὰ»: Τὰ βιβλία τῆς «γλώσσας», αὐτὰ τὰ περιοδικὰ ποικίλης καὶ ἀνόητης ὕλης, ποὺ μᾶς φόρτωσαν οἱ νεογραικύλοι.

Πέρυσι ἔγραψα γιὰ τὶς πομπές καὶ τὶς παραλυσίες τῶν βιβλίων τῆς Ε΄ Δημοτικοῦ. Τὴν κακόψυχη μάγισσα «Φρικαντέλα» ποὺ μισοῦσε τὰ κάλαντα καὶ ἀποκαλεῖ «σκουπιδοπαιδα» τὰ παιδιὰ ποὺ πῆγαν νὰ τῆς τὰ ψάλλουν, γιὰ τὶς συνταγὲς μαγειρικῆς, ποὺ προτείνει τὸ ἄθλιο βιβλίο, ἀντὶ γιὰ τὴν γιορτὴ καὶ γενικὰ ὅλες τὶς νεοταξικὲς μαγαρισιές, ποὺ ἓνα μόνο πράγμα θέλουν νὰ κρύψουν ἀπὸ τὰ Ἑλληνάκια: ὅτι τὰ Χριστούγεννα γιορτάζουμε τὴν γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, «σήμερον» καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων.

Φέτος ἤθελα νὰ γράψω γιὰ τὰ Χριστούγεννα, ἀναφερόμενος, κυρίως, σ' αὐτὰ τὰ χαζοχαρούμενα ἰδεολογήματα περὶ... γιορτῆς τῆς εἰρήνης ἢ τῆς οἰκογένειας. Καὶ ὡς γνωστόν, τὰ Χριστούγεννα καθιερώθηκαν σὰν γιορτὴ τῆς οἰκογένειας, μετὰ τὴν διάλυσή της στὴν παραζαλισμένη Δύση, ἐνῶ σὰν γιορτὴ τῆς εἰρήνης οὔτε ὡς κακόγουστο ἀστεῖο δὲν

στέκει. Δὲν ἔχουν τὸ Θεό τους οἱ μακελλάρηδες τῆς οἰκουμένης...

Τὶς ἡμέρες αὐτὲς μου φέρνει μία δασκάλα, συνάδελφος, τὸ βιβλίο γλώσσας τῆς Δ΄ Δημοτικοῦ. Διαβάζω τὴν 8<sup>η</sup> ἐνότητα. Τίτλος: «Χριστὸς Γεννᾶται».

Πρῶτο κεῖμενο: «Ἡ Νύχτα τῆς Γεννήσεως», ποίημα τοῦ Δροσίνη. Ἀπὸ κάτω ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς γέννησης, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι «λεπτομέρεια ἐπιτραχηλίου, δώρου τοῦ Γρηγορίου Βελλᾶ ἐκ Μελενίκου, στὴν Ἱερὰ Μεγίστη Μονὴ Βατοπεδίου Ἁγίου Ὁρους, 2 Μαρτίου 1813». Ἐξαιρετικὰ ὅλα.

Δεύτερο κεῖμενο: «Χριστουγεννιάτικα Κάλαντα Κύπρου». Κι ἐδῶ ἄριστη ἢ ἐπιλογή.

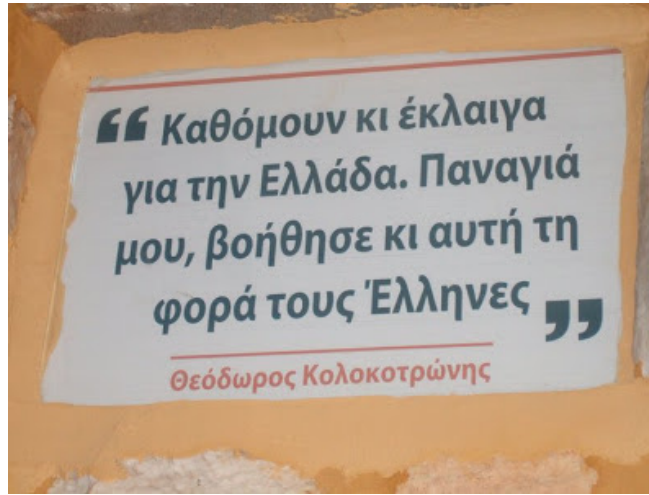
Στὴν ἐπόμενη σελίδα (50) τὸ «ἐπίπεδο πέφτει». Παραπομπὴ στὴν ἐφημερίδα «ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ», ἓνα κεῖμενο γιὰ τὶς Χριστουγεννιάτικες κάρτες καὶ τὴν ἱστορία τους στὴ Δύση. Τέλος πάντων, μπῆκαν στὴ ζωὴ μας. Παρατρύνονται οἱ μαθητὲς νὰ φτιάξουν τὶς Δυτικοῦ τύπου Χριστουγεννιάτικες κάρτες.

Στὸ ἐπόμενο κεῖμενο, «πέφτει ἡ κουτσουλιὰ», τὰ λύματα ποὺ λυμαίνονται τὴν «ὑγιὰ πίστη». Τίτλος τοῦ κειμένου: «Ἡ Μπουγάδα τοῦ Ἀἰ-Βασίλη». Προσοχὴ στὰ κουτοπόνηρα ἢ πονηρὰ μηνύματα τοῦ ἀθλιουργήματος. Διαβάζω: «Σήμερα ὁ Ἀἰ-Βασίλης ξυπνᾷ ἀπ' τὰ χαράματα. Ἐξὶ μόνο μέρες μένουν ὡς τὴν παραμονὴ τῆς Πρωτοχρονιάς κι ἓνα σωρὸ δουλειὲς τὸν περιμένουν». Μεταξὺ τῶν ἐργασιῶν ποὺ «τὸν περιμένουν» καὶ ἡ μπουγάδα.

Παρατήρηση πρώτη: Ἐξὶ μέρες πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν παραμονὴ τῆς Πρωτοχρονιάς εἶναι τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Τότε θὰ κάνει τὶς δουλειὲς του καὶ θὰ βάλει μπουγάδα; Βάζει μπουγάδα.

Διαβάζω ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο γλώσσας Δ΄ Δημοτικοῦ, τεῦχος β΄, σελίδα 52: «Μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο βγαίνει στὴν αὐλὴ, ν' ἀπλώσει τὴν μπουγάδα του. Πρῶτα κρεμάει τὶς κάλτσες του, ὕστερα τὴ φανέλα του, τὸ μακρὺ του σῶβρακο, τὸ σκούφο του, τὸ πουκάμισο καὶ τελευταῖα τὸ σακάκι καὶ τὸ παντελόνι του». Ἔτσι ἀκριβῶς: «Κρεμάει ὁ Ἀἰ-Βασίλης τὸ μακρὺ του σῶβρακο». (Τί γράφουμε! Ὁ ἅγιος νὰ μᾶς συγχωρέσει).

Οἱ ἀφόρητες αὐτὲς σαχλότητες προφανῶς γράφονται γιὰ τὸ περίεργο αὐτὸ ξωτικό, τὸ εὐτραφὲς καὶ γαστρίμαργο, ποὺ διαφημίζει τὸ ἀμερικάνικο...



ψυκτικό. Τὸ κείμενο ὁμως ἀναφέρεται σὲ παιδιὰ βαπτισμένα, «τέκνα» τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς ὁποίας σέμνωμα καὶ καύχημα εἶναι ὁ οὐρανοφάντωρ ἅγιος Βασίλειος καὶ ὄχι σὲ παιδάκια τῆς ἄθειας Δυσης ποὺ περιμένουν τὴν δωρογεμὴ κάλτσα τοῦ «ἐξέρυθρου οἰνόφλυγος Σαντακλάους».

Εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἀναφέρονται μὲ τέτοιες δυσφημιστικὲς καὶ ὕβριστικὲς φράσεις τὰ σχολικὰ βιβλία, γιὰ τὸν ἀσκητικώτατο καὶ φιλανθρωπότατο ἅγιο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας; Τὸν ἅγιο, ποῦ ὅπως μαρτυρεῖ ὁ ἐπιστήθιος φίλος του, Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος, λόγω τῆς κοσμοσυρροῆς τῶν εὐεργετηθέντων, κατὰ τὸ «ξόδι» του, ποδοπατήθηκαν ἄνθρωποι; Τίποτε δὲν σέβονται πιά οἱ κηφῆνες τῆς κακοηθείας καὶ τῆς ἀκολασίας; Πῶς τὰ παιδιὰ θὰ μάθουν νὰ σέβονται ὅσια καὶ ἱερά, ὅταν χλευάζονται μὲ τέτοιες χυδαῖες εὐτραπελίες οἱ ἅγιοι τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας;

Ὁ γέροντας τῆς Καισαρείας, αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς ποῦ γίνεται σήμερα στὸ σχολεῖο, συμβουλεύει νὰ ἀποφεύγουμε: Τὴν προβολὴ σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἡλικία, τὴν «εὐπλαστον», βλαβερῶν διηγήσεων καὶ νοσηρῶν προτύπων. Γράφει ὁ ταπεινὸς Ἱεράρχης: «*Εὐπλαστον οὖν ἔτι οὖσαν καὶ ἀπαλὴν τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ὡς κηρὸς εὐεικτον, ταῖς τῶν ἐπιβαλλομένων μορφαῖς ραδίως ἐκτυπομένη, πρὸς πάσαν ἀγαθῶν ἄσκησιν εὐθὺς καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐνάγεσθαι χρῆ...*». («Ὅροι κατὰ Πλάτος», ΕΠΕ 8:258). Δηλαδή, «ἡ ψυχὴ πρέπει νὰ ὀδηγεῖται στὴν ἄσκηση κάθε ἀγαθοῦ ἔργου ἀπὸ τὰ πρῶτα βήματα τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὅποτε εἶναι ἀκόμη εὐπλαστὴ καὶ ἀπαλὴ σὰν τὸ κερί καὶ εὐκόλα διαμορφώνεται σύμφωνα μὲ τὶς μορφές καὶ τὰ σχήματα, ποῦ παρουσιάζονται σ' αὐτὴ ἀπὸ τοὺς πνευματικὸς ὀδηγούς της».

Καὶ τώρα αὐτὸν τὸν ἅγιο, ποῦ ἀνάλωσε τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ παιδαγωγώντας τὴν νεότητα, τὸν βάζουμε ἐμεῖς τὰ ἀπολειψάδια τοῦ Γένους, νὰ πλένει Χριστουγεννιάτικα τὸ σῶβρακό του.

Δὲν γέννησε αὐτὸς ὁ τόπος Παπαδιαμάντη, Κόντογλου, Καρκαβίτσα, Παπαντωνίου, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔγραψαν ἀριστουργήματα γιὰ τὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ Θεῖαν γέννησιν ἢ γιὰ τὸν Ἄη-Βασίλη (ὅπως τὸ θεσπέσιο κείμενο τοῦ Κόντογλου «ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογιμένος» τὸ ὁποῖο ἐκπαραθυρώθηκε ἀπὸ τὰ βιβλία). Ὅχι. Αὐτοὶ ἔχουν τὸ «κουσοῦρι» νὰ εἶναι Ὁρθόδοξοι Ἕλληνες, ιδιότητα ἐπικίνδυνη, σκοταδιστικὴ...

Κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα «ὑπουργεῖο Παιδείας καὶ διὰ βίου μάθησης». (Αὐτὸ τὸ πομπῶδες εὐφυολόγημα «διὰ βίου»—κέλυφος ἔρημο ἐννοίας—ἢ δευτέρη λέξη του, περιέχει «ἰῶτα ἐν» περιττό. Ἄν τιτολοφοῦνταν «διὰ βού(ν)» μάθησι θὰ ἦταν σαφεστέρα ἢ διατύπωσις...).

Λασπόνερα καὶ ἀσέβειες στὰ σχολικὰ βιβλία, ποῦ θολώνουν τὸν νοῦ. Στὸ τέλος τῆς ἐνότητος,

γιὰ νὰ ἐπανέλθουμε στὸ βιβλίον τῆς Δ' Δημοτικοῦ, παρατίθεται—τί ἄλλο—συνταγὴ γιὰ τὴν παρασκευὴ Βασιλόπιτας. Ἡ ὅποια παιδευτικὴ ἀξία τῶν δύο πρώτων καλῶν κειμένων ἐξουδετερώνεται ἀπὸ τὰ νεοεποχίτικα ποῦ ἔπονται.

Καὶ ὅταν θολώνει ὁ νοῦς καὶ μᾶς βρίσκει τὸ κακό, παροτρύνει ὁ Ἑλύτης, νὰ μνημονεύουμε Διονύσιο Σολωμὸ καὶ Ἀλέξανδρο Παπαδιαμάντη. Γράφει ὁ ἅγιος τῶν γραμμάτων μας: «Νὰ παύσει ἡ συστηματικὴ περιφρόνησις τῆς θρησκείας ἐκ μέρους πολιτικῶν ἀνδρῶν, ἐπιστημόνων, λογίων, δημοσιογράφων καὶ ἄλλων. Ἡ λεγομένη ἀνωτέρα τάξις νὰ συμμορφωθεῖ μὲ τὰ ἔθια τῆς χώρας... Νὰ γίνῃ προστάτις τῶν πατριῶν, καὶ ὄχι διώκτρια. Νὰ ἀσπασθεῖ καὶ νὰ ἐγκολπωθεῖ τὰς ἐθνικὰς παραδόσεις. Νὰ μὴν περιφρονεῖ ἀναφανδὸν ὅ,τι παλαιόν, ὅ,τι ἐγχώριον, ὅ,τι Ἑλληνικόν. Νὰ καταπολεμηθεῖ ὁ ξενισμὸς, ὁ πιθηκισμὸς, ὁ φραγκισμὸς. Νὰ μὴν νοθεύονται τὰ θρησκευτικὰ καὶ τὰ οἰκογενειακὰ ἔθια... Νὰ μὴν χάσκωμεν πρὸς τὰ ξένα...».

Ποῦ νὰ ἐβλέπε ὁ γέροντας τοῦ Γένους τὰ σημερινὰ μασκαριλίκια τῆς Παιδείας μας. Δὲν θὰ ἔγραφε γιὰ «συστηματικὴ περιφρόνησιν τῆς θρησκείας», ἀλλὰ γιὰ διωγμὸ καὶ διαπόμπευση τῆς πίστεως.



**Κ**άποτε ἓνας ἅγιος Γέροντας παρακαλοῦσε νυχτα καὶ μέρα τὸν Θεὸ, γονατιστός, νὰ τοῦ φανερώσῃ πῶς ἐνεργοῦν ἐναντίον τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ δαίμονες.

Ὁ Κύριος τοῦ ἔδειξε σημεῖο ὅτι δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ ζητεῖ τέτοιο πρᾶγμα. Ὁ Γέροντας ὁμως παρακαλοῦσε τὸν Κύριο μὲ ἐπιμονὴ καὶ ἔλεγε:

«Κύριέ μου, κάνε μου αὐτὴ τὴν χάρη καὶ ὡς Παντοδύναμος ποῦ εἶσαι φύλαξέ με, ὥστε νὰ μὴ μοῦ δημιουργήσουν κανένα κίνδυνο».

Πράγματι ὁ Θεὸς δέχθηκε τὴν προσευχὴ του, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ νὰ ὠφεληθῇ περισσότερο καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν ἔκανε νὰ δῇ τοὺς δαίμονες μὲ τὰ ἴδια του τὰ μάτια.

Τί εἶδε τότε: Εἶδε νὰ εἶναι τόσο μεγάλο τὸ μῖσος τῶν δαιμόνων, νὰ περιτριγυρίζουν τὸν ἄνθρωπο, νὰ τρίζουν ἀπὸ φθόνον τὰ δόντια τους ἐναντίον του, ἀλλὰ Ἄγγελος Κυρίου νὰ τοὺς ἐπιπλήττη καὶ νὰ προφυλάσῃ τὸν ἄνθρωπο.

**Ἀπὸ τὸν «Εὐεργετινὸ» (τόμ. Γ')**

## Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἱερώνυμος στὴ Σπήλαια τῆς Βηθλεέμ...

Περιοδικό «Ο ΣΩΤΗΡ», Τεύχ. 2057.



**Ἦ**ταν ἡ νύχτα τῶν Χριστουγέννων. Ἐνας ἅγιος καὶ σοφὸς ἀσκητὴς προσεύχεται ἀπὸ ὥρα γονατιστὸς μέσα στὸ μικρὸ, ἅγιο Σπήλαιο, στὴ Βηθλεέμ. Στὸ ἴδιο σπήλαιο ποὺ

πρὶν ἀπὸ περίπου 400 χρόνια εἶχε φιλοξενήσει τὸν νεογέννητο Χριστό μας. Ὁ ἀσκητὴς δὲν εἶναι ἄλλος ἀπὸ τὸν μεγάλο Πατέρα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, τὸν ἅγιο Ἱερώνυμο (+420), ποὺ κατέγραψε καὶ τὰ ὅσα συνέβησαν ἐκεῖ.

Ἐκεῖνη τὴ νύχτα ὁ Ὅσιος εἶχε ἀφήσει τὸ ἀσκητήριό του, ποὺ ἦταν κοντὰ στὸ ἅγιο Σπήλαιο, καὶ εἶχε ἀποφασίσει νὰ τὴν περάσει ξάγρυπνος καὶ προσευχόμενος μπροστὰ στὴν ἁγία Φάτνη.

Ἡ καρδιά του ἦταν γεμάτη εὐγνωμοσύνη γιὰ τὴ μεγάλη δωρεὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ: νὰ ἔλθει ὁ Ἰδιος στὴ γῆ, νὰ γίνει ἄνθρωπος, γιὰ νὰ μᾶς γλυτώσει ἀπὸ τὴ δουλεία τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ἀπὸ τὴν τυραννία τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ τὰ νύχια τοῦ θανάτου!

Ἀπόλυτη σιωπὴ ἐπικρατοῦσε μέσα στὴ νύχτα στὸν ἱερὸ χῶρο... Ἐαφνικὰ ἀκούστηκε νὰ προφέρει τὸ ὄνομά του μὴ γλυκιὰ φωνή:

-Ἱερώνυμε!

Ἐαφνιάστηκε ὁ Ὅσιος... Κοίταξε παραξενεμένος γύρω του... Τίποτε... Δὲν ὑπῆρχε κανεὶς.

-Ἱερώνυμε! Ξανακούστηκε ἡ φωνή...

Ναί! Ἐρχόταν ἀπὸ τὴν ἁγία Φάτνη... καὶ ἔκανε τὴν καρδιά του νὰ τρέμει συγκλονισμένη.

-Ἱερώνυμε, τί δῶρο θὰ Μοῦ κάνεις ἀπόψε στὴ γιορτὴ Μου;

Ἦταν πράγματι ἡ γλυκιὰ φωνὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

Ἐέσπασε σὲ λυγμοὺς ὁ ἅγιος:

-ὦ Κύριε, τὸ ξέρεις ὅτι γιὰ Σένα τὰ ἄφησα ὅλα: τὸ παλάτι τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, τὰ μεγαλεῖα τῆς Ρώμης, τὶς ἀνέσεις. Ἡ καρδιά μου, ἡ σκέψη μου, ὅλα σὲ Σένα εἶναι στραμμένα! Τί ἄλλο μπορῶ νὰ Σοῦ προσφέρω; Δὲν ἔχω τίποτε!

-Καὶ ὅμως, Ἱερώνυμε, ἔχεις κάτι ἀκόμα ποὺ μπορεῖς καὶ πρέπει νὰ μοῦ τὸ προσφέρεις... Αὐτὸ θὰ Μὲ εὐχαριστήσῃ πιὸ πολὺ ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα, καὶ αὐτὸ θέλω...

Ἔπεσε σὲ συλλογὴ ὁ Ὅσιος... Πέρασαν λίγα λεπτὰ καὶ μετὰ τόλμησε νὰ ψελλίσει:

-Κύριε, δὲν βρίσκω κάτι... Πές μου, τί θὰ μποροῦσα ἀκόμη νὰ Σοῦ προσφέρω καὶ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ τὸ σκεφτώ;

Μεσολάβησε μικρὸ διάστημα σιγῆς καὶ ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ξανακούστηκε:

-Ἱερώνυμε, τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου θέλω. Δῶσε μου τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου!

-Τὶς ἁμαρτίες μου; Τί νὰ τὶς κάνεις, Κύριε, τὶς ἁμαρτίες μου;

-Θέλω τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου γιὰ νὰ σοῦ τὶς συγχωρήσω, ἀφοῦ γι' αὐτὸ ἦρθα στὸν κόσμο, ἀπάντησε ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἐπικράτησε βαθιὰ σιωπὴ.

Συγκλονισμένος ὁ ἅγιος Ἱερώνυμος ἄφησε τὰ δάκρυά του, δάκρυα εὐγνωμοσύνης, νὰ πλημμυρίζουν τὸν ἱερὸ χῶρο ὅλη τὴ νύχτα.

Ἄφησε καὶ σὲ μᾶς τὴν ἔμπρακτη παραγγελία νὰ μὴ λησιμονοῦμε κάθε Χριστοῦγεννα τὸ ὠραιότερο δῶρο πρὸς τὸν Σωτήρα μας, τὴ μετάνοιά μας γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ καλύτερος ἑορτασμὸς τῆς μεγάλης ἑορτῆς...

**Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε.**

**Χριστὸς ἐξ Οὐρανῶν ἀπαντήσατε.**

**Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς ὑψώθητε.**

**Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ, καὶ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ ἀνυμνήσατε λαοί· ὅτι δεδόξασται.**



**Π**ρέπει κατὰ τὸν ἀγῶνα νὰ ἐπικαλοῦνται οἱ ἀγωνιστὲς καὶ τὴν θεία βοήθεια, λέγοντες, πάλιν, μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς Παῖδες πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ: «Κύριε, βαδίζουμε ὀπίσω Σου τώρα μὲ ὅλη μας τὴν καρδιά, καὶ Σε φοβούμεθα καὶ ζητοῦμε τὸ πρόσωπό Σου· μὴ μᾶς ἐντροπιάσῃς, ἀλλὰ δέξου μας μὲ ἐπιείκεια καὶ σῶσε μας, κατὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῆς εὐσπλαχνίας σου καὶ τῶν θαυμάτων σου· δόξασε τὸ ὄνομά Σου, Κύριε, καὶ ἂς ἐντραποῦν ὅσοι κακομεταχειρίζονται τοὺς δούλους Σου· εἴθε νὰ καταισχυνοῦν μαζὶ μὲ κάθε δυναστεία τους καὶ νὰ συντριβῇ ἡ δύναμή τους. Ἄς μάθουν ὅτι σὺ εἶσαι Κύριος, ὁ μόνος ἀληθινὸς Θεὸς καὶ δοξασμένος σ' ὀλόκληρη τὴν οἰκουμένη».

Καὶ ἐὰν ὁ τύραννος γίνῃ ἔξω φρενῶν καὶ πυρακτώσῃ ἐπτά φορὲς ἰσχυρότερα τὸ καμίνι τῶν ἡδονῶν, ἂς ἔχουν θάρρος ὅσοι ἐστήριξαν τὶς ἐλπίδες τους στὸν Κύριο. Διότι τὸ καμίνι θὰ μεταβληθῇ ἐντὸς ὀλίγου σὲ δροσιά, καὶ ὁ τύραννος, τὸν ὁποῖον παλαιότερα εἶχαν φοβηθῇ, αὐτὸς ἀπ' ἐδῶ καὶ ἐμπρὸς καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν σκιά τους θὰ τρομάξῃ, ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς βοήθειας ποὺ τοὺς ἐδόθη ἀπὸ ὑψηλά.

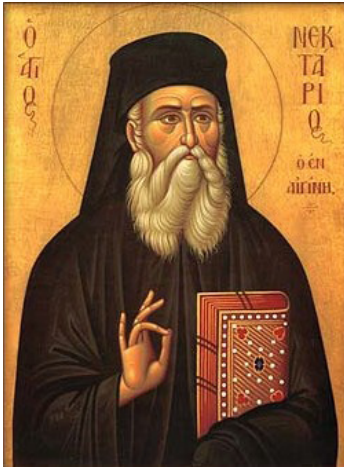
**Ἅγιος Ἐφραίμ ὁ Σύρος**

## THE INVIOABILITY OF FREE WILL

By St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, from "ΠΕΡΙ ΕΠΙΜΕΛΕΙΑΣ ΨΥΧΗΣ," Athos Editions, pp. 25-32.

*If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.*

[Mt 16:24]



**H**uman free will is sacred. This saying demonstrates the profundity of our moral freedom. The Savior invites people to follow Him and then leaves us free to decide this most important question for ourselves: to follow Him or turn against the way of God. He came for our salvation but does not encroach on our free will. He invites us to take an active part in our

salvation, but does not violate our free will in the slightest. If people were not free and self-determining beings, we would never have deserved such great respect, we would never have been accorded such great honor, that is to work with Christ the Savior for our own salvation; nor, of course, would it have been left to our personal inclination, but rather we would have been led to salvation as passive and inert creatures and would have simply accepted the effect of divine grace, which would have worked exclusively for our redemption. Truly, this is how respected and inviolate God desires our moral freedom to be; how imperious He wants our free will to be!

A study of the history of the redemption of humankind reveals the Son of God, Who became a person in order to save all of us, treading the path to His voluntary passion, bearing the sin of the world, healing our wounds, fulfilling the great mystery of divine dispensation, reconciling us with God and yet in no way infringing our free will. There you are! The gate of Paradise, which had been shut, was opened; the fiery sword which guarded the entrance was removed and the voice of the Lord invited excluded humanity to enter thereby into a place of peace and quiet. However, we were left free to enter or not, as we choose.

This freedom, that is to act by choice and to follow His laws, not influenced even by God Himself, demonstrates the absolute nature of our free will, which derives from our moral freedom, our great value, and the high position we occupy in the creation. What great honor is rendered to us by the fact that our free will is inviolate. At the same time, with what clarity are we taught our responsibilities: that we should respect our free will; have fervent zeal; and not allow,

under any circumstances, our free will to be enslaved and our moral freedom to become dependent on humiliating passions and desires.

Our moral freedom obliges us to make provision for our salvation, because otherwise we shall be lost. The formal recognition of our moral freedom by the Savior Himself teaches us that our salvation will be achieved solely by the absolute action of God's grace, but also by our own consent and simultaneous action.

Concerning this necessity, let us see what the wise Fathers of the Church have to say. St. Chrysostom says: *Even though grace is grace, it saves only those who desire to be.* St. Gregory the Theologian stresses that: *Our consent is necessary; but we shall be saved by God.* St. Clement the Alexandrian adds: *God inspires the souls that desire; but if their readiness abandons them, then the very grace which has been given them by God will be denied them.* In addition, St. Justin concludes: *God did, indeed, make people without their consent, but is unable to save them against their will.* Thus, we are expressly and clearly taught that there are two factors in our salvation: (a) the free desire of the human will and (b) the grace of God.

The prime agent in the work of our salvation is indeed the grace of God, because Christ the Savior came as Light to those who were in the dark and shed the light of His Grace on those *dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death.* He sought the lost sheep, called back those who had strayed, spoke secretly to people's hearts and showed us the way to salvation. It is the grace of God which perfects and saves, yet our own will should not be accounted of any less importance. We should regard it as the outstanding gem in the crown of our salvation, since it is the main lever that shifts our outlook that has been rendered inert by sin.

Our will is what urges our footsteps to follow the Savior, this is what strengthens our hearts to show self-denial, this is what bears the cross on the shoulder. Because, although grace invites us, dispels the gloom and illumines the dark places, it is possible nevertheless, due to the carelessness and slothfulness, the contamination and spiritual idleness of the carnal view of life, for our free will to feign deafness, to close its eyes, to remain in darkness and to proceed in exactly the opposite direction: the direction towards perdition. In other words, our free will can act in total contradiction to what it actually wants. Therefore, it is necessary for us truly to want our salvation, to seek it.

We have to want to hear, in order to hearken to the voice of Him Who is calling us. We need to want to see in order to open our eyes to the brilliant, abundant light. We have to want to move, to follow the Savior, to refuse to be the people we once were, with our passions and desires, in order to take the cross upon our shoulders. We must follow the *strait and circumscribed road* so that we may pass through the narrow gate of Paradise.

Our own will has to come first, because this is required by the terms with which the Savior calls those who are of a mind to follow Him. Without this disposition, it would be impossible to fulfill the terms offered, and thus salvation itself would be beyond us. On the one hand, grace is granted, but our will and concurrence are necessary if we are to receive it. Even more so, what is required is self-denial, self-sacrifice, a stable outlook which will not allow for any deviation from the path of constantly following the voice of the Savior, Who calls and is the voice of grace and of truth. If the grace of God which comes to us saved people by itself, the call would be entirely superfluous, as would be the terms and conditions. Though the grace of God is infinite, it does not save by itself, because it does not want to violate our free will.

Were it not that our consent is a vital factor in our salvation, God, in His infinite love for humankind, would, of course, save everyone, but without their consent. Yet, with very precise terms, He did indeed call us who are enslaved to our sentiments and who tend towards sin. He offered salvation, but demanded that we conform, because this was required by a great and important provision: the stipulation that we be reborn and renewed in Jesus Christ our Savior. Because in our former state, we could not enter the Kingdom of God, since we would be corrupted by sin. Therefore, we had to cast off this person, with its desires and passions and put on a new person, who had been reborn, in the awareness that they were made by God in *His image*.

Nevertheless, in order to cast off the old person, we first have to want to do so. So our cooperation in the task of our perfection is exceptionally important. Our Saviour has told us that in His Father's house, *there are many rooms*. The people who dwell therein are those who have lived their lives on earth in an appropriate manner. Our life-style here, therefore, defines our position in Paradise. St. Gregory Nazianzos has this to say on the matter: *Just as there are various, separate ways of living, so there are "many rooms with God", which are allocated depending on each person's worth. One of us might have one virtue, another have them all. Given this, let each of us, from now on, cease from wandering off wherever the mood takes us and instead follow Him Who guides us well and directs us along the narrow path, in order to bring us to the broad highway of blessedness.*

So we have to work for our salvation, otherwise we run the ultimate risk of perdition, since there is nothing in common between light and darkness, any more than there is between good and evil. Sin, which has corrupted us, is darkness and the great evil, because it conflicts with the will of God. Since we have the privilege of moral freedom, any misconduct on our part is counted as a sin that sets us apart from God. The greater the good of moral freedom, the greater also are the responsibilities this entails. People who are morally free should become holy. This is why, in the Old and New Testa-

ments God gives commands telling us: *Become holy, as I am holy*. (Lev 20:7, 26 and I Pet, 1:16).

How can people who are loathsome, people who are worthy of aversion have any sort of communion with God? Moreover, the Savior gives us a similar commandment when He says: *You, too, should be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect* (Mt 5:28), because His children should be like the Father Who has called them. God, then, wants us to be holy and perfect, because only those who are holy and perfect are really the children of our Father in heaven and they alone have the right to invoke His gifts, taking courage precisely from the love of a child for its Father.

They alone will inherit the kingdom of heaven. St. Paul wrote about all of this in his epistle to the Corinthians: *Do not you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: no fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, sodomites, thieves, drunkards, nor those given to cursing, avarice and peculation (embezzlement, Ed.) will inherit the kingdom of God.* (I Cor 6:10). This is why the Savior calls upon us to deny ourselves, to take up the cross on our shoulders and follow Him. *If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.* (Mt 16:24). He recognizes our moral freedom and our free will, and leaves our salvation in their care. So that **people who seek their salvation will have to work to acquire it, otherwise they will be deprived of it.** Otherwise, through their carelessness and lack of concern, they will be preparing themselves for the loss of eternal life and will inherit eternal hell, from which I pray that God will spare us all. Amen.



Notice the way in which Zacchaeus confessed his sin. He did not say: "Lord, I am a sinful man!", or "Avarice is my sickness!" No; but, showing the fruits of repentance, he thus confessed his sin and his sickness: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." Is not this a clear confession that riches are his passion? "And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." Is not this a clear confession that his riches were acquired in a sinful manner? He did not, before this, say to the Lord: "I am a sinner, and I repent." He confessed this silently to the Lord in his heart, and the Lord silently received his confession and repentance.

It is of more importance to the Lord that a man acknowledge and confess his sickness and cry for help in his heart than with this tongue, for the tongue is capable of deception, but the heart is not.

**St. Nikolai Velimirovich**

## OUR STRUGGLE WITH PASSIONS

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "The Path to Salvation," translated by Heiromonk Seraphim (Rose) and the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, published by the Holy Monastery of St. Paisius, Arizona.

### War with the Passions and Lusts



Following the order is a powerful means of destroying passionateness, purifying and correcting ourselves. Observing it consciously and freely, a person destroys passionateness by the very act of alienating it, of not giving it any food, or by placing a yoke upon it of the prescribed rules for the entire breadth of his powers and activities. The stifled pas-

sions then quiet down, like a candle under a glass. Just the same, we must not limit ourselves to this activity alone. Rules are given in order to heal our corrupted powers which are permeated with passionateness. The same power that lies in evil must now work for good. Therefore it is impossible not to meet with evil at the beginning of good works, during the first movement of our powers. If it is impossible to be both good and evil, and if we are expected to be only good without any evil taint, then we must cast out evil from every work, so that we can begin to do only good. So in uninterrupted connection with a direct and appropriate occupation of the powers, there must always be an indirect activity aimed at casting out evil and passionateness that rise up, otherwise known as war with the passions and lusts.

Establishing ourselves in and growing accustomed to the prescribed ascetic labors is achieved only through struggle and warfare, by victory over temptations. Who has ever become a faster without struggling against his stomach, or acquired sincere child-like faith without conquering self-opinion and proud-mindedness? And this does not apply to one thing only, but to the whole array of related activities, from inner effluences to the final departure from the world. Everywhere is struggle; therefore the prescribed rule, being the renewer of the powers and nature, is also the field of constant spiritual warfare. Conquer the unnatural in your powers, and they will become natural; ward off and cut off evil, and you will see the good. Asceticism is ceaseless triumph.

### Freely Choosing and Loving Good Is a Powerful Weapon

The possibility and basis for all inner victories is first the victory over ourselves—in the breaking of our will and dedicating ourselves to God, with inimical denial of every-

thing sinful. At this time is born the dislike for passionate-ness, hatred, and aversion, which is itself a spiritual fighting strength and alone comprises the entire army. Where this is not present, the battle is already in the hands of the enemy; but where it is present, we often win without a struggle. From this we can see that a departure point for appropriate activity is our inner [man]; it is the departure point of warfare, only from another side. When consciousness and free will switch to the side of good and come to love it, they vanquish through hatred all evil and passionateness, especially their own. In this consists the change, or the break.

Therefore the powers that war with passions are also the intellect or spirit—the seat of consciousness and freedom—the spirit being upheld and strengthened by grace. Through it, healing power reaches the powers through ascetic labors; through it, the vanquishing Spirit passes through the passions to battle. And vice versa: When passions attack, they directly storm the mind or spirit, that is, the seat of consciousness and freedom. These reside in our inner sanctuary, at which the enemy shoots his arrows, by way of the passions, from soul-related qualities and fleshliness as if from an ambush. And as long as the consciousness and freedom are whole, that is, as long as they are on the side of good, then no matter how fierce the attack, the victory is ours.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that all the power for victory comes from us—it only shows what comes out of us. The point of fortification for battle is our renewed spirit, and the triumphant, vanquishing power over the passions is grace. It builds one thing in us and destroys another, but again through the spirit, or consciousness and free will. The struggler relinquishes himself to God crying out, complaining about his enemies and hating them, and God in him and through him casts them out and vanquishes them. *Be of good cheer*, said the Lord, *for I have overcome the world.* (Jn 16:33). *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*, (Phil 4:13) confesses the Apostle, precisely because without Him we can do nothing. Whoever wants to triumph by himself will undoubtedly fall into the same passion that he fights, or at least into some secondary passion. Having given himself to God, he literally goes from nothing to victory. Again, this does not negate our own opposition, but only shows that even with all our opposition, success or victory can never be our own; and if it comes, it is always from God. Therefore oppose and struggle against the passions as much as you can, but do not fail to lay all your sorrows on the living God, Who says: *I am with you in an evil day—do not be afraid.*

### Reviewing Our Enemies to Know the Suitable Methods on Uprooting Passions

How should a man now act, or in general what methods are suitable for uprooting passions? In order to determine this, we must review all of our enemies, as well as what

forms they take and how they act. This itself will determine the nature of our struggle with them. Success in battle depends greatly on our vision of its formation.

There is no such thing as peaceful progress in goodness, because our passions are still alive and they are greatly fortified by this present vain, visible world, and by the dark forces that rule it. These are the sources of the movements that war against goodness in us.

Man is totally passionate until he converts. At conversion the spirit, being filled with zeal, is pure. But the soul and the body remain passionate. When the cleansing and healing has begun, the soul and body resist and fight for their lives against the spirit that persecutes them. These attacks usually come through soul-related and bodily powers; they strike at the spirit, for through it are these powers estranged. But sometimes there are movements aimed directly at the spirit. These are the fiery arrows that the enemy shoots from his physical-emotional/psychological ambush at the prisoner escaping from his tyranny. Regardless of the fact that there is a part of us which is healed and whole, the attacks of sin and passions are obvious and felt throughout our existence.

**(1) In the body:** The source of passions is pleasing of the flesh, or comforting the flesh, with which the whirlwind of our bodily life and sensual delight are directly linked. Wherever they are present there is sexual lust, gluttony, love of pleasure, sloth, comfort, adulterous feelings, loquacity, absent-mindedness, restlessness, willfulness in everything, unseemly laughter, idle talk, sleepiness, day-dreaming, craving the pleasant and all manner of pleasing the flesh in lust.

**(2) In soul:** **a) In the mental part**—opinion, exclusive belief in one's own intellect, criticism, attacking the mind of God, doubts, puffing up and arrogance, curiosity, mental plundering, straying thoughts. **b) In the desirous part**—self-will, unsubmitiveness, love of authority, cruelty, opportunism, self-reliance, covetousness, ungratefulness, possessiveness, extortion. **c) In the sensual part**—passions that shatter peace and tranquility of heart, or various kinds of pleasantness and unpleasantness: wrath, envy, hatred, anger, revenge, judgment, contempt, vainglory, ambition, pride, boredom, sadness, sorrow, depression, joy, cheerfulness, fears, hopes, expectations.

### The Source of Passions of Soul and Body Is Self-Love

The source of all these passions of soul and body is self-love or egotism which, although conquered or refused at first, attacks often, and, clothed in one passion or another, wages war against the spirit. This residual egotism together with the whole army of passions comprises the now-decaying fleshly man and is that very other *law in my members* (Rom 7:23), of which the Apostle speaks, and from which something always attacks that is contrary to the spirit's desires.

The Holy Fathers, in order not to distract the attention of the spiritual warrior-Christian, strove to trace all the passions to their beginnings, in order to discern what the warrior should attack. With this goal, they place three things close to the effluence of egotism: pleasure, covetousness and pride; after these are five more passions issuing from them. Limiting it to this, the Holy Fathers describe the attacks of these passions and show how to war with them. Whoever has cut off pleasure by self-directed wrath, covetousness with unacquisitiveness, and pride with humility has conquered egotism, for it is easier to vanquish it by destroying its children than by attacking it itself.



If you wish, search out a mediator and a physician and a good counselor and let them show you: how as a good counselor they will apply their counsel on the ways of repentance; how as a physician, they will give you the appropriate medicine for every wound; how they will be a mediator through prayer; and how he has communication with God and will stand before Him face to face on your behalf to gain the mercy of the Divine.

Therefore, if you find a flatterer or a slave of the belly do not strive to make him your counselor and ally lest he come around to your will and teach you not those things that are pleasing to God but those that you will accept, and thus you remain again the enemy of God and unreconciled with Him.

Accept neither an inexperienced physician who will plunge you into despair with his great abruptness and improper incisions and cauteries, nor one who, in his excessive sympathy, will leave you ill while you think you are cured and, worst of all, what you do not expect, will surrender you to eternal hell. For this hell is brought about when, in this life, the soul's illness is not cured [never attains illumination] but continues [unillumined in darkness] until it dies with us. *For not all who are of Israel are Israelites* (Rom 9:6), but those with the name who also know the power of the name and are minds [a nous] that see [theoria] God. Likewise not all who are called Christians are really Christians. *Not everyone, who saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, Christ says, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father Which is in heaven, and He says, just as "many will say to Me on that day...in Thy name we cast out demons... and then I will profess to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.* (Mt 7:21-23).

**St. Symeon the New Theologian**



## ON LIES

By Abba Dorotheos, from "Practical Teaching on the Christian Life," translated by Constantine Scouteris, Athens (2004).



Brethren, I want to remind you of a few things about falsehood. I see that you are not careful about holding your tongue and through that, we are easily led astray. You see, my brothers, as I always tell you, a habit can tend towards good or towards evil. We therefore need great vigilance so that we are not cheated by lies. No-one who lies becomes united with God. The lie is alien to God. It is written that, *Falsehood is from the evil one*, and also that *He is a liar and the father of lies*. (In 8:44).

You see he calls the devil the *father of lies*, while God is the truth. He himself said, *I am the way, the truth and the life* (Jn 14:6).

See what we are separating

ourselves from and what we attach ourselves to through lies, clearly the devil. Therefore, if we really want to be saved, we are obliged to love the truth, with all our strength and concern, guarding ourselves from all falsehood, so that we are not separated from truth and from life.

There are three different kinds of lies. Lying in thinking, lying verbally and lying through one's own way of life. The person who lies in his thinking is open to suspicions. When he sees someone talking with his brother, he is suspicious and says, "They are talking about me!" If they happen to stop talking, he is still suspicious, suspecting that they stopped because of him. If someone says one word to him, he suspects that he said it to bother him. Simply he is suspicious of his neighbor in everything, saying, "He did that because of me. He said that or did that because of me." This is the person who lies in his understanding. Nothing he says is true, but all is based on suspicion. From this comes curiosity, slander, eavesdropping, quarrelling and condemnation.

It sometimes happens that he suspects something and it turns out to be true. On account of this, he maintains that he wants to correct himself, so he is always curious thinking

that, "If someone speaks against me, I will see what is the mistake he is accusing me of, and thus I can correct myself". First of all, this principle is from the devil, since he started with lies. That is to say, he suspected what he did not know. How is it possible for an evil tree to produce good fruits? If this person really wanted to correct himself, when a brother says to him, "Don't do that!" or "Why did you do that?" he should not be distressed, but make a bow and thank him. Then he will be corrected. If God sees that this is his intention, He will never leave him in error, but will always send him a person who can correct him. However, to say that, "I shall believe my suspicions in order to 'correct myself' and I shall eavesdrops and be curious about everything," this is a justification from the devil to destroy him.

When I was present in the coenobium, I was tempted to find out about the inner disposition of someone through his gestures. Just such a thing happened to me. I was once standing still when a woman passed in front of me carrying a pitcher. I do not know how I was carried away and stared into her eyes. Immediately, my thoughts told me that she was a prostitute. As I had told myself that, I was greatly troubled and I referred the whole matter to the elder, Abba John, in this way, "Master, if without wanting to, I see someone's gesture and my thoughts tell me his inner disposition, what should I do?" The elder answered me thus, "What! Surely, it happens that a person may have a natural defect and through inner struggle manage to overcome it! It is impossible to learn the state of a person's soul from that. Therefore never trust your suspicions for even a straight rule can be made crooked by a crooked one. Suspicions are not true and harm us." From that time on, even if my mind told me that the sun was the sun or that darkness was darkness, I would not believe it. Nothing is graver than suspicions. They are so harmful that if we keep them for a long time, they begin to convince us that we clearly see things that do not exist and have never happened.

I will tell you a wonderful thing that I witnessed when I was in the coenobium. There we had a brother much troubled by this passion. He was so easily persuaded by his own suspicions that he was certain that all of his suspicions were just as his thoughts dictated to him, and it could not possibly be otherwise. As time passed the evil progressed and the devil had misled him so much that he once went into the garden to spy. He always eavesdropped and pried. He thought he saw one of the brothers stealing figs and eating them. It was Friday and not yet the second hour. Having persuaded himself that what he saw was a reality, he left in silence and watched again during the Eucharist gathering, to see what the same brother would do about Holy Communion. When he saw the brother washing his hands to enter and take Communion, he ran and said to the Abba,

“Look, at that brother who is going to take Communion with the other brothers. Order that It not be given to him. I saw him stealing figs from the garden this morning and eating them.”

Meanwhile, this brother entered into the holy offering with great compunction. He was one of the devout. When the Abba saw him, he called him, before he reached the priest who was distributing Holy Communion. He took him aside and said to him, “Tell me my brother what you have done today?” The brother was surprised and said, “Where, master?” The Abba said, “In the garden when you went there this morning, what did you do there?” The surprised brother said again to him, “Father, I was in neither the garden, nor indeed the monastery, this morning, for I have only just come back from the road. Immediately after the dismissal of the vigil the steward (the monk in charge of the financial affairs of the monastery) sent me on an errand far away.”

The errand that he referred to was many miles away and he arrived just in time for the Eucharist. The Abba called the steward and asked him “Where did you send this brother?” He confirmed what the brother had already said, namely that he sent him to that particular town. He made a bow to the Abba saying, “Forgive me, father for not sending him to you to get your blessing. It was after the vigil and you were resting.”

When the Abba heard all this, he gave them both his blessing and allowed them to take Communion. Then he called the other brother who had the suspicions and reprimanded him, banning him from Holy Communion. Not only that but he gathered all the brothers after the service and told them what happened, in tears. He marked out that brother, in front of everyone. He had three reasons for doing so: Firstly, to shame the devil and make an example of the sower of suspicion. Secondly, to allow the brother’s sin to be forgiven through this dishonor and to obtain God’s help for his advancement. Thirdly, to ensure that the brothers never trusted their own suspicions. He gave much advice about this to us and to the brother concerned saying that, “There is nothing more harmful than suspicion,” and he proved that by this incident.

The fathers said many similar things to protect us from the harm that suspicion does to us. Therefore, brethren, let us try not to trust our suspicions, with all our strength. For there is nothing that distances a person from taking care of his own sins, or from always being curious about what does not concern him, more than this. No good comes of it, rather manifold troubles and affliction come of it. They leave a person no time to acquire fear of God. Therefore, if suspicions are sown in us through our own evil, let us immediately transform them into good thoughts. Thus, we will not harm ourselves. Suspicions are evil and they

never allow the soul to find peace. This is falsehood of the understanding.

As for the liar in words, this is the person who, let us say, is too lazy to get up for the vigil, yet does not say, “Forgive me because I was too lazy to get up.” Instead, he says, “I had a fever. I was faint and I couldn’t get up. I didn’t have the strength.” He says ten lying words to avoid making a bow and humbling himself. If someone blames him for something, he sighs and tries to change his words in such a way, so as to refute the person who blames. Likewise, if he happens to quarrel with his brother, he does not stop justifying himself. Instead he maintains... “But you have,” or “But you did that,” or “I didn’t say that, he did.” He says all that, so that he should not have to humble himself. Also, if he happens to want something, he does not come to the point and say, “I like this, I want it” but he persists and says in a round-about way, “I suffer this and I need this” or “they told me to do that” and many other lies so as to fulfill his will.

Every sin arises from the desire for pleasure, avarice or ambition. Lying has its roots in three vices. Either from not blaming and humiliating oneself, or for some pleasure or for gain. He does not cease from turning this way and says anything to achieve his purpose. This person is never trusted, for even if he says a true word no one believes him. Even when he speaks the truth, the others are in doubt.

Sometimes there is a great need. In that case, if one does not hide this, it causes great trouble and sorrow. When a person finds himself in such circumstances and there is no alternative, he can, as I said, alter his words so as not to become more sorrowful, troubled and endangered. As Abba Alonios said to Abba Agathon, “Suppose two men killed someone in front of you and one of them escapes to your cell. The magistrate is looking for him and asks you saying, ‘Did a murder take place in front of you?’ If you do not accommodate things you will deliver that man to death.”

Even in this case where there is great necessity a person must not be without care but he must repent and in tears before God, he must consider this as a time of temptation. He must not use this very often but as one possibility amongst many others. It is like an antidote for poison or like the purgative, which if taken continuously is harmful, but if taken once a year, when it is necessary, is beneficial. One must face the peculiar situation in a similar way so that if it is necessary, as I said, to adapt the truth, to make that one occasion amongst a great many and only when it is necessary. He must do this rarely and with the fear of God, showing to them his intention and the need, and then God will protect him because even this harms the soul.

Thus, we have discussed the liar in thought and the liar in word but we should also talk about the person that lies in his whole life.

The person that lies in his whole life is the one who, while in reality is dissolute, feigns temperance, and being greedy, he speaks about charity and praises sympathy. He is proud but admires humility. Even then, he admires it, without wanting to praise it. He should, with humility, firstly confess his own weakness saying, “Woe is me, wretched one, for I have done nothing good in my life.” After confessing his own weakness, he should then have admired and praised the virtue. He praises it without having the intention of avoiding scandalizing others because in that case he would have thought as follows: “Indeed I am wretched and subject to passions. Why should I scandalize someone else? Why should I harm another soul and bring another burden on myself?” With that thought, even if he had sinned, he would have touched upon good. It is a characteristic of humility to accuse yourself and a characteristic of sympathy to take care of your neighbor.

However, this person does not admire virtue for the reasons I have mentioned, but rather, either to cover his own shame by giving the impression that he himself has this virtue or often to harm and mislead someone. No evil, no heresy, not even the devil himself can mislead someone unless it is transformed into virtue. The Apostle says, *Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.* (2 Cor 11:14). It is not strange then if his servants are transformed into the servants of righteousness. In like manner, the liar, either through fear of shame and humiliation or, as I said, because he wants to mislead and cheat someone talks about the virtues, praising and admiring them as if they were his own and he had experience of them. This is the person whose very life is a lie. This is not a simple person but a two-faced one. He has an internal and external face. His own life is two-faced and worthy of scorn.

Thus, we have said that lies come from the devil. We have also discussed truth and said that God is truth. Let us avoid falsehood, brethren, so as to be delivered from the evil one and let us struggle to obtain the truth so that we may be united with Him, Who said, *I am the truth.* (Jn 14:6). Let God make us worthy of his own truth.

To Him the glory and dominion forever. Amen.



Prayer keeps the world alive and when prayer fails, the world will perish... “Nowadays,” perhaps you will say, “there are no more monks like that to pray for the whole world.” But I tell you that when there are no more men of prayer on earth, the world will come to an end and great disasters will befall. They have already started...

**St. Silouan the Athonite**

## WHY ARE YOU SORROWFUL?

By Elder Ephraim of Arizona.



Why are you sorrowful and glum while walking along the way of God? Those who have forgotten God, who have no hope in the living and eternal fountain of God, should grieve. But we,

who believe in the living God and whose hopes depend upon Him, ought to rejoice that we have such a Father in the heavens, Who loves us more than all fathers and mothers and Who takes infinite care to render us worthy of Him.

But, you say, we fall every moment! Yes, I do not deny it—but we know that our nature is from clay and that it desires the earth and seeks what is base, for *the mind of man is inclined to evil from his youth.* (cf. Gen 8:21). And we see within us a law which seeks to capture our free will, to subjugate it and *render it a slave of sin.* (cf. Rom 7:23).

In all this, however, our good intention triumphs. God has given us spiritual weapons to fight against every satanic attack: the glorious banner of the cross of hope—living hope in Him Who said, *I will never leave you nor forsake you* (cf. Heb 13:5)—hope in our Christ, who was hanged on the Cross, and all who look upon Him and hope in Him will not be put to shame. The all-immaculate Blood which was poured out on the Cross pardoned the sins of mankind and poured forth life. *Blessed is the man who hopes in Him.* (cf. Pss 33:8).

Take courage, my child; this grief of yours will turn into joy. This grief produces great good for you; it surrounds you as with a breastplate of iron, so that the evil darts of attachment to earthly things do not tear your mind away from the concern for heavenly things and for your immortal soul. Grief will succeed joy, and joy, grief, just as night follows day. This is how the Father of lights has established the path of those who are being saved. Just have patience and hope: engrave these in the depths of your heart—with these, all adversities will be faced. Cling to our sweet Jesus; cry out to Him in your afflictions. Entrust to Him the care of grievous things and He will do good to you, as to Hannah, the mother of the Prophet Samuel, who out of extreme grief because of her barrenness, fell down before the Lord and poured out her soul as if beside herself. And her petition did not fail. Who ever hoped in God and was put to shame?

Of course, this does not mean blameworthy hope but active hope—that is, hope along with spiritual works according to our strength; otherwise, it is not hope but mockery. Save us from such deceitful hope, O God.

## CHILDREN: THEIR JOYS AND THEIR DIFFICULTIES

Source: "Discourses 4, Family Life," published by the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian, Souroti, Thessaloniki.



**Q.:** I've noticed, Elder, that sometimes babies smile at the time of Divine Liturgy.

**A.:** They don't do that only at the Divine Liturgy. Babies are in constant contact with God, because they've got nothing to worry about. What did Christ say about little children? *Their angels in heaven continually gaze upon the face of my Father who is in heaven.* They're in touch with God and with their guardian angel, who's with them

all the time. They smile in their sleep sometimes, and at other times cry, because they see all sorts of things. Sometimes they see their guardian angels and play with them- the angels stroke them, tease them, shake their fists and they laugh. On other occasions they see some kind of temptation and cry.

**Q.:** Why does temptation come to babies?

**A.:** It helps them to feel the need to seek their mothers. If there wasn't this fear, they wouldn't need to seek the comfort of being cuddled by their mothers. God allows everything so that it'll turn out well.

**Q.:** Do they remember what they see as babies when they grow up?

**A.:** No, they forget. If a little child remembered the number of times it had seen its guardian angel, it might fall into pride. That's why, when it grows up, it forgets. God's wise in His doings.

**Q.:** Do they see these things after baptism?

**A.:** Of course after baptism.

**Q.:** Elder, is it all right for an unbaptized child to reverence relics?

**A.:** Why not? And they can be blessed with the holy relics. I saw a child today, it was like a little angel. I asked, "Where are your wings?" It didn't know what to say! At my hermitage, when spring comes and the trees are in blossom, I put sweets on the holm-oaks next to the gate in the fence and I tell the little boys who come: "Go on, boys, cut the sweets from the bushes, because if it rains they'll melt and spoil." A few of the more intelligent ones know that I've put them there and laugh. Others really believe that they've grown there and some others have to think about it. Little children need a bit of sunshine.

**Q.:** Did you put lots of sweets, Elder?

**A.:** Well, of course. What could I do? I don't give good sweets to grown-ups; I just give them *loukoumia*. When

people bring me nice sweets, I keep them for the kids at the School [*The Athoniada*]. "See, last night I planted sweets and chocolates and today they've come up! See that? The weather was good, the soil was well-turned because you'd dug it over well and they came up just like that. See what a flower garden I'll make for you. We'll never need to buy sweets and chocolates for kids. Why shouldn't we have our own produce?" (St. Paisios had planted sweets and chocolates in the freshly dug earth and put lilac blossoms on top to make it seem that they were flowering).

**Q.:** Elder, some pilgrims saw the chocolates you planted in the garden because the paper stood out against the soil. They didn't know what to make of it. "Some kid must have put them there," they said.

**A.:** Why didn't you tell them that a big kid put them there?

**Q.:** Elder, why does God give people a guardian angel, when He can protect us Himself?

**A.:** That's God looking after us especially carefully. The guardian angel is God's providence. And we're indebted to Him for that. The angels particularly protect little children. And you wouldn't believe how! There were two children once, playing in the street. One of them aimed at the other to hit him on the head with a stone. The other one didn't notice. At the last moment, apparently, his angel drew his attention to something else, he leapt up and got out of the way. And then there was this mother who went out into the fields with her baby. She breast-fed it, put it down in its cradle and went off to work. After a bit, she went to check and what did she see? The child was holding a snake and looking at it! When she'd suckled the child, some of the milk had stayed on its lips, the snake had gone to lick it off and the baby had grabbed hold of it. God looks after children.

**Q.:** Elder, in that case, why do so many children suffer from illnesses?

**A.:** God knows what's best for each of us and provides as necessary. He doesn't give people anything that's not going to benefit them. He sees that it's better for us to have some sort of defect, a disability instead of protecting us from them.



Live simply and without thinking too much, like a child with his father. Faith without too much thinking works wonders. The logical mind hinders the Grace of God and miracles. Practice patience without judging with the logical mind.

**St. Paisios the Athonite**

## THE NATIVITY AND BAPTISM / THEOPHANY OF CHRIST

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, "Empirical Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church, According to the Spoken Teaching of Father John Romanides," vol. 2 (text in quotes is directly from the lectures of Fr. John Romanides).

When we talk about the birth of Christ we are speaking of two births. One is the pre-eternal birth of the Word from the Father, according to the divine nature, and the other is the birth in time from the All-Holy Virgin, according to the human nature. This refers to Christ's two natures: the divine and the human: "The important thing is that this Word, before His birth in the flesh, is like the Father in every respect. He does not come from nothing. The Word has two births. One birth was before all ages and the other birth was in time, which is the birth as a man, the incarnation."

This theological fact is revelational and above all it is empirical, as the glorified flesh of Christ becomes a source of life for the members of the Church, particularly the saints. "It is not only the Old and New Testaments that clearly teach the fact that the Word, the Lord of Glory, Who is God by nature and co-essential (*homoousios*) with the Father, truly took flesh and was born in His own normal and separate humanity of the Virgin Mary—who is literally, really and truly the Theotokos or Mother of God. Thus He became man by nature, not just by indwelling, and, as the Word in flesh, He became co-essential with us through His humanity. This truth is clearly revealed to all who have reached glorification, from which they learn empirically that Christ is the Word, that He is God by nature and man by nature, and also by nature the source of glory. He passes on to His human nature the existence of the source of glory, by means of which the actual flesh of the Word becomes the source of our life and life-giving, because the Word Himself is incarnate, and on account of the union and exchange of natural properties between the divine and human natures of the Word."

In the Old Testament there was the tabernacle of witness, where the pot of manna, the tablets of the covenant and Aaron's rod were kept in the Holy of Holies. Now, in the New Covenant, the tabernacle is the flesh that He took from the All-Holy Virgin. "This is why the statement that *the Word became flesh and dwelt* (literally: "tabernacled") among

us (Jn 1:14) is so important. This dwelling is the tabernacle. God "tabernacled" among us. How? He became flesh and dwelt among us."

"The tabernacle of witness is the created form of the uncreated Temple, because the uncreated Temple is Christ Himself, the Word, this Angel of the Lord. For that reason Christ says, *I am in the Father, and the Father in Me* (Jn 14:10-11) and so on. That Christ is in the Father and the Father is in Christ means, in Hebrew terms, that Christ is the Temple of God. Therefore, we have the uncreated Temple, as we have the uncreated Law, which is Christ; and we have a created temple, which is the tabernacle of witness, which they later enclosed in Solomon's temple. This is why the created temple, the temple of Solomon, has been abolished and replaced by the created Temple, the human nature of Christ."

Christ as God-man is like God the Father and the Holy Spirit in every respect according to His divinity, and like man in every respect according to His human nature. The phrase that Christ is *the image of the invisible God* (Col



1:15), refers to His uncreated divine nature. "This is what the Apostle Paul says: *the image of the invisible God*' Christ, that is. When he says *image* he does not mean something created, because there cannot be a created image of God. It is different if we speak about an image of Christ; in that case we have an image of something created, because

Christ is man and we have an icon of Christ the man, not of Christ's divinity. But when we say that Christ is the image of God, as God is not incarnate, how can God have a created icon? He is the image of the invisible God as an uncreated reality, not as a created reality."

The incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity was in the pre-eternal plan of God, because through the union of the divine and human natures in the Person of the Word, the glorification of every human being could come about. From this perspective, the Theotokos was in God's pre-eternal plan. St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain wrote a specific text *About our Lady the Theotokos*, in which, by quoting the Fathers' words, he asserts that *All the intelligible and perceptible world came into being for this end, that is, on account of the Lady Theotokos, but the Lady Theotokos came into being on account of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

"The All-Holy Virgin is in the pre-eternal plan of God, as the *troparia* and the Fathers of the Church say. This is a matter of description. It is not a philosophical question

about whether or not the All-Holy Virgin is necessary for the incarnation. It is a fact that the All-Holy Mother of God is Ever-virgin. We cannot philosophize about something that is a fact and say that the incarnation could have come about even without the All-Holy Virgin, or from a Mother of God who was not a virgin.”

The All-Holy Virgin was the greatest gift of the creation and humanity to Christ. The successive purifications of her forebears, her own struggle and, most of all, the grace of God, made her worthy to become the Mother of the Son and Word of God. She experienced glorification in the Holy of Holies: “We know from the Tradition about the glorification of the All-Holy Virgin, who entered the Temple at three years old. She reached the Holy of Holies, which means that the All-Holy Virgin at three years of age had attained to the experience of glorification. She lived in the glory of God. She also beheld God from at least the age of three, and in this way she was made ready to be the Mother of God.”

Christ is co-essential (*homoousios*) with the Father according to His divine nature and co-essential with us according to His human nature. Some people in the early Church claimed that Christ was co-essential with the Father and with His Mother: “Christ is co-essential (*homoousios*) with His mother. That means that Christ is co-essential with us. He cannot be co-essential with His mother and His mother co-essential with us, without Christ being co-essential with us.”

The Church ruled at the Third Ecumenical Council that the All-Holy Virgin was to be called Theotokos, because she did not give birth to a mere man, but to the Word of God. The teaching about the Theotokos is therefore included in the infallible teaching of the Church.

The Theotokos has an important place in the Church: “In the Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church the whole catholic Church is present: Christ with the Theotokos, the Prophets, the Apostles and the saints.”

The faithful have a spiritual relationship with the Church. Anyone who loves Christ also loves the All-Holy Virgin, who assisted in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God and from whom Christ took human nature and glorified it. The relationship of the faithful with the All-Holy Virgin is not, therefore, simply sentimental but spiritual. The glory of the Theotokos is not a theoretical teaching, but empirical, as many saints have seen the glory of the Theotokos.

In any case, the human nature that was assumed by the Word and united immutably, inseparably, indivisibly and unconfusedly with the divine nature, was glorified “at the same time as it was assumed” in the womb of the Theotokos. Christ was not gradually perfected, as human beings are. Christ is God according to essence, whereas man is glorified according to participation. Also, according to the

Fathers of the Church, Christ brings about glorification: He is Himself the source of man’s glorification and does not “undergo” glorification. Christ is God and glorifies others, like the other Persons of the Holy Trinity, whereas man is glorified. Christ revealed this glorified human nature to human beings by stages.

“There is no question of Christ having passed through the stages of perfection, purification and illumination in order to reach glorification or *theoria*. There was no progress towards perfection in Christ, since He had glorification or *theoria* or participation in the union of uncreated glory from the very conception of His human nature in the womb of the All-Holy Virgin. He did not possess this by the grace of God, but naturally, seeing that He was God by nature and the actual hypostasis of the Word, Who was the only one of the Holy Trinity to become man by nature, uniting Himself with His own normal human nature, with all its natural properties, including the will and energy that are common to human nature in general. Christ gradually revealed the stages of perfection in Himself (in other words, the glorification of human nature in Himself) to set an example to those who are on the way to perfection. He assumed everything that was common to human nature (except sin) not in external appearance, as the Docetists claimed, in order to delude those observing His human life, but in reality.”

“After the incarnation of the Word, exactly the same method of revelation and glorification that took place with the Prophets is repeated with the Apostles. The difference now is that the Word reveals Himself in the natural and uncreated glory of His nature, which is shared with the Father and the Holy Spirit, by means of His own humanity. This humanity did not advance towards the continuous vision of divine glory, but was glorified through its union—not by grace but by nature—with the Word from the beginning of its existence in the womb of the Theotokos.

Christ did not progress as a human being towards glorification, but was conceived as a glorified man, not by virtue of the union that the saints experience with the divine nature, but by virtue of the one unique natural or hypostatic union with the divine nature and energy. Thus Christ, as man, participates by nature in the divine glory and is the natural source of this glory. The glorification of the Prophets, Apostles and saints is a union by grace with the natural glory and energy of the divine nature, but the glorification of the human nature of the Word is its hypostatic union with God the Word and the resultant union with the divine nature. All glorified creatures see the divine glory and share in it. Only Christ, because He is the Word by nature, sees and participates by nature in the divine essence.”

The saints understand this from their experience. When they reach glorification, the *theoria* of Christ’s glory in His human nature, they realize that Christ is the source of the

uncreated Light, whereas they themselves are participants in the Light.

The fact that Christ was perfect from the beginning was made clear on many occasions, even during His struggle with the devil: “In Christ this state of perfection was natural and not acquired. For that reason His struggle with the devil in the wilderness and His forty-day fast were not an achievement but a manifestation of perfection. At the same time it was a real fight with temptations, not from within but from the devil.”

Christ voluntarily assumed the passible and corruptible aspects of human nature because He really took flesh. However, the so-called “blameless” or natural passions—hunger, thirst, weariness, sleep—did not act in Christ by compulsion. Christ’s divine nature had authority over them. Therefore, Christ was hungry when He wished to be, thirsty when He wished to be, slept or rested when He wished to.

The saints understand this to some extent from their experience. They too, when they reach glorification according to grace, observe a suspension of the natural and blameless passions: hunger, thirst, sleep and so on. In Christ this happened “naturally” because He was true God, and the human nature followed the divine nature: “The incarnate Word not only possesses the state of *theoria* naturally, not by grace, but even as man He Himself is the natural source of glorification and glory. If some of the natural and blameless passions are suspended in those who by grace are in a temporary state of glorification, how much more must those passions have no natural place in Christ, Who is glorified by nature and the source of glorification as man.

So one can see why it is a basic doctrine of the Orthodox Church that the Word as man wants to have the natural and blameless human passions, and really to share in them, transforming them into a source of our salvation and a means by which we ourselves can overcome the devil and pass through the stages of purification and illumination on our way to glorification. On the one hand these passions are a result of the Fall, but at the same time, through the glory of the Cross, they become the source of our salvation, perfection and glorification, and the means by which the devil is defeated and destroyed.

Paradoxically, the devil is destroyed by means of the very passions by which he attempts to destroy man. The most basic weapon with which Satan tries to destroy human beings is death, but through death Christ and the saints destroy the devil.”

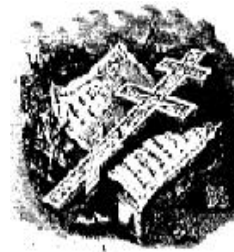
It should be noted at this point that the Triune God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—is present everywhere in the world according to energy but not according to essence. The God-man Christ, however, is absent from the world according to His essence as Word, but “the human nature of Christ is everywhere present according to essence,”

by reason of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures. This issue is linked with the teaching about the essence and energy of God, but also about the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ.

“The foundation of this teaching is the actual experience of glorification. These distinctions that the Fathers of the Church make are not the outcome of philosophical speculation. They know from the experience itself that in the experience of glorification the one who is glorified is united with God according to energy.”

At Christ’s Baptism in the River Jordan, John the Forerunner was accounted worthy to experience the Triune God: *It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.”* (Mk 1:9-11).

“For the Forerunner, at least for the day of the Baptism, this is the experience of glorification. When he saw the heavens opened and so on, this means that he had a revelation of the uncreated glory of Christ. That is also why we sing in the troparion of the Feast of Theophany that the Holy Trinity was revealed in the Baptism. How is the Holy Trinity revealed in the Baptism? Through the manifestation of the glory of God, which is the experience of glorification for John the Baptist.”



What, then, O brethren, is required of us in order that we might avail ourselves of all the grace brought unto us from on high by the coming to earth of the Son of God? What is necessary, first of all, is faith in the Son of God, in the Gospel as the salvation-bestowing heavenly teaching; a true repentance of sins and the correction of life and of heart; communion in prayer and in the mysteries [sacraments]; the knowledge and fulfillment of Christ’s commandments. Also necessary are the virtues: Christian humility, alms-giving, continence, purity and chastity, simplicity and goodness of heart.

Let us, then, O brothers and sisters, bring these virtues as a gift to the One Who was born for the sake of our salvation – let us bring them in place of the gold, frankincense and myrrh which the Magi brought Him, as to One Who is King, God, and Man, come to die for us. This, from us, shall be the most-pleasing form of sacrifice to God and to the Infant Jesus Christ.”

**St. John of Kronstadt**

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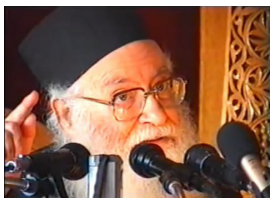
ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΓΕΝΝΑΤΑΙ, ΔΟΞΑΖΑΤΕ!

CHRIST IS BORN, GLORIFY HIM!

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

## THE FAITHFUL PEOPLE OF GOD NOT ONLY HAVE THE RIGHT—THEY ARE OBLIGED TO CORRECT ERRING CLERICS

*Excerpt from a Prophetic Homily by the Ever-memorable and Blessed Fr. Athanasios Mytilinaios.*



There exists the pan-heresy of ecumenism, which has taken hold of Patriarchs and Archbishops by the back of the neck the world over. Patriarchs and Archbishops throughout the world. You know, when someone comes and grabs you by the back of the neck, you are immobilized. If you grab a cat by its neck and you lift it up, he cannot bite you. He is unable to do anything and is immobilized.

Likewise, the devil, [with] this heresy, the pan-heresy of ecumenism [a denial of the Body of Christ's oneness and catholicity], has taken hold of leading clergy, the highest of high, and he now is moving down, toward the people. At this point [*more than 30 years ago, Ed.*], however, he has hold of the leading figures of the Church worldwide—allow me to repeat.

In America, for example, there are already Presbyters who are preaching ecumenism. I have been given a cassette tape in which he [the priest] is preaching ecumenism.

If you do not know someone who will come to you [for example a new priest], what will you do? Should you not make a point to see just who is your parish priest, or your bishop, or Archbishop,

or Patriarch? What will you do? Are you going to be a fool? I mean, if he becomes an ecumenist, will you join him?

There are many other errors or transgressions which could be described in order to illustrate the bad shepherd. The shepherd could even be a heretic—not only in reference to the heresy of ecumenism—pay attention to me here—but with regard to other heresies. Oh, dear, we have quite a few!

So, the people of God not only have the right, they are **required to be vigilant** as to what is being taught by the shepherds and who they are. They have an obligation.

Therefore, politely, kindly, you will see about it, say something, correct possible errors. You remember when Aquila and Priscilla, saw the amazing Apolla, of the race of Alexandrians, he was lacking [in some way] and Priscilla, a woman, took him aside and corrected him, so that his teaching was more accurate. When someone is lacking in some way, he should be politely corrected. A layman may go and tell him, “Father, this is not exactly correct.” When a priest has discernment, respect and humility, he accepts the correction.

When, however, he insists on ideas which are truly heretical, what will the sheep do? Won't that sheep leave?

To give you an example: when I go to confession and the confessor tells me that I can have [relations with] a girlfriend or boyfriend, will I go back to that confessor? I will never return there again.

So, the people of God not only have a right, they have a responsibility to be vigilant in matters of Faith and spiritual life.