

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]

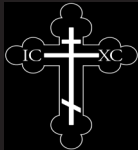
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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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BE ALWAYS WITH ME AND IN ME

SPIRITUAL ADVICE FOR THE AGES!

Source: "My Life in Christ," extracts from the diary of St. John of Kronstadt, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY (1994), pp. 436-441.

Reverence in every way images of living men, in order that you may duly reverence the image of God. For the image of the Lord Jesus Christ is the human image. He who does not respect the human image will not respect the image of God!

Am I not everything to you—I am the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—your God, your life, your peace, your joy, and your blessedness? Your riches, your meat, and drink; your raiment, your all? To what, then, do you cling? Is it not to dust? What is that you grudge Me in the person of your neighbor? Is it not dust? Do you grudge it to Me Who has created all things, Who can turn earth and stones into bread, and can bring forth water from a rock? Be always with Me and in Me, and you shall be always at peace and joyful. Has your trust in Me ever been in vain? Have I not always given you tranquility and new life?

If you share your prosperity with your neighbor, if you have it in common with him, then all God's blessings will be in common with you. *Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you... All Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine.* (Jn 15:7, 17:10)

When you forbid the Devil in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, then His name, the sweetest to us, and the most terrible and grievous to the demons, itself creates power, like a two-edged sword. Equally, if you ask anything of the Heavenly Father, or do anything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

then the heavenly Father, for the sake of the name of His beloved Son, shall give you all things in the Holy Ghost, in the sacraments, if you fulfill His commandments, and will in no wise consider your unworthiness; for wherever the name of God is made use of with faith, there it creates powers: **for the very name of God is power.**

Some persons ask: What is the use of mentioning the names of the departed or living in prayer for them? God being omniscient Himself, knows their names and the needs of each one. But those who speak thus forget, or do not know, the importance of prayer, do not know the importance of every word said from the whole heart; they forget that the justice and mercy of God are moved by our heartfelt prayer which the Lord, in His goodness, imputes to the merit of the living or the departed themselves, as to the members of the one body of the Church. They do not know that also the *Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven* (Heb 12:23), in her love continually prays to God for us, and expressly mentions before God the names of those who pray for them—equal for equal. We make mention of their names, and they of ours. Whilst he who does not lovingly remember his brethren in prayer, will not himself be remembered, and does not deserve to be mentioned. Even one word of faith and love means much in prayer. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* (Jas 5:16).

When we pray for the living and for the departed, and mention them by name, we must pronounce these names lovingly, and from the whole heart, as though we carried in our souls the persons whose names we mention, *even as a nurse cherisheth her children* (1Thes 2:7), remembering that they are our members, and members of the Lord's

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body. (Eph 4:25; 30). It is not right to stand before God and merely run over their names with the tongue without the heart’s participation and love. We must remember that God sees into the heart; that the persons for whom we pray also require from us brotherly love and sympathy as a Christian duty.

There is a great difference between the apathetic repetition of names and their hearty remembrance: the one is as far from the other as heaven from earth. However, above all, the name of the Lord Himself, that of His most pure Mother, and those of the holy angels and saints, must always be pronounced from a pure heart with burning faith and love. In general, the words of the prayer must not be merely run over with the tongue as if we were turning over the leaves of a book or counting money, the water must flow like a stream of living water from its source—they should be the sincere voice of the heart, not a strange, borrowed garment.

Have the same attention and respect for the Word as you have for the living man, and firmly believe that *the word of God is quick and powerful* as a living being, as an angel, and that, by reason of its spiritual fineness, it is *piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* (Heb 4:12). The word of God is God Himself; and therefore when you speak, believe that you have to do with living, and not with dead beings, with active, and not with inert and powerless ones. Know that you should pronounce every word with

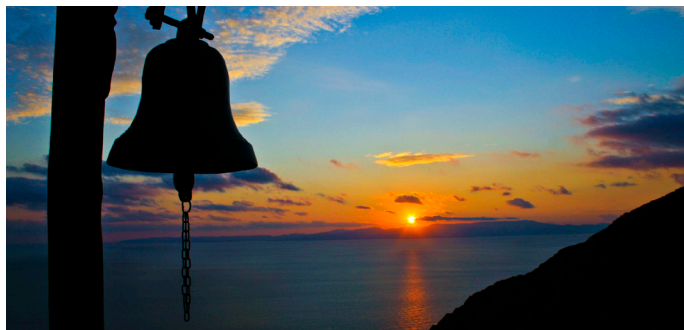
faith and assurance. The words are living pearls. *Neither cast ye your pearls before swine.* (Mt 7:6).

During prayer, it is necessary, in the first place, that the object of the prayer should be definitely expressed, or at least, that there should be a clear sense of it and desire for it in the heart; in the second place, it is necessary that this desire should be expressed with feeling and lively trust in the mercy of the Lord or in that of the Mother of God ; in the third place, there must be a firm intention not to sin in the future, and to fulfill God’s will in everything. *Thou art*

made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. (Jn 5:14).

When you pray for anything, either to the Lord or to the most-pure Mother of God, or to the angels and saints, asking their intercession before God for yourself or for others, then consider

the words. Express your petitions, your needs, as the very things, the very matter, for which you ask the Lord, and believe that you have already a sure pledge of receiving the objects of your prayer, in the very words by which these objects are designated. For instance: when you pray for health for yourself or for someone else, look upon the word health as the very thing itself, as the very deed; believe that you already have it by the mercy and omnipotence of God, for the word itself, the name, may in an instant become deed with the Lord, and you will unfailingly receive that which you ask for in return for your unshaken faith. *Ask, and it shall be given you.* (Mt 7:7). *What things soever you*



desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them; and ye shall have them. (Mk 11:24).

Do not pay attention to the darkness, fire, and distress proceeding from the enemy during prayer, and steadfastly trust with all your heart in the very words of the prayer, being assured that the treasures of the Holy Ghost are concealed in them—that is, truth, light, life-giving fire, forgiveness of sins, expansion, peace and joy of the heart, and blessedness.

The great names: the Most Holy Trinity, or the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, called upon with lively, hearty faith and reverence, or thought of in the soul, are God Himself, and bring into our soul God Himself in Three Persons. But of God, *and through Him, and to Him, are all things.* (Rom 11:36): therefore, if you are united to God the Trinity by lively faith and virtue, especially by meekness, humility, and mercy, ask of Him whatever you desire, whatever the Holy Ghost teaches you to ask, and it shall be given unto you, either quickly, in a moment, in an hour, or after some time, according to the judgment of God's great wisdom.

Desire of Me and I shall give thee. (Pss 2:8). Everything that you ask for is certainly less, infinitely less, than the Giver Himself, as it derives its existence from Him. And, as the Giver Himself is an infinite, incomplex Being, and can in some manner be comprised in one single thought of ours, in one single word, then believe that one single

word of yours, one single petition concerning the fulfillment of anything, can at a sign from the Lord immediately become a thing or a deed. *He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.* (Pss 33:9). Remember the wonders that Moses worked, remember how that man of God was a god to Pharaoh, and how instantaneously at his word, or at a movement of his hand, or of his staff, everything either changed or appeared. O great God, most glorified God, God of wonders, God of unspeakable mercy, bountifulness, and love to man, glory to Thee always, both now and forever, and unto ages of ages!

Spiritual pride manifests itself by the fact that a proud man dares to make himself a judge of religion and of the Church, and says: "I do not believe in this, and I do not acknowledge this; this I find superfluous, that unnecessary, and this strange or absurd." Spiritual pride also manifests itself in boastfulness, in the proud man's pretended knowledge of everything, whilst in reality he knows very little or his spiritual eyes are entirely blind. "That is not worth reading," he says; "it is all well-known; these sermons are

not worth reading; they contain the one same thing which I already know." Human pride also manifests itself to a great extent when an ordinary mortal dares to compare himself with God's saints, and does not see their great and wonderful perfections acquired by their own exploits, with the assistance of the grace of God; perfections which God Himself has crowned and glorified in them. Such a man says: "Why should I reverence them, and especially why should I pray to them? They are men like me; I pray to God alone." And he does not consider that God Himself commanded us to ask the prayers of the righteous for ourselves. *For him will I accept.* (Job 42:8)

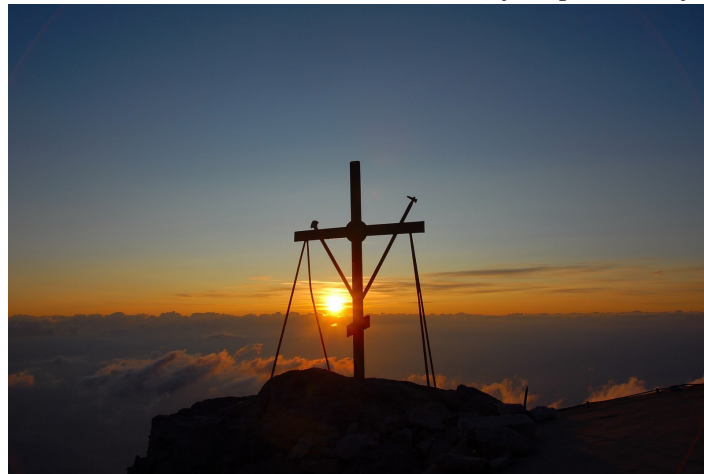
Spiritual pride also manifests itself by insensibility to our sins, by the Pharisee's self-justification and self-praise, by insensibility to God's mercies, by ingratitude to God for all that is good, by not feeling the need of praising God's greatness. All those who do not pray to the Almighty God, *to the God of all spirits and of all flesh* (prayer from the Burial Service), to their Life, do not pray by the reason of their secret pride.

If, when praying to the Mother of God you do not find due reverence for Her in your heart, and feel evil and blasphemous thoughts, then say the following words of praise worthily applied to Her: *Thou, our Lady, art all light, all holiness, all mercy, all wisdom; Thou, as the Mother of the Almighty, canst do all things; Thou art ever one and the same, all-perfect as the Mother of the all-perfect King of Glory!*

Unbelief betrays itself by the fact that it has nothing in common with truth; an unbelieving heart is restless, anxious, weak, inconsistent, whilst a believing one is, on the contrary, tranquil, blissful, great, and firm.

When you pray to the Lord, or to our Lady, or to the angels and saints, do not ascribe any difficulty to the Lord, to our Lady, to the angels and saints, in fulfilling your petitions, or the petitions of other believers; instead, believe that it is as easy and simple for the Lord to give any blessing to His people, and equally so by the prayers of His most pure Mother and of the angels and saints as it is for you to think of it. Besides this, as God is ever-flowing, infinite goodness, he desires and ever seeks to impart His goodness to His Creatures, if only they turn to Him with faith, hope, and love, like children to their father, recognizing their sinfulness, poverty, need, blindness, and infirmity without Him.

When you pray to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost—to the one God in the Trinity—do not seek Him



outside yourself, but contemplate Him within, as dwelling in you, entirely penetrating and knowing you. *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.* (1Cor 3:16). *And I will walk among you, and will be your God.* (2Cor 6:16, 18). *I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and will be a Father unto you.* (Lev 26:12). *O Lord, Thou hast searched me out and known me* (Pss 139:1), says David.

When during prayer you doubt in the possibility of the fulfillment of any of your petitions, then remember that to God it is *possible* to give you *all things*, excepting direct evil, which is only proper to the Devil—that the word itself, or your petition itself concerning anything, is already a sure guarantee on your part that its fulfillment is possible; for if you can only think of something, either possible or impossible to yourself, then this “something” is absolutely possible to the Lord, to Whom the thought is already deed, if He pleases to fulfill it. Even for yourself the blessing already exists in the word, and only does not exist in the deed; but in order to fulfill a petition, God has the Son, the Creator, and the Holy Ghost the Accomplisher. To the possibility of accomplishing all things, add His infinite mercy, by which He is the ever-flowing source of being, as well as of all the gifts of being.

He is the God of gifts, the God of mercy and bounties. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* (Mt 7:7). Add to this God’s great wisdom, by which, in bestowing gifts upon us, He chooses that which is best for us, and which corresponds to our spiritual and bodily state. On your part is required only firm, undoubting assurance in the possibility of the Lord’s fulfillment of your petition, and also that your prayer should absolutely be good, for good, and not for anything evil. *Your Father, which is in heaven, it is said, shall give good things to them that ask Him.* (Mt 7:11).

When praying to God, we must have such firm, unshaken faith that doubt in anything would be difficult and even impossible, and therefore, we must have inscribed in our hearts the words: *With God all things are possible.* (Mk 10:27). We must also have the lively assurance that God fulfils everything; that His Being is love and mercy; that His business and, as though, His nature is to create, to give, to forgive, to be bountiful, to fulfill our requests. *And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive.* (Mt 21:22). Also, we must carefully watch our heart, that it should not lie, that every word should come out of its depths: *Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord!* (Pss 130:1); that is, we must be most careful of the truth of the prayer, of that sincerity, which makes all the words of the prayer composed by others our own words, and which esteems every word as true.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!

THE UNION OF HEART AND NOUS

Source: From the translated book “My Elder: Joseph the Hesychast and Cave-dweller,” pp. 558-562, St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery, Florence, AZ.

One year before the repose of Elder Joseph, while I was saying the prayer in sync with my breathing during vigil, something amazing happened. A state of prayer came to me that I cannot find words to describe. Suddenly, my *nous* entered my heart, and my *nous*, my heart, and the prayer became one! I could not tell where I was. All I can say is that the prayer was being said within my heart, and I felt sublime sweetness and an indescribable bliss. I do not know how long this lasted. When I regained my senses, I felt an inexpressible tranquility and sweetness, and I had many tears.

Afterwards, I went to Geronda and said:

“Something has happened to me, Geronda.”

“What happened to you?”

“While I was praying, suddenly my *nous* became enclosed within my heart. I became unaware if there was anything else in the world.” And I described that state of grace to him.

Then Geronda said to me:

“From this state of prayer, the *nous* will later ascend above. From this point on, the rapture of the *nous* begins. During and after this state, the *nous* leaves and goes to *theoria*. When I first experienced this state, I went and stayed in a cell so small that I could barely fit inside. It was so small that I nearly asphyxiated. I stayed in it for a year. Make sure that you hold on to what you felt and experienced; do not lose it!”

Another time when I told Geronda what I was experiencing, he ecstatically exclaimed:

“Oh, blessed obedience! Obedience—you are truly sovereign [among virtues]. My child, in order to taste these heavenly blessings, Gero-Arsenius and I shed much blood in *ascesis*. But you disciples, merely through diligent obedience, are enjoying the same grace we had. Hold on to obedience with all your soul; there is no path easier and higher than this.”

This state lasted about seven months. My *nous* enclosed itself for two or three hours. After I returned to my senses, this state would leave. But the following day in the daytime, I had very strong prayer. I had fallen in love so much with this prayer that I did not want to talk. I did not speak idly and I did not talk with anyone. That is how careful I was those months when I had that state. As soon as I woke up, I kept thinking about when night would come so that I could struggle in prayer and find that state. If I did not find it the first night, I would struggle and find it the second or third night. I would find it about twice a week.

Whenever I found this prayer, I would experience such a strong sweetness during the daytime that I did not care

if I was working hard all day. When we did have to work hard all day, everyone else would get tired and want to stop working, but I did not. I was flying! I did not have just twice as much strength as usual but five times as much—in both body and soul. I was not interested in what other people were doing. I would sit down for meals, and I would not look to see what they were eating or saying. I would eat my food while my *nous* was in prayer. I felt so much sweetness within myself that I cannot describe it.

In this state, my *nous* had been united with my heart, and the prayer was being said on its own inside my heart. My *nous*, my heart, and the words of the prayer were united, just as it says in “The Art of Prayer.” I had no perception of things around me: not my cell, not the walls—nothing. Awareness of the world would be extinguished.

I did not want to eat or drink, and I did not even get sleepy. For two days, I did not eat or drink anything and I did not even get thirsty, all because of this prayer! Prayer was dancing within me and would not let me sleep. I would say to myself, “It does not matter if I do not sleep, eat, or drink, as long as I have this!” It was the only thing I wanted because it brought me indescribable peace, sweetness, and bliss. When you are in this state, you sit down to eat and you cannot, so you eat just superficially. You lie down to sleep and you cannot. This would last not just for twenty-four or thirty-six hours, but even for forty-eight hours when I had found this prayer.

I told Geronda:

“The prayer won’t let me sleep!”

“Brace yourself,” Geronda replied. “It looks like I will depart, and God is preparing you so that you will bear it.”

After Geronda departed and I lived alone, the prayer still would not let me sleep—sometimes three or even six times a week, when I found it. Sometimes when I was thinking about this prayer, I was considering resigning from the priesthood and withdrawing to some hidden place where no one would see me. I would weep and say:

“Oh, Lord, why did I want the priesthood? If only I were somewhere where I could pray and not meet anyone.”

I was thinking about staying in the caves of the ascetics so that I could preserve that state of prayer. But I lost it due to the many cares I later had.

As papa-Haralambos said this, he wept hard. Later, he explained:

“Even though many times I had the thought of becoming a solitary ascetic, I rejected the idea. Since Geronda hadn’t recommended this to me before passing away, I was afraid to proceed any further without his blessing.”

On the day that Geronda departed, papa-Haralambos did a prostration to him before going to rest in his cell. Geronda said to him:

“Come close to me. Cut out the cares. Do you hear me?”

“May it be blessed,” papa-Haralambos answered and turned around to leave.

After taking only ten steps, Geronda called out to him, again:

“Papa!”

He came running back.

“What did I tell you? Did you hear me? I told you to cut out the cares.”

“May it be blessed, Geronda.”

After he turned around again and took fifteen steps, Geronda called out to him once more:

“Papa!”

He came running back again...

“What did I tell you? Did you hear me? Cut out the cares! I told you to cut out the cares!”

“May it be blessed, Geronda

“I told you not to forget to cut out the cares.”

Later, Papa-Haralambos would weep every time he remembered this. He recalled:

“He told me three times. When I started getting involved with cares, how many times his words came to mind! What can I say? What tears did I lose because of

cares! Because of the cares I got involved—planting a garden, building walls—I found my demise. I got involved in many cares. Whereas during Geronda’s final year, I had a state that cannot be described. I had many states of grace.”

Papa-Haralambos had indeed received much grace from God. This is why he said to me very naturally and as a matter of fact:

“I have prayer?”

“Yes, my dear papa,” I would reply. “Yes you do, you do have prayer.”

He could say this without pride because he was simple, straightforward, and innocent, yet a perfect disciple and a great fighter until his holy repose in 2001.



Elder Joseph the Hesychast with two of his disciples: Elder Haralambos (of Dionysiou, left) and Elder Ephraim (of Filotheou and Arizona, right)

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SERVICE OF MY LIFE

Source: "Everyday Saints and Other Stories," by Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov), translated by Julian Henry Lowefield, Pokrov Publications (2012), pp. 217-221.

During Soviet times there perhaps was no more horrific symbol of the devastation of the Russian Orthodox Church by Communist rule than the Diveyevo Monastery.

The monastery had been founded by St. Seraphim of Sarov, yet it had been turned into a frightful ruin. The gutted remains of what was left towered over the pathetic Soviet "regional center" into which the once glorious and flourishing town of Diveyevo had been transformed. The authorities did not bother destroying the monastery completely. Instead they deliberately left the ruins standing there as a memorial of their triumph, as a trophy of their perpetual enslavement of the Church. By the holy gates of the monastery, they put up a monument to the leader of the Revolution—Lenin—whose arm was raised to the sky in mocking greeting of anyone who came to the devastated monastery.

Everything about the scene said convincingly that there would never be any return to the past. The prophecies of St. Seraphim about the grand destiny of Diveyevo Monastery, which had

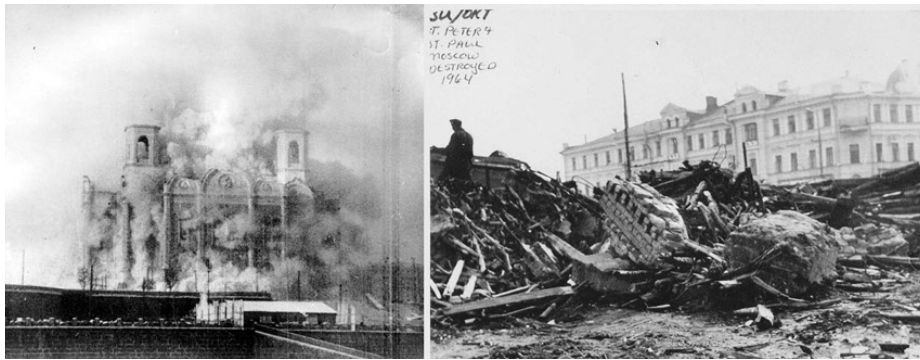
been so beloved in all of Russian Orthodoxy, seemed to have been forever profaned and destroyed.

Nowhere in Diveyevo, neither within the town, not in its surroundings, was there a single working church, not even the memory of a church—all had been utterly destroyed. And in the once renowned Monastery of Sarov, and in the towns around it, instead of a holy site, now one of the most top-secret and heavily guarded constructions of the Soviet Union was housed instead—a project known as Arzamas-16. Here nuclear weapons were made.

If any priests ever made a secret pilgrimage to Diveyevo, they carefully hid their intentions, always dressing in secular clothes. It was to no avail. The secret police would somehow find them out anyway. In the year when I first visited the devastated monastery, two monks who came to pray and express their reverence for the holy relics of Diveyevo were arrested, cruelly beaten by the police, and then kept imprisoned for over fifteen days in a jail cell, sleeping on a frozen floor.

That winter, Archimandrite Boniface, a wonderful and extremely kind monk from the famous Holy Trinity Monastery, asked me to accompany him on a trip to Diveyevo. According to our ecclesiastical rules, a priest who sets out on a journey with the Sacred Gifts of the Eucharist—the Body and Blood of Christ—must always be accompanied by someone, so as to help defend and protect the great Holy Gifts in the event of any emergency that might arise. And Father Boniface was on his way to Diveyevo in order to give Communion to a few old nuns still living in the area around the monastery—some of the last few still living in our time of the thousand who once inhabited the pre-Revolutionary convent.

To get there we had to take a train through Nizhny Novgorod, then called Gorky, and next drive by car to Diveyevo. In the train, all night long, Archimandrite Boniface could not sleep. Hung around his neck by a silken cord was a small sacred receptacle for the Holy Gifts. I was sleeping on a neighboring bunk, but from time to time would wake up at the sound of the wheels and see Father Boniface seated at table reading the New Testament in the dim night light of our train wagon.



We made it to Nizhny Novgorod, which was his hometown, and stayed in his parents' house. Father Boniface gave me a seriously transformative book to read—the first volume of the

works of Holy Hierarch Ignatius Brianchaninov—and all night long I could not sleep a wink, as I first discovered for myself that amazing Christian writer.

Next morning we set off for Diveyevo. We faced a drive of about eighty kilometers. Father Boniface tried to dress in a way so that no one would ever suspect him to be a priest: carefully tucking away the pleats and folds of his cassock beneath his coat, and hiding away his very long beard into his thick scarf and upturned collar.

It was already getting dark by the time we reached our destination. Looking out of our car window through the snowflakes whirling in a February storm, I was distressed to see the tall watchtower, wrecked dome and ruined shells of the desecrated churches. Despite this mournful scene, I was still struck by the unusual power and secret energy of this great monastery. What's more, I had a sense that the Monastery of Diveyevo was not yet dead, but still alive with some ineffable spiritual life, well past the comprehension of this uncaring material world.

And so it turned out to be! In a ramshackle little hut, on the outskirts of Diveyevo, I saw something that I could have never imagined even in my most radiant dreams. I saw alive the Church Radiant, invincible and indefatigable, youthful and joyful in the consciousness of Her God, our Shepherd and Savior. It was then that I was struck by a great verse of the apostle Paul: *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth!* (Phil 4:13).

And what's more, the most beautiful and unforgettable church service in my life took place then—not in some magnificent grand cathedral, not in some glorious ancient church hallowed with age, but in a nondescript building in the community center of Diveyevo, on Number 16, Lesnaya Street. It was not even a church at all, but an old bathhouse somehow vaguely converted into communal housing.

When I first arrived with Father Boniface, I saw a dingy little room crowded by about a dozen elderly women, the youngest of whom could not have been younger than eighty, while the oldest were definitely more than 100 years old. All of them were dressed in simple old country maids' clothes and wearing peasant kerchiefs. None of them was wearing a habit or any kind of monastic or ecclesiastical clothing. Of course, these weren't nuns—just simple old ladies; that's what anyone would have thought, including me, if I had not known that these old women were in fact some of the most courageous modern-day confessors of our faith, true heroines who had suffered tortures and decades in prisons and concentration camps for their beliefs. And yet despite all their ordeals, their spiritual loyalty and unshakable faith in God had only grown.

I was amazed to see how before my very eyes the venerable Father Boniface, an archimandrite and rector of the churches in the Patriarchal quarters of the Holy Trinity Monastery, a respected and well-known father confessor in Moscow, got down on his knees before blessing these old women, and bowed low to the floor! To be honest, I could not believe my eyes. However, after lifting himself up from the floor, this priest fervently began to bless those old women who were hobbling up awkwardly to him, each in their turn. It was clear how truly delighted they were by his visit.

As Father Boniface and the old women were exchanging greetings, I looked around. Icons in ancient ceremonial frames, dimly lit by flickering lamps, were hung on the walls. One of them particularly attracted my attention. It was a large and beautiful icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov. The elder's face exuded such kindness and warmth that I could not tear my eyes away from him. As I found out later, that image had been painted right before the Revolution for the new Cathedral of Diveyevo, which they had never even had time to consecrate, and which only by miracle had been spared from complete desecration.

Meanwhile, I started to prepare myself for the Vigil service. It took my breath away as the nuns started to take out of their

secret hiding places and set down on the crudely put together wooden table genuine artifacts belonging to St. Seraphim himself. Here was the Stole of his ecclesiastical vestment; there was his heavy iron cross on thick chains, worn for the mortification of the flesh, a leather glove, and the old-fashioned cast iron pot in which the saint had cooked his food. After the Revolution, when the monastery was pillaged and destroyed, the nuns of the Monastery of Diveyevo had passed down these holy relics from sister to sister.

Having put on his vestments, Father Boniface gave the priest's pronouncement that begins the Vigil service. The nuns immediately perked up and began to chant. What a divine and utterly amazing choir they were!

In the sixth tone! Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me! sang out one of the voices quavering with age; it was the canonarch nun, who was now 102 years old. She had been imprisoned and exiled for over twenty years. And all those wonderful sisters sang out together with her: *Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me! Harken unto me, O Lord!*

There is no way to capture the sublimity of this service in words. Candles flickered, and the limitlessly kind and wise face of St. Seraphim looked down from his icon upon us... These incredible nuns chanted the entire service virtually by heart. Only very rarely did one of them glance at the thick old books, for which they needed to use not just eyeglasses but gigantic magnifying glasses with wooden handles. They had risked death or punishment saying this service in concentration camps and prisons and places of exile. They said it even now after all their sufferings, here in Diveyevo, settling into their wretched hovels on the outskirts of the town. For them it was nothing unusual, and yet for me, I could scarcely understand whether I was in Heaven or on Earth.

These aged nuns were possessed of such incredible spiritual strength, such prayer, such courage, such modesty, goodness, and love, and they were full of such faith! It was then, at that wonderful service, that I understood that they with their faith would triumph over everything—over our godless government despite all its power, over the faithlessness of this world, and over death itself, of which they had absolutely no fear...



No matter who you are, what kind of work you do, give an account of yourself as to how you have performed your work: as a Christian, or as a heathen (that is, motivated by self-love and worldly pleasure). A Christian must remember that every deed, even the smallest, has a moral principle. A Christian, who remembers the teaching of Jesus Christ, should perform every deed so that it will be of use toward the spreading of the grace of God and the Kingdom of Heaven among men.

St. Gabriel of Imereti

CONCERNING FASTING,

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, from "Orthodox Life," vol.2, number 2 – March/April 1951.

The head or chief of the virtues is prayer; their foundation is fasting. Fasting is constant moderation in food with prudent discernment in its use.

Proud man! You think so much and so highly of your mind, while all the time it is in complete and constant dependence on your stomach.

The law of fasting, though outwardly a law for the stomach, is essentially a law for the mind. The mind, that sovereign ruler in man, if it wishes to enter into its rights of autocracy and retain them, must first submit to the law of fasting. Only then will it be constantly alert and bright; only then can it rule over the desires of the heart and body. Only with constant vigilance and temperance can the mind learn the commandments of the Gospel and follow them. The foundation of the virtues is fasting.

Newly-made man when placed in Paradise was given a single commandment, a commandment concerning fasting. Of course, only one commandment was given because that was sufficient to have kept primitive man in his innocence. The commandment did not speak of the quantity of food, but only prohibited a kind or quality. Let those who recognize a fast in quantity of food only and not in quality be silent. By devoting themselves to a practical study of fasting, they will see the significance of the quality of the food.

So important was the law of fasting declared by God to man in Paradise that with the commandment was pronounced a threat of punishment for breaking it. The punishment consisted in the striking of men with eternal death.

And now a sinful death continues to strike the breakers of the holy commandment of fasting. He who does not observe moderation and due discernment in food cannot preserve virginity or chastity, cannot control anger, yields to sloth, despondency and sorrow, becomes a slave of vainglory and an abode of pride which gets into a man through his carnal state, which is caused most of all by luxurious and nourishing food.

The commandment to fast was renewed or confirmed by the Gospel. *Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with excessive eating and drinking* (Lk 21:34), said the Lord. Overeating and drinking impart corpulence or grossness not only to the body, but to the mind and heart as well; that is,

they reduce a person to a carnal state of soul and body. Fasting, on the contrary, leads a Christian to a spiritual state. A person who is purified by fasting is humble in spirit, chaste, modest, silent, refined in the feelings of his heart and mind, light in body, fit for spiritual labors and contemplation, apt to receive divine grace.

The carnal man is completely immersed in sinful pleasures. He is sensual in body, in heart and in mind. He is incapable not only of spiritual joy and of receiving divine grace, but even of spiritual occupations. He is nailed to the earth, wallowing in materiality, spiritually dead while alive.

Woe to you who are full now, for you shall hunger! (Lk 6:25). Such is the message of the Word of God to breakers of the commandment of holy fasting. How will you nourish yourself in eternity when you have learnt here only to glut yourself with material foods and material pleasures which do not exist in heaven? What will you feed on in eternity when you have not tasted one of the good things of heaven? How can you

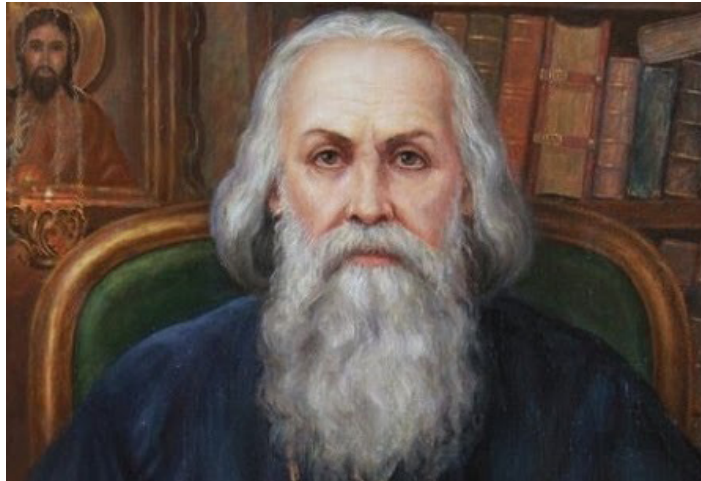
eat and enjoy the good things of heaven when you have acquired no taste or sympathy for them, in fact have only acquired aversion for them?

The daily bread of Christians is Christ. Uncloying repletion with this bread is the saving satiety and delight to which all Christians are invited. Be insatiably filled with the Word of God; be insatiably filled with the doing of Christ's commandments; be insatiably filled with the table *prepared against those who*

trouble you, and be inebriated with the strong chalice. (Pss 22:5). *Where are we to begin, says St. Macarius the Great, we who have never engaged in searching our hearts? Let us stand outside and knock with prayer and fasting, as the Lord commanded: Knock and it will be opened to you.* (Mt 7:7).

This work which is proposed to us by one of the greatest teachers of monasticism was a work of the Holy Apostles. From the midst of it, they were granted to hear the Spirit's messages. *While they were serving the Lord and fasting, says the writer of their acts, the Holy Spirit said: Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.* (Acts 13:2). From the midst of their effort in which fasting was combined with prayer the Spirit's command concerning the call of the Gentiles to Christianity was heard.

Wonderful union of fasting with prayer! Prayer is powerless unless it is based on fasting, and fasting is fruitless unless prayer is built upon it. Fasting frees a person from fleshly



St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867)

passions, while prayer wrestles with the passions of the soul and, having conquered them, it penetrates and permeates the person's whole constitution, and purifies it. Into the purified spiritual temple it introduces God.

He who sows his land without working it wastes his seed and instead of wheat reaps thorns. So too if we sow seeds of prayer without refining our flesh, instead of righteousness we shall produce sin. Our prayer will be ruined and robbed by various thoughts and fantasies, it will be defiled by sensual feelings. Our flesh came from the earth and unless it is cultivated like the earth it can never produce the fruit of righteousness.

On the other hand if anyone works his land with great care and at great expense but leaves it unsown, it will be covered with a thick crop of weeds. So if the body is refined by fasting but the soul is not cultivated by prayer, reading and humility, then fasting becomes the parent of numerous weeds—passions of the soul: pride, vainglory, scorn.

What is the passion of gluttony and drunkenness? Having lost regularity (that is, a sense of what is right and lawful), the natural craving for food and drink demands a much greater quantity and more varied quality than is needed for the maintenance of life and the bodily powers, and becomes a passion. Excessive food acts on the bodily powers in a way that is the reverse of its natural purpose; it acts harmfully, weakening and destroying them.

The craving for food is satisfied by a simple table and by refraining from excess and delight in food. First, excess and delight must be abandoned; in this way, the desire for food is refined and reduced to order. However, when desire becomes normal, it is satisfied with simple food. On the other hand, when the craving for food is satisfied with excess and delight, it is coarsened. To arouse it we resort to a variety of tasty foods and drinks. At first, our desire seems satisfied; then it becomes capricious, and finally it turns into a morbid passion constantly seeking repletion and pleasure, and never satisfied.

Having resolved to consecrate ourselves to the service of God, let us make fasting the foundation of our effort. The essential quality of every foundation should be an unshakable firmness; otherwise it will be impossible to construct a building on it, however solid the building itself may be. So let us never on any account, on any pretext whatever, allow ourselves to break our fast by overeating, and especially by drunkenness.

The use of food once a day not to repletion is regarded by the Holy Fathers as the best fast. Such a fast does not weaken the body by prolonged abstinence or overload it with excessive food, but keeps it fit for soul-saving activity. Such a fast presents no glaring peculiarity, and therefore the person fasting has no cause for boasting, to which people are so prone on account of virtue itself, especially when it stands out sharply.

Those engaged in physical labors or who are so weak in body that they cannot content themselves with the use of food

once a day should eat twice. Fasting is for man, not man for fasting. But however often food is used, whether frequently or infrequently, satiety is strictly forbidden; it makes a person unfit for spiritual labors, and opens the door to other carnal passions.

Immoderate fasting—that is, prolonged excessive abstinence from food—is not approved by the Holy Fathers. From inordinate fasting and the exhaustion which results from it, a person becomes unfit for spiritual labors, frequently turns to gluttony, and often falls into the passion of boasting and pride.

Very important is the quality of food. The forbidden fruit of Paradise, although it was beautiful in appearance and tasted delicious, had a fatal effect on the soul. It imparted to it a knowledge of good and evil, and thereby ruined the innocence in which our first parents were created. And now food continues to have a powerful effect on the soul, which is particularly noticeable in the use of wine. This effect of food is due to its diverse action on the flesh and blood, and to the fact that the vapors and gases produced by it rise from the stomach into the brain and affect the mind. For this reason all intoxicating drinks are forbidden to the ascetic, since they deprive the mind of soberness and vigilance, and so of victory in the war of thought. The defeated mind, especially when it has been defeated by sensual thoughts in which it has taken pleasure, is deprived of spiritual grace. What was acquired by many protracted labors is lost in a few hours, in a few minutes.

A monk should not use wine at all, said Saint Pimen the Great. This rule ought to be followed by every pious Christian who wishes to preserve his chastity and virginity. The Holy Fathers followed this rule, and if they did use wine, it was extremely seldom and with the greatest moderation. Heating foods should be banished from the table of the abstinent since they arouse bodily passions. Such are pepper, ginger and other spices.

The most natural food is that which was assigned to man by the Creator immediately after his creation—food of the vegetable kingdom. God said to our first parents: *Behold I have given you every seed-bearing plant, the sowing seed which is on the whole earth; and every tree which has within it the fruit of seminal seed shall be to you for food.* (Gen 1:29). It was only after the flood that *the use of meat* was allowed. (Gen 9:3).

Vegetable food is the best for an ascetic. It is less heating for the blood and less fattening for the flesh. The vapors and gases it produces and which rise to the brain affect it less. Finally, it is the most wholesome because it produces less mucus in the stomach. For these reasons, when vegetable food is used, it is particularly easy to preserve purity and mental alertness, and the power of the mind over the whole man; also the passions act more feebly, and the person is more capable of engaging in the labors of piety.

Fish foods, especially those prepared from large sea fish, are of quite another kind. They act more perceptibly on the brain, fatten the body, heat the blood, and fill the stomach with harmful mucus, especially when they are frequently or constantly used.

These effects are incomparably more violent in the case of meat. It has an extremely fattening effect on the flesh, it causes a special corpulence, and heats the blood. The vapors and gases it produces are very oppressive to the brain. For this reason, it is not used at all by monks. It is the prerogative of people living in the world who are always engaged in hard physical labor. But even for them the constant use of meat is harmful.

“What!” at this point would-be wiseacres exclaim, “Meat is allowed man by God, and do you forbid its use?” To this we reply in the words of the Apostle, *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.* (1Cor 10:23). We decline from the use of meat not because we regard it as unclean but because it produces a special corpulence in our whole constitution and hinders spiritual progress.

Our Holy Church, by her wise rules and regulations, has allowed Christians living in the world to use meat. Yet she does not allow its constant use, but has divided the year into seasons of meat-eating and seasons of abstinence from meat in which the Christian is detached from his meat-eating. This fruit of the fasts can be discovered by experience by everyone who keeps them.

For those living the monastic life the use of meat is forbidden. In its place, the use of milk foods and eggs is permitted during the seasons of meat-eating. At certain times and on certain days the use of fish is permitted them. But mostly they can use only vegetable food.

Vegetable food is used almost exclusively by the most zealous ascetics and exponents of piety, especially those who have felt within them the movement of the Spirit of God, on account of the convenience mentioned above and the cheapness of this food. For drink, they use only water and avoid not only heating and intoxicating beverages but also even nourishing ones like all the drinks made from bread.

The rules of fasting are appointed by the Church with the object of helping her children and to supply direction for the whole of Christian society. At the same time, it is prescribed for everyone to examine himself with the help of an experienced and discerning spiritual father and not to impose upon himself a fast which is beyond his strength. We repeat—**fasting is for man, and not man for fasting.** Food given for the support of the body should not be used to destroy it.

If you control your stomach, said Saint Basil the Great, you will mount to Paradise; but if you do not control it, you will be a victim of death. Here by the name Paradise should be understood a state of grace and prayer, and by death a pas-

sionate condition. A state of grace during our life on earth serves as a pledge of our eternal beatitude in the heavenly Eden. A fall into the power of sin and into a state of spiritual deadness serves as a pledge of our fall into the abyss of hell for eternal torment.

Amen.



FAITH AND HOPE IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov.

There is no such thing as blind happenstance! God rules the world, and all that happens in heaven and under the heavens happens according to the wise and omnipotent God, unfathomable in His wisdom and omnipotence, and unfathomable in His governance.

If there is not a single event that is secret from God, then we must glorify God for everything that happens. God watches over the times, events in society, and personal fates.

It is necessary to assure ourselves that God governs the fate of the world and of each person. Life experiences are not long to prove and confirm this Gospel teaching.

All things pass—both the bad and the good—and neither men, nor demons can do anything if God does not allow it.

Why does our soul rebel against God's will and allowances? Because we have not revered God as God...

From living faith in God, is born complete submission to God, and from submission to God is born peace in our thoughts and calm in our hearts.

From seeing God's Providence, in the soul develops profound meekness and unflinching love of neighbor, which no winds can disturb or agitate.

The vision of God's Providence preserves and grows our faith in God.

The Christian who keeps his gaze fixed upon God's Providence preserves constant courage and unshakable steadfastness, even amidst terrible misfortunes.

Before the sight of God's Providence, not only can temporary sorrows not stand, but also those that await a person when he crosses the threshold into eternity beyond the grave.

A Christian should never and for no reason worry, for God's Providence carries him in its arms. Our only care should be that we would ever remain faithful to the Lord.

That one soldier has fallen does not mean the entire army is defeated.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A SALVIFIC CONFESSION

Source: "The Path to Salvation," by St. Theophan the Recluse, 4th edition, published by St. Paisius Monastery, Safford, AZ (2016), pp. 168-172.



For a salvific confession, one must prepare himself sufficiently. Whoever has read this narrative thus far is ready. Proceed with reverence and faith!

[1] Firmly convinced of the necessity of this Sacrament, go to it—not as though it were some new part of your life or just a simple custom, but with complete faith that for you as a sinner, this is the

only possible way to be saved. By skipping it, you will be numbered among the condemned, and, consequently, you will be outside of any mercy. By not entering this clinic, your spirit will not regain its health and you will remain as you were, sick and disturbed. You will not see the kingdom if you do not enter it through the door of repentance.

[2] By these convictions engender the desire for this Sacrament. Go to it not as to the slaughter, but as to a fountain of blessings. Whoever vividly represents to himself the fruit born in us through the holy Sacrament of Confession could not but long for it. A man goes to it all in wounds from head to toe, and he returns from it healthy in all his members, alive, strong, and with a feeling of safety from future infection. He goes there weighed down by a heavy yoke—the whole sum of past sins on him. It torments him and deprives him of all peace. He returns light, joyful, and with a consoling disposition of spirit that he has received a charter of complete forgiveness.

[3] Shame and fear will come up—let them! That is why this Sacrament was created, to bring shame and fear upon us—and the more shame and fear, the more it will save us. Desire this Sacrament, desire great shame and great trembling. If someone wants to be healed, does he not know how painful the treatment is? He knows, but resolving to be healed, he also determines to endure the attendant pain in the hope of recovering. And you, when you were tormented by the feelings of regret that came upon you and you rushed to come closer to God, did you not say: "I am ready to endure anything, only have mercy on me and forgive me!" Well, now it is happening according your wish.

Do not be upset over this shame and fear; they are bound up with this Sacrament for your own good. By having burned again in them, you will become morally stronger. You burned already more than once in the fire of repentance—burn some more. Then you burned alone before God and your conscience, but now burn before a witness appointed by God, in witness of the sincerity of that solitary burning, and perhaps to complete its lack.

There will be a judgment, and at it will be shame and fear without hope. Shame and fear at confession pay for the shame and fear then. If you do not want the latter, go through with the former. Besides, it always happens that, according to the measure of the trembling that the penitent goes through, he overflows with consolation at the confession. This is where the Saviour truly shows Himself to be the Comforter of the laboring and heavy laden! By sincerely repenting and confessing the heart learns this truth by experience, rather than by faith alone.

[4] Then, again recalling all the sins you have committed and renewing the now ripened, inner commitment not to repeat them, rise up in the living faith that you stand before the Lord Himself Who receives your confession; and tell everything that burdens your conscience, without holding anything back. If you have approached it with the desire to shame yourself, you will not cover yourself, but will express as fully as possible your disgraceful weakness for sins. This will serve to satiate your humbled heart. You must be sure that every sin you have told is torn from the heart, for every hidden sin remains there even more to your condemnation, because the sinner stood with his wound near the Doctor that heals all things. By hiding the sin, he closed the wound without regretting that he torments and disrupts his soul.

In the story of Blessed Theodora, who passed through the toll-houses, it is written that her evil accusers did not find in their scrolls those sins that she had confessed. The angels later explained to her that Confession wipes away sin from every place that it had been recorded. Neither in the book of the conscience, nor in the book of the living, nor with the evil destroyer is it attributed to that person—Confession wiped away these lines. Tear out all that burdens you without hiding anything.

The point to which you need to bring the revelation of your sins is so that the spiritual father has a precise understanding of you; so that he sees you as you are, and, in giving absolution he absolves you and not someone else; so that when he says: *Forgive and absolve this penitent for the sins he has committed*, nothing remains in you that would come under this category. He does well who, having prepared for Confession for the first time after a long period of residing in sins, finds some opportunity to have a preliminary discussion with the spiritual father, and tells him the entire history of his sinful life. This will remove the danger of forgetting or omitting

anything in confusion during the confession. Everyone must concern himself with a complete revelation of his sins. The Lord gave the authority to absolve sins not automatically, but under the condition that they be repented of and confessed. If something is left incomplete, then it could happen that when the spiritual father pronounces: *I forgive and absolve you*, the Lord will say: *I condemn you*.

[5] Now the confession is over. The spiritual father lifts his *epitrachelion*, covers the head of the penitent with it, and keeping it in his hand, pronounces the absolution of all sins, making the sign of the Cross on the head. What occurs at this moment in the soul is well-known to everyone who sincerely repents. Streams of grace pour from the head into the heart and fill it with joy. This is not from human beings, not from the penitent, not from the absolver—this is the mystery of the Lord Healer and Comforter of souls.

Sometimes it happens at this time that some hear clearly in their hearts a divine word to strengthen and inspire them for future works. This is a sort of spiritual weapon entrusted by Christ the Saviour to the man who now enters the ranks of those warring in His name. Whoever has heard such a word, let him treasure it later, to comfort and inspire him—comfort, because it is clear that the confession has been received when it has pleased the Lord to enter into a sort of discussion with the penitent; inspire, because in the hour of temptation all he has to do is remember it, and strength comes from somewhere to resist! With what do warriors in battle inspire themselves? With a word spoken by the commander that affected them powerfully. It is the same here.

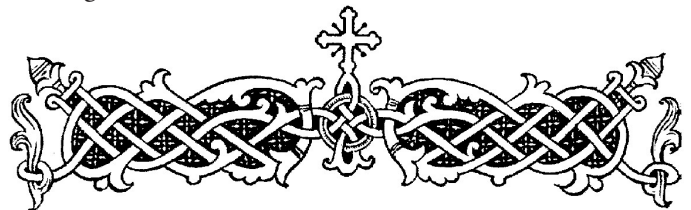
[6] With this everything is done. All that remains is to fall at God's feet with feelings of thankfulness for His unspeakable mercy, and kiss the Cross and Gospels as a sign of your vow. Go unwaveringly along the path shown to you in the Gospels, with the commitment to follow Christ the Saviour, as described in the Gospels, under His blessed yoke, only now taken upon yourself. Having completed this, go in peace, with the intention to intently act according to what you have promised, remembering that the judgment over you from now on will be from your own words. You have made a promise—keep it. It has been sealed by the Sacrament, and therefore you must be ever more faithful to it, so that you do not fall again into the ranks of those who have wasted grace.

[7] If the spiritual father gives you a penance, accept it with joy. If the spiritual father does not give you one, then ask him to. This will be not only a send-off to you as you depart on your good path, but also a shield and protection from outside enemy attacks on your new way of life.

Here is what the Patriarch of Constantinople wrote in answer to the Lutherans: “We accompany the absolution of sins with penances for many respectable reasons. First of all, so that through voluntary suffering the sinner will be freed here from onerous involuntary punishment there, in the next

life, for the Lord grants mercy to nothing more than He does suffering, especially voluntary suffering. Therefore St. Gregory also says that God's love is granted for tears. Secondly, it is in order to destroy in the sinner those passionate desires of the flesh which give birth to sin, for we know that opposites cure. Thirdly, it is so that the penance would serve as a bond or bridle for the soul, and not allow it to again take up those same vices from which it is still being cleansed. Fourthly, in order to accustom it to labor and patience, for virtue is a matter of labor. Fifthly, it is so that we will see and know whether or not the penitent has truly come to hate sin.”

Whoever finishes this course of spiritual treatment as given and, most importantly, confesses his sins without hiding anything, returns from the house of God the way criminals return from court who have received mercy and acquittal of their crimes instead of a death sentence. He returns with a deep feeling of thankfulness to the Saviour of our souls, with the firm resolve to dedicate himself to Him and to the fulfillment of His commandments all the rest of his life, with extreme disgust for all of his former sins, and with an unrestrainable desire to wipe away all traces of his former error. The one who has received absolution feels within himself that he is not useless, that he has been visited by a special power. Divine grace, which has thus far only acted on him from without in helping him conquer himself, now with the words: *I forgive and absolve* has entered into him, mingled with his spirit and filled it with a burning and longing, with which he now proceeds into action until the evening of his life.



No matter how absurd the idea of the toll-houses may seem to our “wise men,” they will not escape passing through them.

Whoever enters on the true path of pleasing God, or who begins with the aid of grace to strive toward God on the path of Christ's law, will inevitably be threatened by the danger of losing his way at the crossroads, of going astray and perishing, imagining himself saved. These crossroads are unavoidable because of the sinful inclinations and disorder of one's faculties which are capable of presenting things in a false light—to deceive and destroy a man. To this is joined the flattery of Satan, who is reluctant to be separated from his victims and, when someone from his domain goes to the light of Christ, pursues him and sets every manner of net in order to catch him again—and quite often he indeed catches him.

St. Theophan the Recluse

Γιὰ τὸν Μέγα Ἁγιασμό

Ἀπὸ τὶς ἱστοσελίδες τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Νέας Σμύρνης.



Ὁ Μεγάλος Ἁγιασμός τελεῖται κάθε χρόνο τὴν 5^η καὶ 6^η Ἰανουαρίου. Πολλοὶ εἶναι αὐτοὶ οἱ ὁποῖοι ρωτοῦν ἂν ὁ Ἁγιασμός αὐτὸς πίνεται, χρησιμοποιεῖται γιὰ ραντισμό, φυλάσσεται στὰ σπίτια καὶ ἂν «ἀντικαθιστᾶ» τὴ Θεία Κοινωνία. Τὸ κείμενο ποὺ ἀκολουθεῖ, μεταγλωττισμένο στὴ νεοελληνική, ἀποτελεῖ «εἰδικὴ γνωμοδότηση περὶ τοῦ θέματος

τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἁγιασμοῦ», δηλ. πῶς λαμβάνεται αὐτὸς παρὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν, ἂν φυλάσσεται καὶ ἂν ἀπ' αὐτὸν μεταλαμβάνουν» οἱ πιστοί, συνταχθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ μακαριστοῦ Μητροπολίτου Πατρῶν κυροῦ Νικοδήμου. Ἀρχικῶς αὐτὴ δημοσιεύθηκε στὰ Δίπτυχα τοῦ ἔτους 1999 (Α.α.θ), πρὸς ἐνημέρωση τῶν εὐλαβέστατων Ἐφημερίων καὶ πληροφόρηση τῶν πιστῶν.

Ἐπάρχει διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα στὸ Μεγάλο Ἁγιασμό ποὺ τελεῖται τὴν παραμονὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων καὶ ἐκεῖνον τῆς κύριας ἡμέρας τῆς ἑορτῆς;

Ὁ Μεγάλος Ἁγιασμός ποὺ τελεῖται τὴν παραμονὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων καὶ ἀνήμερα τῆς ἑορτῆς εἶναι ἀκριβῶς ὁ ἴδιος. Ἐσφαλμένα κάποιοι θεωροῦν ὅτι δῆθεν τελεῖται τὴν παραμονὴ ὁ «μικρὸς Ἁγιασμός» καὶ τὴν ἐπόμενη ὁ «Μέγας». Καὶ στὶς δύο περιπτώσεις τελεῖται ὁ Μεγάλος Ἁγιασμός. «Μικρὸς» Ἁγιασμός τελεῖται τὴν πρώτη μέρα κάθε μήνα, καθὼς καὶ ἐκτάκτως, ὅπως ὅταν τὸ ζητοῦν οἱ Χριστιανοὶ σὲ διάφορες περιστάσεις (ἐγκαινία οἰκῶν, καταστημάτων καὶ ἰδρυμάτων, σὲ θεμελίωση κτισμάτων, κ.λπ.). Ὁ Μεγάλος Ἁγιασμός τελεῖται μόνο δύο φορές τὸ χρόνο (τὴν 5^η καὶ 6^η Ἰανουαρίου) στὸ Ναό.

Ποῦ φυλάσσεται ὁ Μέγας Ἁγιασμός καὶ γιὰ ποῖο λόγο;

Ὁ Μεγάλος Ἁγιασμός φυλάσσεται ὅλο τὸ χρόνο στὸ Ναό. Φυλάσσεται ὄχι ἄνευ λόγου. Καὶ ὁ λόγος δὲν εἶναι ἄλλος, παρὰ γιὰ νὰ «μεταλαμβάνεται» ἀπὸ τοὺς πιστοὺς ὑπὸ ὀρισμένες συνθήκες καὶ προϋποθέσεις. Συνηθισμένη εἶναι ἡ περίπτωση ποὺ ἀφορᾶ στοὺς διατελοῦντες ὑπὸ ἐπιτίμιο τοῦ Πνευματικοῦ, ποὺ ἐμποδίζει τὴ συμμετοχὴ τους στὴ Θεία Κοινωνία, γιὰ ὀρισμένο καιρὸ, καὶ εἰθισται νὰ δίδεται σὲ αὐτοὺς Μέγας Ἁγιασμός, γιὰ εὐλογία καὶ παρηγοριά τους. Κανένα κώλυμα δὲν ὑφίσταται πρὸς τοῦτο, ἐφ' ὅσον

μάλιστα βρίσκονται «ἐν μετανοίᾳ καὶ ἐξομολογήσει». Ἀπαραίτητα ὅμως πρέπει νὰ συνειδητοποιοῦν ὅτι ὁ Μέγας Ἁγιασμός δὲν ὑποκαθιστᾶ οὔτε ἀντικαθιστᾶ τὴ Θεία Κοινωνία τοῦ Σώματος καὶ τοῦ Αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία ὀφείλουν μὲ τὴ μετάνοια νὰ προετοιμάζονται, γιὰ νὰ ἀπαλλαγοῦν ἀπὸ τὰ κωλύματα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ὥστε νὰ ἀξιωθοῦν νὰ κοινωνήσουν τὸ ταχύτερο.

Μπορεῖ ὁ Μέγας Ἁγιασμός νὰ φυλάσσεται στὸ σπίτι καὶ νὰ πίνουν ἀπ' αὐτὸν σὲ καιρὸ ἀσθένειας ἢ γιὰ ἀποτροπὴ βασκανίας καὶ κάθε σατανικῆς ἐνέργειας; Ἡ ἀπάντηση εἶναι θετική. Παρέχεται ἀπ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο τὸ ἱερὸ κείμενο τῆς Ἀκολουθίας τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἁγιασμοῦ, ποὺ προβλέπει «ἵνα πάντες οἱ ἀρνούμενοι καὶ μεταλαμβάνοντες ἔχοιεν αὐτὸ (τὸ ἡγιασμένον ὕδωρ...) πρὸς ἰατρείαν παθῶν, πρὸς ἁγιασμὸν οἴκων, πρὸς πᾶσαν ὠφέλειαν ἐπιτήδειον», καὶ δὴ καὶ «δαίμοσιν ὀλέθριον, ταῖς ἐναντίαις δυνάμεσιν ἀπρόσιτον» (πρβλ. καὶ τὴ συναφὴ εὐχὴ σὲ βασκανία: «φυγάδευσαν καὶ ἀπέλασαν πᾶσαν διαβολικὴν ἐνέργειαν, πᾶσαν σατανικὴν ἔφοδον καὶ πᾶσαν ἐπιβουλήν... καὶ ὀφθαλμῶν βασκανίαν τῶν κακοποιῶν ἀνθρώπων»).

Ἀναντίρρητα χειραγωγεῖται μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ ὁ πιστὸς νὰ ἀποφεύγει ἄλλες διεξόδους («ξόρκια», μαγεῖες καὶ ἄλλες μεθοδεῖες τοῦ πονηροῦ), καὶ νὰ καταφεύγει στὰ ἔγκυρα «ἀγιάσματα» τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὅπως εἶναι ὁ Μέγας Ἁγιασμός, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ «Μικρὸς» λεγόμενος Ἁγιασμός, ὡς συνειδητὸ μέλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς ταμειούχου τῆς Θείας Χάριτος, καὶ μέτοχος τῶν ἁγιαστικῶν της μέσων. Προϋποτίθεται βέβαια ὅτι στὶς οἰκίες ὅπου φυλάσσεται ὁ Μέγας Ἁγιασμός, καὶ τὸ καντήλι θὰ ἀνάβει καὶ θὰ καιεὶ ἐπιμελῶς, καὶ ἡ εὐλάβεια θὰ ὑπάρχει στὰ μέλη τῆς οἰκογενείας, τοὺς συζύγους καὶ τὰ παιδιά, καὶ θὰ ἀποφεύγεται κάθε αἰτία ποὺ ἀποδιώχνει τὴ Θεία Χάρη (ὅπως βλασφημίες ἢ ἄλλες ἀσχημοσύνες).

Ποιὰ ἡ σχέση νηστείας καὶ Μεγάλου Ἁγιασμοῦ;

Ἡ ἱστορικὴ ἀρχὴ τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἁγιασμοῦ εἶναι ἡ ἐξῆς: Στὴν ἀρχαία Ἐκκλησία τὴν παραμονὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων—ὅπως τὴν παραμονὴ τοῦ Πάσχα καὶ τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς—γινόταν ἡ βάπτισμα τῶν Κατηχουμένων, δηλ. τῶν νέων Χριστιανῶν. Τὰ μεσάνυχτα τελοῦνταν ὁ ἁγιασμός τοῦ ὕδατος γιὰ τὴν τελετὴ τοῦ Βαπτίσματος τότε εἰσήχθη ἡ συνήθεια—ὅπως μᾶς πληροφορεῖ ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος—οἱ Χριστιανοὶ νὰ παίρνουν ἀπὸ τὸ ἡγιασμένο νερὸ καὶ νὰ πίνουν ἢ νὰ τὸ μεταφέρουν στὰ σπίτια τους γιὰ εὐλογία καὶ νὰ τὸ διατηροῦν ὀλόκληρο τὸ χρόνο· «Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐν μεσονυκτίῳ κατὰ τὴν ἑορτὴν ταύτην ἅπαντες ὕδρευσάμενοι, οἴκαδε τὰ νάματα ἀποτίθενται, καὶ εἰς ἐνιαυτὸν ὀλόκληρον φυλάττουσιν». (Λόγος εἰς τὸ Ἅγιον Βάπτισμα τοῦ Σωτῆρος, PG 49:366).

Ἀργότερα ὁμως, σὲ καιροὺς λειτουργικῆς παρακμῆς, ἡ ἀκολουθία τοῦ Ἁγιασμοῦ ἀπομονώθηκε ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τοῦ Βαπτίσματος, παρόλο ποὺ διατήρησε πολλὰ στοιχεῖα του. Παρέμεινε ἡ συνήθεια ὥστε οἱ πιστοὶ νὰ παίρνουν ἀπὸ τὸ ἁγιασμένο νερὸ «πρὸς ἁγιασμὸν οἴκων», ὅπως ἀναφέρει ἡ καθαγιαστικὴ εὐχὴ τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἁγιασμοῦ.

Νωρὶς ἐπίσης ἐπικράτησε ἡ συνήθεια τῆς νηστείας πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἑορτὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων, γιὰ κυρίως δύο λόγους:

[1] Οἱ δύο μεγάλες ἑορτές τῶν Χριστουγέννων καὶ τῶν Θεοφανείων στὴν ἀρχαία Ἐκκλησία ἦταν ἐνωμένες σὲ μία, αὐτὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων ἢ Ἐπιφανείων, ποὺ τελοῦταν τὴν 6^η Ἰανουαρίου (συνήθεια ποὺ διατηρεῖται στὴν Ἀρμενικὴ Ἐκκλησία μέχρι σήμερα)· ὁμως ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος (4^{ος} αἰ.) χώρισε τὶς δύο γιορτές καὶ ὄρισε ἡ μὲν Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ γιορτάζεται τὴν 25^η Δεκεμβρίου, ἡ δὲ Βάπτιση καὶ φανέρωση τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδας τὴν 6^η Ἰανουαρίου. Πρὶν ἀπὸ κάθε Δεσποτικὴ ἑορτὴ προηγοῦνταν νηστεία γιὰ τὴν ψυχικὴ καὶ σωματικὴ κάθαρση τῶν πιστῶν. Ἄς θυμηθοῦμε πὼς ἡ νηστεία ἔχει μέσα της τὸ στοιχεῖο τοῦ πένθους γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες. Ἔτσι, ὅταν χώρισαν οἱ δύο ἑορτές, ἡ νηστεία ποὺ προηγοῦνταν ἀκολούθησε τὴν ἑορτὴ τῶν Χριστουγέννων· γι' αὐτὸ ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὄρισε νὰ νηστεύουμε μόνο τὴν παραμονὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων σάν προετοιμασία γιὰ τὴν ἑορτὴ, καὶ ὄχι περισσότερες ἡμέρες, γιὰτὶ βρισκόμαστε σὲ ἑορταστικὴ περίοδο, τὸ ἅγιο Δωδεκαήμερο.

[2] Ἀρχαία συνήθεια ἦταν ἐπίσης αὐτοὶ ποὺ θὰ βαπτίζονταν νὰ νηστεύουν καὶ μαζὶ μὲ αὐτοὺς οἱ Ἀνάδοχοι, οἱ συγγενεῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅλοι οἱ ἄλλοι ἀδελφοὶ Χριστιανοὶ οἱ ὁποῖοι τηροῦσαν ἐθελοντικὰ νηστεία «ὑπὲρ τῶν βαπτιζομένων». Δὲν ἦταν λοιπὸν καθόλου δύσκολο στὴ συνείδηση τῶν ἀρχαίων Χριστιανῶν νὰ συνδεθοῦν ἡ πόση τοῦ ἁγιασμοῦ καὶ ἡ νηστεία, χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχει αἰτιώδης σχέση μετὰξὺ αὐτῶν.

Ἔτσι λοιπὸν, μεταφέροντας τὸ ζήτημα στὴ σημερινὴ ἐποχὴ μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι οἱ τακτικῶς μεταλαμβάνοντες τῶν ἁγίων Μυστηρίων καὶ τηροῦντες τὶς νηστείες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ὅπως καὶ τῆς 5^{ης} Ἰανουαρίου, εἶναι ἤδη ἔτοιμοι ὥστε νὰ πιοῦν ἀπὸ τὸ Μεγάλο Ἁγιασμὸ τῆς 5^{ης} καὶ 6^{ης} Ἰανουαρίου. Σὲ ἄλλη περίπτωση, ἐνδείκνυται νὰ τελοῦν σχετικὴ νηστεία, ὅπως ὀρίζει σ' αὐτοὺς ὁ Πνευματικὸς τους.

Τέλος ὅσοι ἐκτάκτως πίνουν ἀπὸ τὸ Μεγάλο Ἁγιασμὸ ποὺ φυλάσσουν στὸ σπίτι τους, σὲ ὄρες ἀσθενειῶν καὶ κινδύνων κ.λπ., μετὰ ἢ ἄνευ νηστείας, ἂς μὴν ὑστεροῦν στὴν πνευματικὴ νηστεία ἀπέχοντες «ἀπὸ παντὸς μολυσμοῦ σαρκὸς τε καὶ πνεύματος, ἐπιτελοῦντες ἀγιοσύνην ἐν φόβῳ Θεοῦ». (Β' Κορ. 7:1).

Νύχτα Τσικνοπέμπτης

Ἀπὸ τὶς ἱστοσελίδες τῆς Ἱ. Μητροπόλεως Θηβῶν καὶ Λεβαδείας.

Πὼς ἀγριεύουν ἔτσι οἱ ἄνθρωποι; Πὼς μεμιᾶς ἀφήνονται ἔρμαια στὶς ροπές καὶ στὶς τάσεις τῆς φθαρτῆς ἀνθρώπινης τους φύσης; Πὼς κατάντησε ἀπόψε αὐτὴ ἡ ἡσυχία ἐπαρχιακῆ πόλη; Θαρρεῖς καὶ δὲν τὴν κατοικοῦν ἄνθρωποι ἀλλὰ ἀνθρωπόμορφα τέρατα ποὺ ἄλλος μὲ κεφάλι γαιδάρου, ἄλλος λιονταριοῦ, ἄλλος πιθήκου τρέχουν νὰ προλάβουν, νὰ γλεντήσουν, νὰ μεθύσουν, νὰ ἁμαρτήσουν ὅσο γίνεται περισσότερο. Γιατὶ ἀπόψε εἶναι Τσικνοπέμπτη καὶ γέμισε ἡ πόλη μασκαράδες. Ἀπόψε κάθε λογικὸς ἄνθρωπος δὲν ξεμυτίζει ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι του.

Αὐτὰ σκεφτότανε ὁ παπα-Θανάσης, καθὼς ἔμπαινε στὸ σπίτι του γυρνώντας ἀπὸ τὸν Ναό.

- Ἔ, παπαδιά μου, τὸ κακὸ παράγινε! Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μᾶς συγχωρέσει, εἶπε στὴ γυναῖκα του, μόλις μπῆκε μέσα. Ἐκεῖνη τὸν κοίταξε μὲ κατανόηση.

- Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μᾶς φυλάει, εἶπε καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ ἐτοιμάζει τὸ βραδινὸ φαγητό.

Στὸ σπίτι τοῦ παπα-Θανάση, περασμένα πιά τὰ μεσάνυχτα, ἐπικρατεῖ ἡσυχία. Τὰ παιδιὰ καὶ ἡ παπαδιά εἶχαν ἤδη κοιμηθεῖ κι ὁ παπα-Θανάσης ἐτοιμαζότανε καὶ κείνος νὰ πάει γιὰ ὕπνο, ὅταν ἀκούστηκε τὸ κουδοῦνι τῆς πόρτας. Τινάχτηκε μέσα στὸν ὕπνο τῆς ἡ παπαδιά καὶ βρέθηκε δίπλα στὸν παπα-Θανάση.

- Μὴν ἀνοίγεις τέτοια νύχτα, πάτερ μου! Τὸν παρακάλεσε φοβισμένη.

- Γιατὶ φοβᾶσαι; Εἶναι ἡ πρώτη φορὰ ποὺ μᾶς κτυποῦν τέτοια ὄρα τὴν πόρτα; Ἀφοῦ τὸ ξέρεις τὸ σπίτι τοῦ Ἱερέα διανυκτερεῖει κάθε βράδυ.

- Ναί, μὰ ἀπόψε...

Τῆς χαμογέλασε ὁ παπα-Θανάσης κι ἄνοιξε τὴν πόρτα.

- Πάτερ μου, μὲ συγχωρεῖτε ποὺ ἦρθα τέτοια ὄρα, ὁμως ἡ μάνα μου πεθαίνει καὶ ζητᾶ νὰ ἐξομολογηθεῖ καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσει.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ στεκόταν μπροστά του, παρόλο ποὺ ἦταν ἄντρας, ἔτρεμε ὀλόκληρος κι ἄφηνε τὰ δάκρυά του δίχως ντροπὴ νὰ τρέχουν.

- Πήγαινε ἐσὺ κοντὰ της, παιδί μου, καὶ γὼ πάω ὡς τὴν ἐκκλησία νὰ πάρω τὴ Θεῖα Κοινωνία καὶ ἔρχομαι ἀμέσως.

Ἔφυγε ὁ ἄντρας ἀφήνοντας στὸν παπα-Θανάση τὴ διεύθυνσή του.

- Ποῦ θὰ πᾶς, πάτερ μου, μόνος σου τέτοια ὄρα, μιὰ τέτοια νύχτα; Δὲ φοβᾶσαι; Γιατὶ δὲν τὸν κρατοῦσες νὰ πᾶτε συντροφιὰ;

Ἡ παπαδιά μιλοῦσε καὶ κείνος τὴν κοίταξε ἀυστηρά.

- Μόνος εἶπες, παπαδιά, μόνος; Κι ὁ Κύριος ποὺ θὰ κουβαλᾶω στὰ χέρια μου; Ἔ παπαδιά μου, κάτι σ' ἔχει πιάσει ἀπόψε καὶ δὲ μιᾶς γνωστικά.

Ντύθηκε ὁ παπα-Θανάσης καὶ βγήκε στὸ δρόμο. Ξέχασε πὼς ἦταν νύχτα Τοικνοπέμπτης. Δὲν τὸν ἀπασχολοῦσαν καθόλου οἱ μασκαράδες ποὺ ἔβλεπε γύρω του. Ἐνα μόνον τὸν ἀπασχολοῦσε, νὰ προλάβει νὰ δώσει τὸ «Φάρμακο τῆς ἀθανασίας» στὴν ἑτοιμοθάνατη. Πῆρε μὲ δέος στὰ χέρια του τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ξαναβγήκε στὸ δρόμο. Δὲν κοιτοῦσε οὔτε δεξιά οὔτε ἀριστερά. Μόνον ἔτρεχε νὰ προλάβει. Σὲ μιὰ στροφή τοῦ δρόμου ἀκοῦσε γέλια καὶ φωνές. Κάποιος φώναξε κοροϊδευτικά: «Τὴν εὐχή σου Δέσποτα!», μὰ δὲν γύρισε νὰ κοιτάξει. Καὶ τότε, δὲν κατάλαβε πὼς, βρέθηκε κυκλωμένος ἀπὸ μιὰ παρέα μασκαράδων, ποὺ προσπαθοῦσαν νὰ τὸν σταματήσουν.

- Συνάδελφε, ποῦ πᾶμε;

Ἐνας νεαρὸς μασκαρεμένος σὲ παπᾶ, μὲ χνῶτο ποὺ μύριζε ποτό, στεκόταν μπροστά του κρατώντας στὸ χέρι ἕνα Σταυρό. Τᾶ ἔχασε ὁ παπα-Θανάσης καὶ πρὶν προλάβει νὰ πει τίποτα, δέχτηκε τὴν ἐπίθεση ὄλου τοῦ τσοῦρμου. Ἄλλος τὸν τραβοῦσε ἀπὸ τα ρᾶσα κι ἄλλος τοῦ ἔβγαζε τὸ καλυμμαῦχι.

Ὁ παπα-Θανάσης ἔσφιξε στὸ στήθος του τ' Ἄχραντα Μυστήρια καὶ προσπάθησε νὰ τοὺς μιλήσει, μὰ κανένας δὲν ἄκουγε. Κάποιος τότε τοῦ τράβηξε τὴ γενειάδα καὶ—σὰν νὰ τὸν κτύπησε ἠλεκτρικὸ ρεῦμα—ἄρχισε νὰ φωνάζει:

- Εἶναι ἀληθινός, ρέ, εἶναι ἀληθινός!

Ἡ παρέα κοκκάλωσε στὴ θέση της κι ὁ παπα-Θανάσης, μὲ τὸ πρόσωπο μουσκεμένο ἀπὸ τὸν ἰδρώτα τῆς ἀγωνίας καὶ τὰ δάκρμά του, τοὺς κοίταξε χωρὶς νὰ μιλά.

- Συγγνώμη, πάτερ! Εἶπε ἐκεῖνος ποὺ τοῦ τράβηξε τὴ γενειάδα. Νομίζαμε πὼς ἦσασταν ψεύτικος σὰν κι αὐτὸν καί...

- Σᾶς εἶδαμε καὶ τέτοια ὥρα ἔξω καὶ ἦμασταν σίγουροι πὼς ἦσασταν μασκαρεμένος. Συγχωρέστε μας! Εἶπε ἕνας ἄλλος.

- Πᾶω νὰ κοινωνήσω μιὰ ἑτοιμοθάνατη, παιδιά μου. Ὁ θάνατος δὲν ἔχει ὥρες κατάλληλες καὶ ἀκατάλληλες κι ἐγὼ τρέχω νὰ τὸν προλάβω. Καὶ σύ, παιδί μου, βγάλε τὰ ρᾶσα τὰ τιμημένα. Μὴν ἀμαρτάνεις ἄλλο ρεξιλεύοντάς τα. Εἶναι πολὺ ἱερὸ τὸ ρᾶσο, γιὰ νὰ μασκαρεῖσαι μ' αὐτό. Τραβάτε στὰ σπίτια σας, παιδιά μου, κι ὁ Θεὸς νὰ σᾶς συγχωρέσει.

Ἄνοιξε τὸ βῆμα τοῦ ὁ παπα-Θανάσης, γιὰ νὰ κερδίσει τὸ χαμένο χρόνο. Ἦταν πικραμένος ὡς τὰ κατάβαθμά του. Τόσο πολὺ, λοιπόν, χάλασαν σὶ ἄνθρωποι, ὥστε μασκαρεύονται καὶ ἱερεῖς;

- Πάτερ, Πάτερ!

Ἡ φωνὴ ποὺ ἔφτασε στὰ αὐτιά του ἦταν γεμάτη ἀγωνία. Σταμάτησε καὶ περιμένε. Ἐνας νεαρὸς κατακόκκινος ἀπὸ τὴν τρεχάλα καὶ τὴν ντροπὴ ἔφτασε κοντά του λαχανιασμένος.

- Πάτερ! Εἶμαι κείνος ποὺ ντύθηκε παπᾶς. Τὸ ἔκανα ἐντελῶς ἀπερίσκεπτα, πάτερ καί... καὶ θέλω νᾶ ῥθω

μαζί σας στὸ σπῖτι τῆς ἑτοιμοθάνατης. Δέν... δὲν θέλω νὰ σᾶς πάρουν κι ἄλλοι γιὰ ψεύτικο...

Ὁ παπα-Θανάσης τοῦ ἔκανε νόημα νὰ τὸν ἀκολουθήσει. Στὰ χέρια του ὁ νεαρὸς κρατοῦσε τὸ σταυρὸ ποὺ εἶχε μαζί του. Μπήκαν στὸ σπῖτι τῆς ἑτοιμοθάνατης σιωπηλοί.

- Χαίρομαι, πάτερ, ποὺ βρήκατε καὶ παπαδάκι καὶ δὲν ἦρθατε μόνος, εἶπε ὁ ἄντρας ποὺ τὸν εἶχε καλέσει.

Ὁ νεαρὸς ξανακοκκίνησε καὶ κοίταξε μὲ ἀγωνία τὸν παπα-Θανάση.

- Ναί, ὁ Θεὸς μοῦ τὸν ἔστειλε, εἶπε ἐκεῖνος, καὶ τὰ λόγια του καρφώθηκαν στὴν καρδιὰ τοῦ νεαροῦ.

- Πάτερ, δὲν θὰ σᾶς ἐγκαταλείψω ποτέ, ἔλεγε ὁ νεαρὸς λίγη ὥρα ἀργότερα, ὅταν ὁ παπα-Θανάσης κλείδωνε τὸ ναό, ἀφήνοντας ξανὰ μέσα τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, θὰ γίνω ὁ βοηθός σας, τὸ παπαδάκι σας. Ἴσως ἔτσι μὲ συγχωρήσει ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ τὴν ἱεροσυλία ποὺ ἔκανα.

- Ἄμποτε, παιδί μου, νὰ τὸ φορέσεις τὸ ρᾶσο κι ἀληθινά, εἶπε ὁ παπα-Θανάσης καὶ τὸν εὐλόγησε μὲ τὰ δυὸ του χέρια, ἐκεῖνα ποὺ πρὶν ἀπὸ λίγο κρατοῦσαν τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Κύριο. Καὶ παράξενο—ὁ παπα-Θανάσης εἶχε τὴ σιγουριά πὼς αὐτὸ θὰ γινόταν κάποια μέρα! Καὶ ἀκόμα πιὸ παράξενο—τὴν ἴδια σιγουριά ἔνωθε μέσα του κι ὁ νεαρὸς...



Οἱ Ἄγγελοι κατὰ τὴν διδασκαλία τοῦ π. Ἰωάννη Ρωμανίδη

«Εμπειρικὴ Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας—κατὰ τὶς Προφορικὲς Παραδόσεις τοῦ π. Ἰ. Ρωμανίδη», Τόμος Β'.

Ὁ ἰερόπτες, μετέχοντας τῆς φωτιστικῆς καὶ θεοποιῦ ἐνεργείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, βλέπουν τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους Ἁγίους μέσα στὴν δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ διακρίνουν μιὰ ἄλλη διάσταση χρόνου. Αὐτό, τὸ ὑψηλότερο ἐπίπεδο τοῦ χρόνου, τὸ ἀποκάλεσαν «αἰώνας» καὶ τὸ διέκριναν ἀπὸ τὸν αἰσθητὸ χρόνο τῆς δημιουργίας ποὺ ζοῦσαν, πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν θεοπτικὴ ἐμπειρία, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ ἀπρόσιτο Φῶς, στὸ ὁποῖο κατοικεῖ ὁ Θεὸς καὶ τὸ ὁποῖο ἀποκάλεσαν «αἰδιόν». Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος λέγει ὅτι **αἰώνας εἶναι ὁ χρόνος ποὺ θὰ σταματήσει νὰ κινῆται, καὶ χρόνος εἶναι ὁ αἰώνας ποὺ μετρᾶται κινούμενος**.

Μέσα στοὺς αἰῶνες ζοῦν καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι, τὰ νοερὰ πνεύματα ποὺ δημιουργήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι καλοῦνται καὶ αὐτοὶ αἰῶνες. Εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ τὸ χωρίο τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου: «Ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκε κληρονόμον πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶ τοὺς αἰῶνας ἐποίησεν». (Ἐβρ. 1:2).

Εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνες εἶναι καὶ ὁ χρόνος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὁ Ἄγγελος πὸν δὲν εἶναι περιορισμένος ἀπὸ τὴν ὕλη, κινεῖται μέσα σὲ χρονικὰ διαστήματα, τὰ ὁποῖα δὲν ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τὰ δικά μας. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος κάτι ὀλίγον συλλαμβάνει ἀπὸ τὸν χρόνον. Ἀπὸ τὸν αἰῶνα τίποτε περὶπου, ἐκτὸς ἂν φθάνη στὴν θέωση καὶ ἔχη διορατικότητα.

Ἐφ' ὅσον οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι δημιουργήματα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἦλθαν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος στὸ εἶναι, σημαίνει ὅτι ἔχουν ἀρχὴ καὶ εἶναι κτιστοί. Παράλληλα, στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη γίνεται λόγος γιὰ τὸν ἄκτιστο Ἄγγελο, τὸν Μεγάλης Βουλῆς Ἄγγελο. Ὑπάρχει ἕνας ἐρμηνευτικὸς κανόνας, πὸν τὸν ἐκφράζει ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος σαφέστατα, ὅπου ὁ Ἄγγελος στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη λέγεται Θεός. Ὁ Ἄγγελος πὸν ἐμφανίζεται στοὺς Προφῆτες λέγεται Θεός, αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ Χριστός.

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος παρουσιάζει τὴν διαφορὰ μεταξὺ ἄκτιστου Λόγου καὶ κτιστῶν ἀγγέλων: «*Τίνι γὰρ εἶπε ποτὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων Υἱός μου εἰ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε, καὶ πάλιν ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν, ὅταν δὲ πάλιν εἰσαγάγῃ τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν Οἰκουμένην, λέγει καὶ προσκνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες Ἄγγελοι Θεοῦ, καὶ πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἀγγέλους λέγει ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα, καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πυρὸς φλόγα πρὸς δὲ τὸν υἱὸν ὁ θρόνος σου, ὁ Θεός, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος ράβδος εὐθύτητος, ἡ ράβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου ἠγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν διὰ τοῦτο ἔχρισέ σε ὁ Θεός, ὁ Θεός σου ἔλαιον ἀγαλλιᾶσσεως παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου».* (Ἐβρ. 1:5-9).

Ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ κάθετα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ Πατρὸς, ἐνῶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι λειτουργικὰ καὶ διακονικὰ πνεύματα: «*Πρὸς τίνα δὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων εἶρηκὲ ποτε κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου; οὐχὶ πάντες εἰσὶ λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα εἰς διακονίαν ἀποστελλόμενα διὰ τοὺς μέλλοντας κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν;*» (Ἐβρ. 1:13-14).

Ὡς δημιουργήματα τοῦ Θεοῦ οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι ὕλικοί, ἀλλὰ ἔχουν λεπτότερη ὕλη ἀπὸ τὴν δική μας. Γι' αὐτὸ δὲν λέγονται ἄϋλα ὄντα, γιατί ἄϋλος-Πνεῦμα εἶναι ὁ Θεός, ἀλλὰ χαρακτηρίζονται «αἰθέρια ὄντα». Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνὸς μάς λέει ὅτι, ἐν συγκρίσει μὲ τὰ ὄρατά, οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι ἀσώματα, διότι εἶναι ἀόρατοι, δηλαδή ἐν συγκρίσει μὲ τὸν Θεὸ εἶναι παχειὰ ὕλη. Λοιπόν, δὲν δέχονται οἱ Πατέρες ὅτι ὑπάρχουν ἄϋλα πράγματα· ὁ μόνος Ἄυλος καὶ φύσει Ἀθάνατος εἶναι ὁ Θεός· οὔτε οἱ Ἄγγελοι οὔτε ἡ ψυχὴ.

Οἱ Πατέρες ἐπίσης ἐξηγοῦν ὅτι φύσει ἀθάνατος εἶναι μόνον ὁ Θεός, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι δὲν εἶναι φύσει ἀθάνατοι. Ὅποτε, στοὺς Πατέρες τῆς

Ἐκκλησίας ὑπάρχει ἡ διδασκαλία ὅτι οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι ὕλικά ὄντα, καὶ «συγκρινόμενοι» μὲ τὸν Θεό, δὲν εἶναι καθαρὰ ἄϋλα πνεύματα. Καὶ αὐτὸ βέβαια βασίζεται στὴν πατερικὴ διάκριση μεταξὺ κτιστοῦ καὶ ἄκτιστου. Τὸ μόνον φύσει ἀθάνατον εἶναι τὸ ἄκτιστο, ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεός πὸν εἶναι Ἄκτιστος.

Ἔτσι, οἱ Ἄγγελοι καὶ οἱ ψυχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἶναι «*φύσει θνητοὶ ἀλλὰ χάριτι ἀθάνατοι*». Γιατί κάθε τί πὸν ἔχει ἀρχὴ ἔχει καὶ τέλος. Αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι κάποτε οἱ Ἄγγελοι καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ παύσουν νὰ ὑπάρχουν, ἀφοῦ ὁ Θεός θέλησε νὰ παραμένουν ἀθάνατοι. Ἀκόμη, οἱ Ἄγγελοι λέγονται «νόες», γιατί ἔχουν νοερὰ ἐνέργεια, ὄχι ὅμως λογικὴ. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔχει καὶ νοερὰ καὶ λογικὴ ἐνέργεια, ἐνῶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι μόνον νοερὰ ἐνέργεια. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἡ περίληψη τῆς δημιουργίας καὶ τὸ τελειότερο δημιούργημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ προκειμένου νὰ σώση τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ νὰ ἀγιάση τὴν κτίση, προσέλαβε τὴν ἀνθρώπινη φύση καὶ ὄχι τὴν ἀγγελικὴ.

Ἄν θέλετε νὰ διητε, ἔτσι ἀπὸ κοντά, τὸ θέμα αὐτό, θὰ πρέπει νὰ διαβάσετε τὸν Διονύσιο τὸν Ἀρεοπαγίτη, ὁ ὁποῖος, ὅταν μιλάει γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, κάθε φορὰ πὸν λέει «λόγο», λέει καὶ «νοῦ» καὶ κάθε φορὰ πὸν λέει «νοῦ» λέει καὶ «λόγο». Βλέπει κανεὶς λόγο καὶ νοῦ νὰ συμβαδίζουν, ὅταν μιλάει γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ὅταν μιλάει γιὰ τοὺς Ἄγγελους, τοὺς ὀνομάζει συνήθως νόες. Αὐτοὶ εἶναι οἱ νόες, νοερὲς δυνάμεις κ.ο.κ. Ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε λογικά ὄντα, ἀλλὰ εἴμεθα καὶ νοερὰ ὄντα, γιατί ἔχουμε καὶ τὰ δύο ἐμεῖς, ἐνῶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι μονοκόμματοι νόες. Ἐπειτα, βασικὴ ἀρχὴ τῆς πατερικῆς διδασκαλίας εἶναι ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχουν ἀμετάβλητα ὄντα, γι' αὐτὸ ὅλα τα ὄντα βρίσκονται σὲ μιὰ κίνηση. Οὔτε στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ θὰ ὑπάρξῃ στασιμότητα.

Ὁ ἅγιος Διονύσιος πιστεύει στὴν αἰώνια κίνηση, ὅτι ἡ τελειότητα εἶναι ἡ αἰώνια κίνηση. Τὴν στασιμότητα τὴν ἀποβάλλει. Πιστεύει στὴν τελειότητα, πὸν ἀκόμα καὶ τὰ Χερουβείμ καὶ τὰ Σεραφεῖμ καὶ οἱ Κυριότητες καὶ ὅλοι οἱ Ἄγγελοι, πάντα ἀπὸ δόξα σὲ δόξα καὶ διαρκῶς εὐρίσκονται σὲ διαρκὴ ἀνοδικὴ πορεία, παρὰ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι εἶναι Θεοῦμενοι καὶ βλέπουν τὴν δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐνῶ γιὰ τὴν πλατωνικὴ παράδοση ἡ τελείωση εἶναι ἡ ἀκίνησις καὶ τὸ ἀμετάβλητο. Ὅποτε, ἔχουμε τὸ ἀμετάβλητο στοὺς Ἕλληνες φιλοσόφους, ὡς τὸ τέλος τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης τελειότητος. Ἐνῶ, στὸν κατ' ἐξοχὴν Ἕλληνίζοντα, διηθεν, φιλόσοφο Πατέρα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἔχουμε τὴν ἀεικίνησις, ὡς τὸ θεμέλιό τῆς Θεώσεως.

Ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι, παρὰ τὴν συνεχὴ κίνηση, ποτὲ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ φθάσουν στὴν γνώση τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποτὲ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ γίνουν ἄκτιστοι. Τὴν οὐσία τοῦ Θεοῦ «*οὔτε οἱ Ἄγγελοι γνωρίζουν*».

Οὐ Κλέψεις

ΠΗΓΗ: «*Ορθόδοξος Τύπος*», τεύχος 2098, 25 Δεκεμβρίου, 2015.

Μᾶς λέγει ὁ Ἄπ. Παῦλος «Ὁ κλέπτων μηκέτι κλεπτέτω, μάλλον δὲ κοπιᾶτω ἐργαζόμενος τὸ ἀγαθὸν ταῖς χερσίν, ἵνα ἔχη μεταδιδόναι τῷ χρεῖαν ἔχοντι». (Ἐφ. 4:28) Δηλαδή: Αὐτὸς ποὺ κλεβει νὰ μὴ ξανακλέψῃ. Εἶναι καλύτερα νὰ ἐργάζεται μὲ κόπο γιὰ τὸ ἀγαθὸ καὶ νὰ τὸ βγάξῃ μὲ τὰ ἴδια του τὰ χέρια, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ νὰ δίνη καὶ σὲ ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἔχει ἀνάγκη. Διότι εἶναι ἐντολὴ τοῦ Κυρίου: «Μὴ κλέψῃς». (Μᾶρκ. 10:19). Εἶσαι βέβαια ἐλεύθερος νὰ κλέψῃς, ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ ἔχῃς ὑπόψῃ σου τὶς συνέπειες, ποὺ θὰ ὑποστῆς ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπινους ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς Θείους νόμους. Διότι ἡ κλεψιὰ εἶναι ἀδικία.

Κάποτε, βαδίζοντας ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ζήνωνας στὴν Παλαιστίνη καὶ ἔχοντας κουρασθῆ, κάθισε κοντὰ σὲ ἓνα λαχανόκηπο, γιὰ νὰ φάῃ. Καὶ τοῦ λέγει ὁ λογισμὸς: «Κόψε ἓνα ἀγγουράκι καὶ φάγε. Γιατί, εἶναι κακό;». Ἐκεῖνος ὅμως ἀπάντησε καὶ εἶπε στὸν λογισμὸ του: «Ὅσοι κλέβουν, πάνε στὴν Κόλαση. Δοκίμασε λοιπὸν τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου ἀπὸ ἐδῶ, ἂν μπορεῖς νὰ βαστάξῃς τὴν κόλαση». Σηκώθηκε λοιπὸν καὶ στάθηκε στὸ λιοπύρι ἐπὶ πέντε μέρες καὶ ἀφοῦ, ἔτσι ξεροψήθηκε, εἶπε: «Δὲν μπορῶ τὴν κόλαση νὰ βαστάξω». Καὶ λέγει στὸν λογισμὸ: «Ἄν δὲν μπορῆς, μὴ κλέβεις».

Διαβάζουμε στὸν Εὐεργετινὸ: «Εἰς τὸ Μοναστήρι τοῦ Ἁγ. Εὐθυμίου ἐξοῦσεν ἓνας Μοναχὸς ἀπὸ τὴν Γαλατίαν, ὁ Θεόδοτος, κανονικὸν μέλος τῆς Ἀδελφότητος. Εἰς αὐτόν, κάποτε συνέβη τὸ ἐξῆς, ἀπὸ φθόνον τοῦ πονηροῦ. Ὁ Στέφανος, ὁ ὁποῖος διετέλεσεν Ἡγούμενος τοῦ ἰδίου Μοναστηρίου πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν Θωμᾶν, προσέφερεν εἰς τὸ Μοναστήρι ἑξακόσια χρυσᾶ νομίσματα, τὰ ὁποῖα προήρχοντο ἀπὸ τὴν περιουσίαν τοῦ ἀποθανόντος ἀδελφοῦ του. Αὐτά, λοιπόν, τὰ ἑξακόσια χρυσᾶ νομίσματα, τὰ ὁποῖα εἶχαν τοποθετηθῆ εἰς τὸ διακονικόν, τὰ ἔκλεψεν ὁ Θεόδοτος τὴν ἐπομένην ἡμέραν ἐπῆρε τὸν δρόμον διὰ τὴν Ἁγίαν Πόλιν καὶ ἐβάδιζε πρὸς αὐτήν.

Ὅταν ἔφθασεν ἀπέναντι ἀπὸ τὴν Μονὴν τοῦ Μαρτυρίου, ἐκάθησε μὲ τὴν ἡσυχίαν του καὶ ἀφοῦ ἔβγαλε τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα ἐκράτησε πενήντα ἀπὸ αὐτὰ καὶ τὰ ὑπόλοιπα τὰ ἔβαλε κάτω ἀπὸ μίαν μεγάλην πέτραν. Ἐβαλε σημάδια, διὰ νὰ ἀναγνωρίσῃ τὸν τόπον καὶ ἀμέσως προχώρησε διὰ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα. Ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ ἐνοικίασεν ἄλογα, διὰ νὰ μεταβῆ εἰς τὴν Ἰόππην καὶ ἀφοῦ ἔδωσε προκαταβολήν, ἐπιστρέφει εἰς τὴν πέτρα, ὅπου εἶχε κρύψει τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα. Ὅταν ὅμως ἔφθασε κοντὰ—ᾠ! Ὁφθαλμοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ ποὺ τὰ βλέπετε ὅλα... ᾠ! Δικαιότατα κρῖματα τοῦ Θεοῦ—βλέπει νὰ ξετροπῶνῃ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν πέτραν ἓνας τεράστιος καὶ φοβερὸς τὴν θεῶν ὄφις. Ὁ ὄφις ἐκεῖνος ἐφαίνετο ὡσὰν νὰ εἶχε διαταχθῆ νὰ φυλάσῃ τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα καὶ νὰ ἐμποδίσῃ τὸν Θεόδοτον νὰ πλησιάσῃ τὸ ξένον πρᾶγμα.

Τὴν ἐπομένην ἡμέραν ἔρχεται καὶ πάλιν εἰς ἐκεῖνον τὸν τόπον ἀμέσως τότε ὡς ἂν κάποια ἐναέριος δύναμις νὰ ἐπέπεσεν ἀπὸ ὑψηλὰ καὶ, ὡσὰν μὲ ρόπαλον, ἐκτύπησε τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ Θεόδοτου μὲ τόσην δύναμιν, ὥστε τὸν ἀνέτρεψε καὶ τὸν ἔρριψεν εἰς τὴν γῆν ὡς νεκρόν. Μερικοὶ ὅμως νοσοκόμοι, ἀπὸ τὸ πλησίον Νοσοκομεῖον, ὅταν ἦλθαν καὶ τὸν εὗρηκαν εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν ἀθλίαν κατάστασιν, τὸν ἐσήκωσαν εἰς τὰ χεῖρας των καὶ τὸν μετέφεραν εἰς τὸ Νοσοκομεῖον, ποὺ εὗρισκετο εἰς τὴν Ἁγίαν Πόλιν. Ἐκεῖ, ἀφοῦ παρέμεινε νοσηλευόμενος ἀρκετὰς ἡμέρας, βλέπει ἓνα βράδυ εἰς τὸ ὄνειρό του κάποιον Γέροντα, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐφαίνετο πάρα πολὺ θυμωμένος ἐναντίον του.

—Δὲν θὰ ἠμπορέσῃς νὰ σηκωθῆς ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ κρεβάτι, τοῦ λέγει, κατ' ἄλλον τρόπον, ἂν προηγουμένως δὲν ἐπιστρέψῃς εἰς τὴν Μονὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Εὐθυμίου τὰ χρήματα ποὺ ἔκλεψες.

Ἀμέσως ἔστειλε καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ἀπ' ἐκεῖ τὸν ξενοδόχον, εἰς τὸν ὁποῖον ἐφανερώσε λεπτομερῶς τὴν κλοπὴν καὶ ὅλα ὅσα ἐπηκολούθησαν. Τὸ στέλλει δὲ νὰ τὰ ἐκθέσῃ ὅλα λεπτομερῶς εἰς τὸ Μοναστήριον. Μόλις ἔμαθαν αὐτὰ οἱ Γέροντες, ποὺ ἦσαν κοντὰ εἰς τὸν ἡγούμενον Θωμᾶν καὶ τὸν Λεόντιον, πορεύονται ἀμέσως πρὸς τὴν τὴν Ἁγίαν Πόλιν. Ἀφοῦ ἐτοποθέτησαν τὸν Θεόδοτον ἐπάνω εἰς ἓνα φορεῖον, τὸν μεταφέρουν, διὰ νὰ τοὺς ὑποδείξῃ τὸν τόπον, ὅπου εἶχε κρύψει τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα. Πράγματι εὗρισκουν τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν πέτραν.

Ἐκεῖνος δὲ ὁ φοβερὸς φύλαξ, ὃ τοῦ θαύματος..., εἶχε φύγει, ὡς νὰ ὑπεχώρησεν ἐμπρὸς εἰς τοὺς πραγματικοὺς ἰδιοκτητὰς τοῦ θησαυροῦ. Ἀμέσως τότε παραλαμβάνουν τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἐθεώρησαν ἀσήμαντα ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἐδαπάνησεν ὁ Θεόδοτος, τὸν συνεχώρησαν καὶ ἐπέστρεψαν. Ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἀπὸ τὴν στιγμὴν ἐκείνην ἀπηλλάγη τελειῶς ἀπὸ τὸ κακὸν καὶ ἀνέκτησε τὴν σωματικὴν του ὑγείαν».



Εἶναι πολλοὶ ἐκεῖνοι, ποὺ ἐπέτυχαν τὴν σωτηρία τους χωρὶς προφητικὰ χαρίσματα καὶ ἐλλάμψεις καὶ θαυματουργίες. Χωρὶς τὴν ταπεινώσιν ὅμως κανεὶς δὲν πρόκειται νὰ εἰσελθῇ στὸν νυμφῶνα. Διότι τὰ μὲν πρῶτα τὰ διαφυλάσσει ἢ δευτέρα, ἐνῶ ἀντιθέτως τὰ πρῶτα σὲ ἐπιπολαίους ἀνθρώπους ἐξαφάνισαν τὴν ταπεινώσιν. Γιὰ νὰ ταπεινούμεθα, ἔστω καὶ χωρὶς τὴν θέλησή μας, ὁ Κύριος οἰκονόμησε τοῦτο: Κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ βλέπῃ τὰ τραύματά του, ὅπως τὰ βλέπει ὁ πλησίον του. Ἔτσι εἴμαστε ὑποχρεωμένοι νὰ χρεωστοῦμε τὴν θεραπεία μας ὄχι στὸν ἑαυτὸν μας, ἀλλὰ στὸν πλησίον καὶ στὸν Θεόν.

Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Σιναΐτου

Ὁ Διωγμὸς τῶν Εὐσεβῶν

Ἀπομαγνητοφωνημένη ὁμιλία τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης π. Αυγουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010), ἡ ὁποία ἐγινε στὸν Ἱ. Ναὸ Ἀγ. Γεωργίου πόλεως Φλωρίνης τὴν 12^η Φεβρουαρίου, 1984.

Οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διωχθήσονται.

[Β΄ Τιμ. 3:12]



Σήμερα, ἀγαπητοί μου, ἀρχίζει τὸ Τριῶδιο. Τί εἶνε Τριῶδιο; Ἄν ρωτήσουμε τοὺς κοσμικοὺς ἀνθρώπους, θὰ μᾶς ποῦν· Τριῶδιο ἴσον χοροί, διασκεδάσεις, γλέντια, μάσκες, καρναβάλια. Αὐτὸ ὅμως εἶνε πλάνη. Αὐτὸ δὲν εἶνε Τριῶδιο· εἶνε ἀντιτριῶδιο, ἀντίθετο μὲ τὸ Τριῶδιο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας.

Τριῶδιο εἶνε μία ἱερὰ περίοδος τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους, περίοδος ἐντατικωτέρας ἀσκήσεως. Ὅπως ὁ στρατὸς ἔχει περίοδο ἀσκήσεων, γιὰ νὰ εἶνε οἱ στρατιῶτες πανέτοιμοι διὰ πᾶν ἐνδεχόμενον, ἔτσι καὶ τὸ Τριῶδιο εἶνε περίοδος ἱερῶν ἀσκήσεων τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Τὸ Τριῶδιο εἶνε δέκα ἐβδομάδες πρώτη ἡμέρα εἶνε σήμερα, καὶ τελευταία ἡμέρα εἶνε τὸ Μέγα Σάββατο, ὅταν ὁ ἱερεὺς γεμᾶτος ἐνθουσιασμῷ σκορπάει μέσ' στὸ ναὸ δεξιά - ἀριστερά, πάνω - κάτω, φύλλα δάφνης καὶ ψάλλει «Ἀνάστα, ὁ Θεός, κρῖνον τὴν γῆν». (Ψαλμ. 81:8).

Τὸ Τριῶδιο, γιὰ νὰ ἐκφρασθῶ ἀπλουστερα, εἶνε μία σκάλα, ποὺ μᾶς ὑψώνει ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ στὸν οὐρανό. Μοιάζει μὲ τὴ σκάλα ποὺ εἶδε ὁ Ἰακώβ, ποὺ τὸ κάτω ἄκρο τῆς πατοῦσε στὴ γῆ καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ἔφτανε στὸν οὐρανό. Μιὰ σκάλα λοιπὸν βλέπουμε μπροστά μας, καὶ σήμερα εἶνε τὸ πρῶτο σκαλοπάτι. Ἐμπρός, πλησιάστε καὶ πατήστε τὸ πρῶτο σκαλοπάτι.

Στὸ πρῶτο σκαλοπάτι στέκεται ὁ τελώνης, ποὺ λέει· «Ὁ Θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ» (Λουκ. 18:13). Καὶ κοντὰ στὸν τελώνη τοῦ εὐαγγελίου στέκεται ὁ ἀπόστολος. Θὰ μοῦ ἐπιτρέψεται νὰ μὴ ἀσχοληθῶ μὲ τὸν πρῶτον, τὸν ἀναστεναγμὸν τοῦ Τελώνου, ἀλλὰ νὰ εἶπω ὀλίγας λέξεις ἐπάνω στὸ ἀποστολικὸ ἀνάγνωσμα ποὺ λέει, ὅτι ἡ ζωὴ εἶνε ἀγώνας, καὶ μᾶς προειδοποιεῖ· «Οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διωχθήσονται.» (Β΄ Τιμ. 3,12).

Ἄς προσέξουμε, ἀγαπητοί μου. «Οἱ θέλοντες», λέει. Τί σημαίνει αὐτό; Ὅτι ὁ χριστιανισμὸς εἶνε ἐλευθερία, δὲν βιάζει κανένα. Εἶσαι ἐλεύθερος νὰ ἐκλέξης ἢ τὸν ἀνήφορο—ἀνήφορος καὶ Γολγοθᾶς εἶνε ἡ ὁδὸς τοῦ καθήκοντος, ἢ τὸν κατήφορο τῆς κακίας καὶ τῆς διαφθορᾶς· ἐλεύθερος νὰ ἐκλέξης ἢ τὴν στενὴ καὶ τεθλιμμένη, ἢ τὴν πλατειὰ καὶ εὐρύχωρη ὁδὸ. (Ματθ.

7:13-14)· ἐλεύθερος ν' ἀκολουθήσης ἢ τὸ φῶς ἢ τὸ σκότος, ἢ τὸν Χριστὸ ἢ τὸν διάβολο.

Ἐλεύθερος εἶσαι· ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ θὰ ἐκλέξης τὴν ὁδὸ τοῦ καθήκοντος, τῆς ἀρετῆς, τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας, τότε πλέον πρέπει νὰ εἶσαι προετοιμασμένος· διότι στὸ δρόμο αὐτὸν θὰ συναντήσης πολλὰ ἐμπόδια. Ποιὰ εἶνε τὰ ἐμπόδια; Ἐμπόδια πρῶτα ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου. Ναί, ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου. Διότι ἐχθρὸς χειρότερος ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας δὲν ὑπάρχει. Θὰ συναντήσης δηλαδὴ ἐμπόδια ἀπὸ κακίαι καὶ πάθη, ἀπὸ τὸν «παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον» ποὺ λέει ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος (Ῥωμ. 6:6, Ἐφ. 4:22, Κολ. 3:9). Θὰ συναντήσης ἀκόμη ἐμπόδια ἀπὸ τὸν διάβολο, ποὺ μέρα - νύχτα δὲν παύει νὰ μᾶς πειράξῃ μὲ λογισμοὺς καὶ ἐπιθυμίας. Θὰ συναντήσης τέλος ἐμπόδια καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον, ἀπὸ τὰ ὄργανα τοῦ διαβόλου, κακοὺς καὶ ἀπίστους καὶ διεφθαρμένους ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ μὲ μυρίους τρόπους ζητοῦν νὰ ἐμποδίσουν τὴν πορεία σου.

«Οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διωχθήσονται». Ὁ λόγος αὐτὸς τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου ἀποδεικνύεται ἀληθινὸς διὰ μέσου ὄλων τῶν αἰώνων. Θέλετε παραδείγματα; Ἀνοίξτε λοιπὸν τὴν ἀγία Γραφή νὰ δῆτε.

Ἐδιώχθη ὁ Ἄβελ, ὁ ἀγνὸς καὶ δίκαιος ἐκεῖνος ἄνθρωπος, ἀπὸ τὸν Κάϊν τὸν δολοφόνον ἀδελφὸ του. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ Ἰακώβ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἡσαῦ καὶ ἀναγκάστηκε νὰ ἐκπατρισθῇ μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ τῶν πατέρων του. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ πάγκαλος Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀδελφούς του, ποὺ τὸν φθόνησαν καὶ τὸν πούλησαν στοὺς Αἰγυπτίους καὶ φυλακίστηκε συκοφαντημένος. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ Δαυῖδ ἀπὸ τὸν ἀχάριστο Σαοὺλ καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ παιδί του τὸν Ἄβεσσαλώμ. Ἐδιώχθησαν οἱ προφῆται, ὁ Ἰερεμίας καὶ ὁ Ἡσαΐας· τὸν μὲν Ἰερεμίας τὸν ἐξόριζαν σὲ βόθρο, ὁ δὲ Ἡσαΐας πριονίστηκε μὲ πριόνι. Ἐδιώχθησαν οἱ Τρεῖς Παῖδες, ἐπειδὴ δὲν προσκύνησαν τὸ εἶδωλο, καὶ τοὺς ἐξόριζαν μέσα στὸ καμίνι. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ προφήτης Δανιήλ, ποὺ τὸν ἐξόριζαν στὸ λάκκο τῶν λεόντων. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Πρόδρομος ἀπὸ τὴν αἰσχρὰ Ἡρωδιάδα, καὶ τὸν ἀποκεφάλισαν.

Ἄλλὰ περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅλους ἐδιώχθη ἓνας· κανεὶς ἄλλος δὲν ἐδιώχθη τόσο ὅσο ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. Διότι οἱ ἄλλοι κατὰ τὸ μᾶλλον ἢ ἥττον ὑπῆρξαν ἁμαρτωλοί, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνος ἦταν ὁ ἀναμάρτητος, ὁ Ἅγιος τῶν ἁγίων. Ἐδιώχθη· Νήπιον ἀκόμη ἦταν, καὶ ὁ Ἡρώδης τρόχισε τὰ μαχαίρια του γιὰ νὰ τὸ σφάξῃ. Ἐδιώχθη ἀπὸ Γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαίους, τοὺς διαστρεβλωτὰς τῶν ἀληθειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐδιώχθη ἀπὸ τὸν Ἄννα καὶ τὸν Καϊάφα, ἐδιώχθη ἀπὸ τὸν Πιλάτο, ἐδιώχθη ἀπὸ ἓναν ἀχάριστο λαὸ ποὺ φώναζε «Σταύρωσον, σταύρωσον αὐτόν.» (Λουκ. 23:21).

Τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ μιμήθηκαν ἔπειτα οἱ ἀπόστολοι. Ὅλοι εἶχαν μαρτυρικὸ τέλος. Κ' ἐκεῖνος

πού ἐδιώχθη περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅλους εἶνε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ὅπως λέει σήμερα. Τὸν ἐξόριζαν στὶς φυλακὲς τῆς Ῥώμης καὶ ἀπὸ 'κεῖ ἔστειλε τὸ μήνυμα αὐτό, «Οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν... διωχθήσονται».

Ἐδιώχθησαν καὶ οἱ διάδοχοι τῶν ἀποστόλων. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος ἀπὸ μία μαφία, πού ἐσχεδιάζε τὴν ἐκθρόνισί του· ἐδιώχθη ὁ Γρηγόριος, τὸν ὁποῖο πετροβόλησαν οἱ ὄπαδοὶ τοῦ Ἀρείου· ἐδιώχθη πρὸ παντὸς ὁ Χρυσόστομος, πού πέθανε στὴν ἐξορία λέγοντας «Δόξα τῷ Θεῷ πάντων ἔνεκεν».

Ὅλοι οἱ πιστοὶ διώκονται. Καὶ διὰ μέσου τῶν αἰώνων φθάνουμε στὴν ἐποχὴ μας. Καὶ σήμερα διώκονται οἱ Χριστιανοί. Θέλετε παράδειγμα; Κάνετε τὸν κόπο—ἂν τολμάτε—νὰ περάσετε τὰ σύνορα καὶ νὰ μπῆτε στὴν Ἀλβανία, ἐκεῖ ὅπου ὑπάρχουν ἑλληνικὲς πόλεις (τὸ Ἀργυρόκαστρο, ἡ Κορυτσά, ἡ Χειμάρρα...), εὐλογημένα μέρη, τὰ ὁποῖα ἀγιάσαμε μὲ ποταμοὺς αἱμάτων οἱ Ἕλληνες. Ἐκεῖ μέχρι πρό τινας δὲν χτυποῦσε καμπάνα, δὲν λειτουργοῦσε παπᾶς, δὲν ἐβαπτίζοντο παιδιά, δὲν ἐνταφιάζοντο ἐκκλησιαστικῶς νεκροί, οὔτε τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ σοῦ ἐπέτρεπαν νὰ κἀνης. Οἱ Χριστιανοὶ Ἕλληνες ἀντιμετώπιζαν ἐξορίες καὶ στρατόπεδα τοῦ Ἐμβερ Χότζα, γιὰ νὰ προστίθενται νέοι μάρτυρες στὸ μαρτυρολόγιο τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς πατρίδος. Καὶ σήμερα μὴ νομίζετε ὅτι ὁ διωγμὸς ἔπαυσε. Συνεχίζεται. Ὅχι ἴσως τόσο σκληρά, ἀλλὰ πάντως μὲ ποικίλους τρόπους ἢ εὐσέβεια ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ καταδιώκεται.

Καὶ στὰ λεγόμενα ὅμως φιλελεύθερα καὶ δημοκρατικὰ πολιτεύματα ἢ πίστι τοῦ Χριστοῦ διώκεται. Δὲν πᾶτε στὴ Βουλὴ τῶν Ἑλλήνων; Ἐὰν εἴμεθα Χριστιανοί, τί περιμένετε νὰ δῆτε; Οἱ κομμουνισταὶ εἶχαν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Μάρξ, αὐτὸς εἶνε ἀρχηγὸς τους. Ἐμεῖς; Οὔτε ἢ εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου ὑπάρχει στὴν αἴθουσα τῆς Βουλῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων! Κι ὅταν κάποιος βουλευτὴς τόλμησε νὰ ὑποδείξῃ ὅτι πρέπει νὰ ὑπάρχῃ ἢ εἰκόνα τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸν εἰρωνεύθησαν «ὁ παπᾶς, ὁ παπᾶς!...». Διώκεται λοιπὸν ἢ πίστις μας ἐμμέσως καὶ ἀμέσως. Διώκεται ἀπὸ ραδιοφωνικοὺς καὶ τηλεοπτικοὺς σταθμοὺς πού μιλοῦν ἐναντίον τοῦ Γρηγορίου τοῦ Ε' πού ἀπηχονίσθη στὴν πύλη τοῦ πατριαρχείου, διώκεται ἀπὸ φύλλα ἐφημερίδων, διώκεται ἀπὸ παντοῦ.

Καὶ μέσα στὴν κοινωνία καὶ μέσα στὸ σπίτι ἀκόμα ἢ εὐσεβῆς γυναίκα πιεζεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἄπιστο ἄντρα, τὰ παιδιά ἐμποδίζονται νὰ πλησιάσουν τὰ κατηχητικὰ σχολεῖα, τὴν ἐξομολόγησι, τὴ θεία κοινωνία. Διώκεται ὁ Ἐσταυρωμένος. Διὰ μέσου τῶν αἰώνων ἢ προφητεία ἐπιβεβαιώνεται «Οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διωχθήσονται».

Ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ἀγαπητοί μου, τί εἶπε; «διωχθήσονται»· ὅτι ἢ πίστις θὰ διωχθῇ. Δὲν εἶπε ὅμως καὶ ὅτι θὰ συντριβῇ. Διωχθήσονται ναί, συντριβήσονται

ὄχι! Μιὰ ἰδέα, ὅσο τὴν πολεμᾶς, τόσο ῥιζώνει. Εἶνε σὰν τὸ καρφί, πού ὅσο τὸ χτυπᾶς τόσο βαθύτερα ἐμπήγνυται στὴ σάρκα τοῦ ξύλου. Καὶ ἢ ἀλήθεια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅσο διώκεται, τόσο κατακτᾶ τὶς ψυχές. Καμμία δύναμις, τὸ πιστεύω ἀκραδάντως, δὲ θὰ τὴ νικήσῃ. Ὅσοι διωγμοὶ κι ἂν γίνουν, ὅσοι ποταμοὶ αἱμάτων κι ἂν χυθοῦν, ὅσοι Νέρωνες καὶ Διοκλητιανοὶ καὶ Ἰουλιανοὶ Παραβάται κι ἂν παρουσιαστοῦν καὶ ὅποια μέσα κι ἂν μεταχειριστοῦν, ἢ πίστις μας ἔχει βαθεῖα ῥίζα· αὐτὸ πού θὰ κάνουν εἶνε νὰ ἐπισπεύσουν τὸν θρίαμβό της.

Οἱ πιστοὶ «διωχθήσονται», ἀλλ' οὐ συντριβήσονται. Ἄλλοι θὰ συντριβοῦν. Θὰ συντριβοῦν οἱ διώκται. Παρ' ὅλο τὸ αἷμα πού χύνουν, παρ' ὅλη τὴ βία πού ἀσκοῦν, παρ' ὅλα τὰ στρατόπεδα καὶ τὰ μέσα ἐξοντώσεως πού διαθέτουν, τὸ τέλος τους θὰ 'νε οἰκτρό. Ἡ θρησκεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας θὰ μείνῃ—ἰδιαίτερος δὲ στὴν πατρίδα μας τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἢ ὁποῖα μὲ κάθε τρόπο καὶ σὲ ὅλες τὶς σελίδες τῆς ἱστορίας της αἰνεῖ καὶ δοξάζει Χριστὸν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἀμήν.

† ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστίνος



«Ἐν τοῖς Λογισμοῖς μας Βελτιούμεθα ἢ Ἀχρειούμεθα».

Ἐπιπλέον ἢ ἄλλοι θὰ συντριβοῦν. Θὰ συντριβοῦν οἱ διώκται. Παρ' ὅλο τὸ αἷμα πού χύνουν, παρ' ὅλη τὴ βία πού ἀσκοῦν, παρ' ὅλα τὰ στρατόπεδα καὶ τὰ μέσα ἐξοντώσεως πού διαθέτουν, τὸ τέλος τους θὰ 'νε οἰκτρό. Ἡ θρησκεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας θὰ μείνῃ—ἰδιαίτερος δὲ στὴν πατρίδα μας τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἢ ὁποῖα μὲ κάθε τρόπο καὶ σὲ ὅλες τὶς σελίδες τῆς ἱστορίας της αἰνεῖ καὶ δοξάζει Χριστὸν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἀμήν.

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Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ τῆς Ἀριζόνα

AN INEFFABLE FRAGRANCE

By Metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, from "A Still Small Voice," Athens 2006, pp. 139–144.

It is impossible to describe the exquisiteness and nobility of our Orthodox ascetics! These people—although they bear the traces of harsh struggles, although their bodies are so withered and emaciated—have a fragrance and grace imprinted on their wondrous souls.

I reflect back to 1976, the month of August—July 22nd (by the old calendar—which is what the Holy Mountain follows). The feast day of St. Mary Magdalene in Simonopetra^[1]. How they love this saint in her Athonite monastery! Her left hand is kept here—her wrist, palm, and fingers—with the skin and tendons. Its temperature holds steadily at 98.6 °F / 37° C—proof that this is the hand of a living witness of the Resurrected Christ, living proof of the fact that *death hath no more dominion over her*, either. (Rom 6:9).

During the All-Night Vigil, they seated me at a *stasidion*^[2] practically in the center. Right next to me was seated a grey-haired geronda, small in stature. He stood as straight as a candle, without any stirring whatsoever. During the course of the service he weakened—he was obviously tired. Most likely, he was sleeping. However, not relaxed as people usually sleep. His state was distinct and interesting: his head was leaning on his hand, his eyes almost shut. From time to time, you could hear him snore a little, gently and peacefully. However, every time the singers would make a mistake, he would come into action and immediately correct it. Then, he resumed his ... restful position. *The body sleeps out of nature's need, but his heart keeps awake out of its great love.* And truly, his mind is keeping a true vigil. This man, it seems, lives in another world.

We came to the *exapostilarion*^[3]. All the fathers stood, took off their *skufias*^[4], and bowed low when the serving priest performed the litany over the relics of the great saint and

protectress of the monastery, which were lying on a silver tray. Soon the veneration began—I was stunned...

I watched what the others did, and I felt that I was not with them. I tried to understand what to do and how to do it correctly, but I could not touch the secret. Everyone around me, I felt, was experiencing an event, new to me, and about which I had zero clue. The chanters intensified the celebration. The monks showed by their whole appearance that they were experiencing something the likes of which I could not perceive. The only thing that I was able to do was to follow what was going on—superficially and with curiosity. Soon the *geronda* standing next to me left his place and went, in his turn, up to the relics. Making three prostrations, he kissed them, was anointed by the priest, and with deep emotion he returned to his *stasidion*.

—You go too, he says to me, do not be shy; today the Saint is fragrant. Receive

some of her grace.

I did what he said and went up to the relics. This is what, apart from everything else, the others had done as well. However, my doubts stayed with me. I did not particularly believe in all this. I went up in a reverie. And I was immensely astonished by the fragrance. I had an insatiable desire to confirm the statement of this fact from an investigative point of view and to venerate the relics again. However, I felt awkward—it was an inappropriate time for experiments! I returned to my place—physically—but mentally I stayed with the Saint. My questions multiplied, but my faith did not increase. It was the "sign" that I had been asking for, but it was not the "sign" that I needed. I could not believe

in it, but again, I could not imagine that the monks were lying. They had such pure countenances, and they experienced what was going on without reasoning or arguments. I had no reason to suspect them of lying.

—Geronda, how does this happen? I asked. Maybe out of piety the fathers sprinkled a little perfume? Or are the relics themselves fragrant?



Holy Monastery of Simonopetra^[1], Holy Mountain



The incorrupt relics of St. Mary Magdalene

—Here reverence is ruined as soon as you sprinkle perfume. Reverence is increased when you receive the “ineffable fragrance” in simplicity. The Holy Mountain is full of such occurrences.

—What does “ineffable fragrance” mean?”

— If we sprinkled a little perfume from a perfume store, then it would be “fragrance.” Now, when we don’t sprinkle anything but the fragrance pours out all by itself, that is called “ineffable fragrance.”

I bowed and kissed his hand. He himself also was fragrant, as if he had been handling incense. The all-night vigil continued—it lasted twelve hours!...

A monk whom I knew came up to me:

—Did you get a blessing from Elder Arsenios?

—Who is that? I asked, not having any idea as to whom he was referring.

—The little old man who was standing next to you.

—The little old man who was sleeping next to me, I said to myself.

—He has the “gift of not washing,” added the monk. It has already been ten years since he has washed his face and he is fragrant all over. He is as pure as the tear of a child. He lives in Kalamitse, in a cell alone, an hour and a half walk from here. Run, before he leaves!

I did not catch up with him. He had withdrawn to his cell before the beginning of the festive *trapeza*. He was filled with the Divine service. He did not need food or words in order to fill his soul. He stood, sat, drifted off for twelve hours, and still every second breathed in the sweetness of the all-night vigil. He *hath chosen the good part, which will not be taken away from him.* (Lk 10:42).

† † †

[1] *Simonopetra Monastery* (Greek: Σιμωνόπετρα, literally: “Simon’s Rock”), also Monastery of Simonos Petra (Greek: Μονή Σίμωνος Πέτρας), was founded during the 13th century by Saint Simon the Myrrh-bearer. It ranks thirteenth in the hierarchy of the Athonite monasteries. The particular site upon which the monastery is built is exceptionally harsh. It is built on top of a single huge rock, practically hanging from a cliff 330 metres over the sea.

[2] *Stasidion*: in Orthodox monasteries, a special wooden chair with high armrests and a seat that can be lifted up out of the way, so that a monk can stand up during the long vigils while being able to rest his arms on the armrests. When it is allowed or necessary out of weakness, the seat may be folded down so he may sit.

[3] *Exapostilarion*: The Dismissal Hymn, the troparion that follows the Canon at Matins, near the end of the service. Sometimes called *photogogikon*, because it sings of Christ the Light of the world. It is connected with the Matins Gospel.

[4] *Skufia*: An item of clerical clothing worn by monastics or clergy, often referred to by laity as a “monastic’s hat.”

ON THE DIVINE SERVICES

By St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco.

Then, having successfully passed through the toll-houses and bowed down before God, the soul for the course of thirty-seven more days visits the heavenly habitations and the abysses of hell, not knowing yet where it will remain, and only on the fortieth day is its place appointed until the resurrection of the dead. Some souls find themselves (after the forty days) in a condition of foretasting eternal joy and blessedness, and others in fear of the eternal torments which will come in full after the Last Judgment. Until then changes are possible in the condition of souls, especially through offering for them the Bloodless Sacrifice (commemoration at the Liturgy), and likewise by other prayers. How important commemoration at the Liturgy is may be seen in the following occurrence:

Before the uncovering of the relics of St. Theodosius of Chernigov (1896), the priest-monk (the renowned Staretz Alexis of Goloseyevsky Hermitage, of the Kiev-Caves Lavra, fell asleep in 1916) who was conducting the re-vesting of the relics, becoming weary while sitting by the relics, dozed off and saw before him the Saint, who told him:

“I thank you for laboring with me. I beg you also, when you will serve the Liturgy, to commemorate my parents.”

And he gave their names (Priest Nikita and Maria). The priest-monk asked the saint:

“How can you, O Saint, ask my prayers, when you yourself stand at the heavenly Throne and grant to people God’s mercy?”

“Yes, that is true,” replied St. Theodosius, “but the offering at the Liturgy is more powerful than my prayer.”

The Divine Services in their composition contain all the fullness of the dogmatic teaching of the Church and set forth the path to salvation. They present invaluable spiritual wealth. The more fully and precisely they are fulfilled, the more benefit the participants receive from them. Those who perform them carelessly and who shorten them by their laziness rob their flock, depriving them of their very daily bread, stealing from them a most valuable treasure.

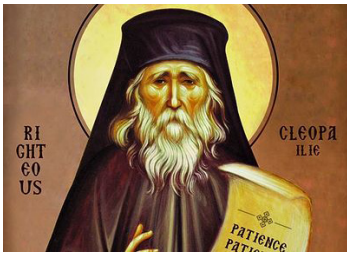


It is the responsibility of the clergy and, in particular, of the parish rectors to insure that those who wear lipstick do not venerate icons, the Cross, or anything holy, leaving lipstick marks on them. A notice to this effect should be posted near the entrance of the church, and, in sermons, it should repeatedly be explained that it is a great sin to defile something holy by such contact. Women should refrain from wearing lipstick to church or not venerate anything. In any case, they should not commune Christ’s Holy gifts without having thoroughly washed their lips.

St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco

ON THE HERESY OF CHILIASM THE “THOUSAND YEAR REIGN”

By Elder Cleopa of Romania, from “*The Truth of Our Faith*,” ch. 16.



Inquirer: There are those who maintain that between the Second Coming of the Lord and the end of the world Christ will reign upon the earth, governing, Himself, along with His elect for a thousand years.

What is the truth of the matter, Father?

Elder Cleopa: This idea is an ancient one. In the first centuries of Christianity, the so-called Chiliasts or Millenialists endorsed it. Against them rose the entire ancient Church and its most important representatives.

The divine Fathers of the Church indicated in their writings that the one thousand year reign referred to in the book of Revelation signifies an infinite number of years, i.e., *a kingdom that shall have no end*. This we know well since from Holy Scripture it is clear that the *Kingdom of Christ is not of this world*. (Jn 18:36). In Holy Scripture it is clearly indicated that the Kingdom of Heaven is also the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Christ, in so much as both Saint John the Forerunner and Christ Himself called it so. This Kingdom of Christ will be spiritual and will reign over the internal world of man, while externally being revealed in the *righteousness, peace and joy of the Holy Spirit*. (Rom 14:17). Christ Himself established this kingdom and explained in His parables how it will appear, whom it will include and what power it will possess. His *reign* will not endure for a thousand years, but *eternally*. (Lk 1:33). Its inhabitants will include all faithful Christians from *all the peoples of the world*. (Pss 116:1-2), it will *reign over all creation, all people, nations, and languages*, and it will be a kingdom of righteousness. (Dan 7:13-14). It will be a kingdom made up of souls (Mt. 28:18)—souls that have already entered and lived within it in this present life.

This kingdom of Christ, derived not from this world, constitutes *the Church*, or the Body, of Christ, of which *the head is Christ Himself* (Eph 1:22). The adoption and entrance into this kingdom takes place only through *the laver of regeneration* (Tit 3:5) or *birth from above* (Jn 3:3). No one can enter into this reign of God except *through baptism* (Rom 6:3), which is to say by being born again from above or *being born of water and the Spirit*, according to the word of the Saviour: *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God* (Jn 3:5). This heavenly birth by the power of the All-holy Spirit is *a true resurrection from the dead* (Col. 2:12-13), and hence the reason why Baptism is so often

referred to as *resurrection* (Rom 6:3-5). Thus, also, it is that the Orthodox Christian baptism is a renaissance of life and a resurrection from the dead. When the Apostle Paul writes *awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*, (Eph. 5:14) he has in mind precisely this internal regeneration and resurrection through Christian Baptism, for no one can enter the Kingdom of Christ unless he has first been brought out from among the dead by Christian Baptism.

Holy Scripture speaks to us about the thousand-year reign in prophetic and symbolic terms, corresponding to that which we spoke of above. Here is what Saint John the Evangelist says in his Revelation: *And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Rev. 20:1-14).*

From this passage, we can ascertain the following:

[1] The thousand-year reign of Christ is a period in which Christ has bound the power of the Devil over men. (vv. 1-2)

[2] At the end of this period, the Devil will again be lord over men and oppress them, but only for a season. (v. 3)

[3] The members of this kingdom will be those alone who do not submit to the beast and accept his engraved seal, and who have a part in the first resurrection. (vv. 4-5)

[4] Those who were not worthy of this resurrection will be raised at the end of the thousand years, that is at the second resurrection, as this resurrection, relative to the first, is the second. (v. 5)

[5] Death will have no power over the sharers in the thousand-year reign. (v. 6)

[6] At the end of these thousand years and after a gruesomely violent persecution against the saints, the devil and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire—the second death. (vv. 4-15)

From this it should be abundantly clear that the thousand-year kingdom is nothing else but the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven, and this is clear seeing that:

[1] In the period of this reign, the Devil was bound and loosed, receiving power over men. Christ entered into His dominion and bound the Devil, that is, by the redemption of humanity by His Blood He bound and restrained his power over mankind.

[2] The entrance into this kingdom presupposes the first resurrection, that is, none other than holy baptism itself, often, in fact, called by the name of resurrection, or being born again from above or simply regeneration. This resurrection through baptism is the first, in comparison to the second, the general one, of the body, which is also called the last resurrection, as when *Martha* spoke to Christ concerning her brother: *I know that he shall rise again at the resurrection on the Last Day.* (Jn 11:24).

[3] At the end of this kingdom or reign, the Devil will again be let loose to deceive the people and with power and mania to assault and oppress holy Christians in the person of the antichrist, the beast or false prophet. (Rev 13:1-11).

[4] The duration of this period will be *brief* and yet it will constitute one of the signs signaling the immediacy of the Second Coming of Christ. (Mt 24:22; Rev 13:5, 20:3).

Therefore, it should be clearly known that the first resurrection is the baptismal resurrection and the second resurrection is that which we await on the last day, the last resurrection. Furthermore, it should also be clear that the first death is the natural one or the separation of the soul from the body, while the second death is the *eternal torment* (of hell) (Mt 18:8), so called due to its opposition to the *blessed life of eternity*. (Jn 5:24). It should also be clear that this second death has no power over those made worthy of the first resurrection. Likewise, from this it follows that the first death, from which not even the saints are delivered, is the natural or bodily death.

In Holy Scripture someone's sinful condition is also compared to a kind of death. It is with this meaning that the Saviour says to one of His disciples who had asked leave to first go and bury his father, *Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.* (Mt 8:22). Likewise does He speak with this in mind when saying, *He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.* (Jn 11:25). The Apostle also had this meaning in mind when he wrote, *reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Rom 6:11, 8:10). Moreover, with this meaning as well is it written to the angel of the Church in Sardis: *I know thy works, and that thou hast a name that thou livest, but thou art dead.* (Rev. 3:1).

Although the duration of the reign of Christ is designated on the whole as a thousand years, we should understand this to signify an era immeasurable and undesignated. Therefore, **its length is nothing else except the period between the first and second comings of the Lord**, or more precisely, the period of the consolidation of the Kingdom of God until His Second Coming. This is the explanation of the Kingdom of God and its duration upon this earth.

Inquirer: Father, recently I had a very disturbing conversation with some people concerning this question and came away with the opinion that the thousand-year reign could only be understood in earthly terms. This might be the case seeing that it will be inaugurated at the Second Coming; it will be preceded by the resurrection of the righteous who in turn will reign with Christ for a thousand years; and after which will occur the resurrection of sinners, the judgement and the end of the world.

This interpretation seems to me to proceed from the twentieth chapter of Revelation that you read earlier. It can be deduced from that chapter that there will be final resurrections: the first resurrection of the righteous at the beginning of the thousand years and the second resurrection of the sinful at the end of world. (vv. 4-5)

During the period of a thousand years the active power of the Devil will be restricted up until just before the end when, after a brief but horrible flurry of aggression, he will be thrown into Hades together with all of his servants (vv. 7-14). Afterward, they will be resurrected, judged and condemned to eternal punishment (vv. 12-15). After the first period, we will pass through to the end of the world (v. 11). This is, for example, what the Apostle Paul says when writing to the Christians of Thessalonica: *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first* (1Thess 4:14-16). Consequently,

at His Second Coming Christ will raise those who have died faithful to Him, i.e. those that, as the Apostle says, shall rise first, hence the first resurrection. The resurrection of the dead, or the second resurrection, will follow later—He does not tell us exactly when—but according to Revelation, it will be after a thousand years. Listen to what Saint Paul says about this: *But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.* (1Cor 15:23). In other words, the Just join the choir of the Righteous at the beginning of the thousand-year reign and the sinful an assembly of their own at the end of the thousand-year period. Is this not the truth of matter, Father?

Elder Cleopa: As I explained to you earlier, the True Church of Christ understands the millennium of Holy Scripture mystically and symbolically to mean an indeterminate number of years. Do you think that Scripture only in this passage speaks in a mystical and veiled manner, or could it be that many hard to comprehend subjects are approached in this way? Are there not, in fact, many mystical, symbolic and allegorical expressions or events that cannot be explained literally but carry exalted and spiritual meanings often completely different from that readily apparent? How can we explain the book of Revelation literally, when it is *bound with seven seals*? (Rev. 5:1) What is the *red horse that is like unto fire*? (Rev 6:4). In addition, what of the *seven angels who were given seven plagues*? (Rev. 15:1-7) How should we understand them?

There are those who speak of two resurrections at the end of the world, and thus, according to them, somehow a third coming of the Lord must take place. However, such a thing is surely not true. It was shown above that, the first resurrection is realized through Christian baptism and the second is the last or general resurrection (of the body). Saint John the Evangelist renders precisely the words of the Saviour concerning the two resurrections: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.* (Jn. 5:24-25). As this passage concerns, the resurrection of those who will hear the voice of the Son of God, i.e. that resurrection which now is, this cannot be interpreted as referring to the last resurrection, but only to the present resurrection of those who are raised from the death of sin to the life of Christ, to the new life of Christian faith entered, as the Apostle and Evangelist himself relates elsewhere, through Christian baptism. (Jn 5:24-25). This is the first resurrection referred to in the book of Revelation.

Further, on the Saviour speaks about another kind of resurrection, a resurrection that even now is and yet will, however, happen at the end of the world, which is not of the soul but of the body, and specifically of the dead in the graves. *Marvel*

not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (Jn 5:28-29). In other words, marvel not at the power of Christ to raise spiritually (i.e. in the first resurrection), for indeed He will raise all the dead from the graves as well. This passage excludes outright the possibility of their being a period of a thousand years between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the sinful, for it shows clearly that the last or general resurrection is one and only and will happen to all. This is the second resurrection. As for the first, we saw that it is that resurrection which now is, the present resurrection, and not the general or last.

Thus, through an analysis and comparison of the passages of Holy Scripture, we see how their meaning is clarified and elucidated, and how the possibility of an interpolation of a one thousand-year period between the two resurrections is ruled out. According to the teaching of the true Church of Christ, the one thousand-year period should be understood as extending between the first resurrection, which happens in Christian baptism, and the second or last resurrection.

This is, in fact, what we find in Saint Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians (1Thess 4:14-16), where he speaks only of *one resurrection* and not a second or last resurrection. It is true that here Saint Paul is referring to the resurrection of the Just who have fallen asleep in the Lord and not to the resurrection of sinners. However, this is not because they will be raised later, after a thousand years, but simply because the Apostle Paul and his listeners are only concerned about the fate of those asleep in Christ. The fact that he makes no reference to sinners does not mean that they will be raised a thousand years later. The Apostle is not in the least concerned here with other questions, for his aim in this epistle is to comfort his readers (v. 18), that they be not sorrowful, anxious or in ignorance, concerning the fate of those reposed in Christ.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians (15:23), Saint Paul speaks of there being *orders*. The Chiliasts wrongly interpret this passage as referring only to two orders, namely of the Just and of the sinful, whose resurrections will be separated by a period of one thousand years. In truth, Saint Paul is speaking here of many orders, analogous to the degree of holiness or sinfulness (*for one differeth from another in glory*—see vv. 39-41) with which they will be revealed.

Holy Scripture is explicit and categorical in many places concerning the Second Coming of Christ, namely, that it will be one single date for all, righteous and sinners alike, without there being a period of one thousand years between the resurrection and judgement of some and that of others. The Saviour said: *For the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have*

done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (Jn 5:28-29). Hence, there will be one voice alone announcing the resurrection of all. In another place the Lord also says: *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire ...* (Mt 25:31-46).

Here the Saviour speaks with precision and clarity concerning His Second Coming and future judgement. In this most glorious parable He communicates the following certainty: *there will be one harvest* for the wheat and the tares alike (Mt 13:30, 42-43), the *Bridegroom will come for all the virgins* at one and the same time (Mt 25:1-13), and in the same hour will a reckoning be sought for the work done by the *servants entrusted with the talents.* (Mt 25:14-30). Therefore, one is the last advent of Christ, one the resurrection and appearance of all before the King and Judge, and one the judgement of mankind.

Inquirer: I read in a “brochure” that the date of the beginning of the millennium can be determined, and that it will not be identical with the date of the Second Coming, and that it represents the end of the era of idol-worship. Does this have any validity?

Elder Cleopa: First, know with absolute assurance that there does not exist any such millennium with the meaning conveyed in that “brochure.” If the date of the Second Coming of Christ cannot be determined, as *neither the angels nor even the Son of Man, as man,* have been informed of it (Mt 24:36-44), then surely neither can the date of the beginning of the millennium be determined.

We know that in that which pertains to salvation, the history of the world can only be divided into two periods: that of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament. Another age will begin with the Second Coming of our Lord, but this will be the last and everlasting age. In the history of the world, there existed other lesser episodes, which subdivided the two great periods without thereby constituting two or three more periods. Ages or epochs that we have with this meaning include that of the patriarchs, the apostles, the persecutions and so on.

Concerning the passages of the Old Testament, these cannot be understood as if they were magical, but are either factual or symbolic like the book from which they are derived. How can someone know that the six days of creation were, in actuality, some seven thousand years and that they each represent a great duration of time for humanity or even one thousand years?

Nowhere does it say in Holy Scripture that one day is equal to one thousand years, but only that before the creation of the visible world time did not exist. Time, for God, is neither fixed nor appointed, but, rather, *one day before God is considered as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day* or as a night watch (2Pet 3:8). It does not follow from this that any figures presented within Holy Scripture represent a certain number of days, which we then reckon as years.

Inquirer: With respect to that which is said in the Symbol of our Faith [The Nicene-Constantinople Creed, 325 and 381 A.D.] In addition, His kingdom shall have no end, the Chiliasts say that the Lord will come before the Future Judgement to rule with them a thousand years, and that afterward he will raise the sinners to be judged. Isn't it true that the Lord will rule endlessly after the final judgement?

Elder Cleopa: The True Church tells us that the kingdom of the Lord will have no end. The Reign of Jesus Christ, as man, and His Glory will never come to an end, but will endure eternally. For, on the one hand, Jesus is not only human, from whom God could someday take His glory, while on the other hand as the Son of God He will never deny His human nature. **His being a Man, so filled with divine glory, will never come to an end.**

The holy Archangel Gabriel announced the everlasting Reign of Jesus Christ in advance. It is true, as Saint Paul says, that Christ will be subjected in everything to the Father and afterward that He will subject everything to Himself. Yet, this means the submission of the entire world before the Father and the cessation of His redemptive activity (1Cor. 15:25-28), as it is His own work, which He assumed at His incarnation.

So, let the Chiliasts know that they cannot make human calculations and determinations for mysteries that are unknown to the angels, and even, in His humanity, to the Son of God Himself.



Do not do anything without signing yourself with the sign of the Cross! When you depart on a journey, when you begin your work, when you go to study, when you are alone, and when you are with other people, seal yourself with the Holy Cross on your forehead, your body, your chest, your heart, your lips, your eyes, your ears. All of you should be sealed with the sign of Christ's victory over hell. Then you will no longer be afraid of charms, evil spirits, or sorcery, because these are dissolved by the power of the Cross like wax before fire and like dust before the wind.

Elder Cleopa (+1998)

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT...

By Protopresbyter James Thornton.

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, soon we Orthodox Christians begin the Great Fast (Monday, February 19th for the current year, *Ed.*). We will enter an extended period of approximately seven weeks of more intense prayer and fasting until we reach Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, the Feast of Christ's Resurrection. This is a period of golden opportunity for each of us wherein we may look deeply within ourselves and determine what, from a spiritual point of view, is unwholesome or deficient. We may then, during this time, begin the work of excising from our lives that which is unhealthy and, at the same time, augmenting that which is truly sound and truly pleasing to God.

I run the risk here of sounding prosaic and platitudinous when I recall the popular saying, "You are what you eat." Yet I shall take the risk: you are indeed what you eat. It is quite obvious that if we eat luxuriously, if our diet is exclusively confined to the most extravagant foods, exotically flavored and rich in fats, spices, and sugars, as is typical of the contemporary American diet, our individual physiologies will sooner or later bear the marks of those habits, either in various aspects of outward appearance or in the functioning of our bodily systems, or in both.

Moreover, our individual characters, personalities, and temperaments will be marked, and, likewise, and most importantly, our souls. An obsession with the worldly impresses itself on the whole of our beings. By way of contrast, more prudent choices in our diets, as prescribed during the Fast by our wise Mother the Church, will do the opposite, and may make us physically healthier, and most assuredly will make us spiritually healthier.

Some religious writers of a modernist or fundamentalist bent enjoy drawing our attention to the alleged fact that in early Christianity—primitive Christianity, as it is sometimes called—there were no Holy Canons regarding fasting, no Great Lent, practically no fasting rules at all. Holy Canons and fasting periods are seen by these writers as latter-day and, by implication, needless accretions, even "monkish" accretions in the estimation of many of them.

St. Paul writes of a difference of opinion between those who believe that they may eat all things and those who *eateth herbs* [i.e., vegetables], as he puts it. (Rom 14:2). We see from this passage that even at this earliest stage, just a few decades after Christ's Ascension, questions about fasting from certain foods were already present and were already the subject of discussion. So, fasting was not unknown in the Apostolic Church. In fact, Orthodox historians maintain that the Wednesday and Friday fasts are of Apostolic origin and it is likely that, while the Lenten fasts were not codified in their current form until after the Apostolic period, that

codification nonetheless reflected an already established, though not always uniform, tradition.

Consequently, what the modernist and fundamentalist writers say is true only to the very limited extent that, in St. Paul's day, certain details about fasting had not yet appeared and would take time to unfold. As with medical science or, let us say, the science of physics, the "science" that is Orthodox theology required time to mature.

The comparison here between the natural sciences and theology is apt, yet it is imperfect in one respect. In the case of the natural sciences, new discoveries that radically alter the body of fundamental knowledge are always possible. The discovery of the connection between bacteria and disease by nineteenth-century medical science or the displacement of classical physics by quantum physics in the twentieth century are examples of this. In the case of Orthodox theology, that cannot happen.

All knowledge needed for salvation has been given us by Christ; the body of fundamental knowledge remains fixed and changeless. No radical discoveries about this knowledge are possible. However, a growth in the understanding of the application of that body of knowledge to our lives is possible, and that growth, that maturing, has characterized the history of Orthodoxy.

As the grave risk to life and limb that was associated with membership in the primitive Church abated in the early fourth century, it became safe, even fashionable, to belong to the Church. It was then that other methods for forging the spiritual character became an urgent necessity, and for this reason fasting took on an increased importance at that time. When one lives by day and by night under the terror of persecution; when crucifixion, burning alive, being devoured by wild animals, or being sentenced to a life of forced labor, are genuine possibilities for the followers of Christ; when one's outlook is colored by continuous fear of the knock at the door—in those circumstances, it may be argued, the most rigorous type of fasting is not as indispensable as in more tranquil times.

Therefore, those who argue that we ought to return to the more primitive practice of fasting, in which it was somewhat less comprehensively regulated, should understand that if membership in Christ's Church is to achieve anything positive for us at all, then with this less stringent regimen in fasting there must also come a desire for trials of the most severe kind elsewhere in our lives. If membership in Christ's Church is to make us more like Christ, either one or the other is indispensable. Considered that way, we can see that fasting from animal products is not so difficult after all.

Now, let us enter more fully into the message of St. Paul's words. In writing of the disputations in the early Roman Church between those who did not fast so strictly and those

who did, St. Paul offers this admonition: *Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.* (Rom 14:3-4). What wonderfully beneficial words these are!

St. Paul is telling us that whatever fasting discipline others or we follow, the crucial thing is that we address the matter of our own relationship with our Master, Jesus Christ, and not judge the relationship of our neighbor with Him. When we each face the question as to whether we need to fast more stringently to strengthen our commitment to our Faith, our answer to that question, and the way our answer manifests itself in our lives, will ultimately be judged by the Master Whom we serve, when we stand before His *dread judgment seat*. So it is also in all the things we choose. It is not for us to make judgments about our Christian brothers and sisters. For several reasons we do not judge them:

1. To judge another is to usurp the place of God; as St. Paul says: *Who art thou that judgest?*
2. To judge another is to take one's focus off the place where it should be, and must be, to save one's soul, which is on one's own spiritual imperfections.
3. To judge another is to incur the danger of an additional sin, misjudging, since we cannot see into another man's heart and cannot know all of the circumstances of his life. St. Dorotheos of Gaza observes that while one can see another man's sins, one cannot know about that man's standing with God, about his secret prayers of supplication for mercy and forgiveness. *You may well know about the sin, the great Saint writes, but you do not know about the repentance.* ("Discourse and Sayings")
4. To judge another brings further dissension and strife into the Church, a place where peace and love should be the primary attributes.
5. To judge another is to bring on the temptation of an even worse sin, one of the worst among sins, which is gossip.
6. Finally, and most significantly, to judge another is to bring judgment upon ourselves; Christ Himself warned, *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.* (Lk 6:37).

We are repeatedly warned as Christians not to judge other men and women. Does this require that we completely abandon our critical faculties when it comes to our dealings with other people? If we should know of a man who is a notorious embezzler, do we do right in judging him unfit to be the custodian of the public treasury? If we should encounter a man whom we know to be a psychopathic murderer, do we properly judge it unwise to invite him over to dinner? The answer to both questions, obviously, is yes.

Let us take some less extreme and more likely examples. If we learn that a particular friend or companion exerts an un-

healthy influence on us as Christians, or if we believe that a friend or companion of our children may lead those children astray, may we make the appropriate judgment in those cases and terminate such associations? Again, the answer is yes. Of course we may do that. We would be held accountable by Christ for not making these kinds of judgments.

What we are forbidden as Christians to do is to judge another person's ultimate state before God, or to employ our critical faculties to enhance, in our own minds, our own rank or station or footing, in what we fancy are the eyes of God, at the expense of another human being. We are forbidden, in other words, to regard ourselves as "holy" by comparison with someone we regard as "sinful." The Holy Gospel teaches us that Christ God judged the outwardly holy men of His country, the Pharisees, very harshly, while the Good Thief (a most unlikely candidate for salvation, one would think) was assured everlasting happiness. St. John of the Ladder declares that *The beginning and sum of the passions... is unholy self-esteem.* (Step 22).

Let us therefore not fasten our gaze upon the imagined inadequacies of other men and women during the Great Fast but examine with the most penetrating contemplation possible our own spiritual failures, that these may be swiftly amended. For most, if not all of us, that task is sufficient to fill a lifetime.



While the dying person addresses his last words to us, suddenly his tongue is at a loss, his eyes dim, his mouth falls silent, his voice paralyzed when the Lord's troops have arrived, when His frightening armies overwhelm him, when the divine bailiffs invite the soul to be gone from the body, when the inexorable lays hold of us to drag us to the tribunal... Then the angels take the soul and go off through the air. There stand principalities, powers and leaders of the adverse troops who govern the world, merciless accusers, strict agents of an implacable tax bureau, like so many examiners that await the soul in the air, ready to demand a reckoning, to examine everything, brandishing their claims, that is to say our sins: those of youth and of old age, those intentional and those not so, those committed by actions and those by words or thoughts. Great then is the fear of the poor soul, inexpressible its anguish when it sees itself at grips with these myriads of enemies, who stop it, push and shove it, accuse it, hinder it from dwelling in the light, from entering into the land of the living. But the holy angels, taking the righteous soul, lead it away.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

WATCHFULNESS, PRAYER AND HOLY CONFESSION

A homily by Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona, translated from the Greek by Fr. Seraphim Bell, pastor of St. Silouan the Athonite Orthodox Church in Walla Walla, WA.



My beloved children, Today we will say a few things about the great virtue of **watchfulness**.

As you know, watchfulness is a patristic teaching, it is the experience of the great *neptic* fathers of the Church and of the desert. The word *nepsis* comes from *nepho*, which means to be sleepless, to guard, to inspect, examine, watch over, keep under surveillance. All these things the fathers sum up in one continuous attention to the *nous*.

Watchfulness is described as the axe which shatters the large trees, hitting their roots. And when the root is struck, it doesn't spring up again. Thus also when the *nous* of the man, of the Christian, has heed for the soul, it keeps watch over the heart and the five senses of the soul, the bodily as well as the spiritual. When the *nous* is awake, when it is attentive, when it keeps watch over the speculations, the thoughts, when it controls the imagination, then the whole man, body and soul, is kept pure. And when the man is rendered pure through watchfulness and spiritual works, his prayers have boldness before God, they cross the sky, they go beyond the stars, they pass through the heavens and draw near to the Divine Throne of Grace, where the blessings of God are granted. And this being the case, the man at prayer is enriched by the grace of God.

The *neptic* fathers tell us that one of our thoughts may rise to heaven and another may descend to hell. *By our thoughts we are improved or defiled*. In other words, a thought which may inattentively attack us, may pollute us, may pleasure us, and is able to render us worthy of hell. A heavenly thought, a thought of self-denial, a brave thought a thought of prayer and the vision of God, makes us worthy to draw near the Divine throne and to taste of heavenly things. By the thoughts either we will become unclean or we will become better. The beginning of sins starts with the thoughts.

The thoughts come from the five senses, the spiritual as well as the physical. When we allow the sense of sight to be uncontrolled and it carelessly sees anything, this carelessness will become no end of dirty and sinful images. Since these images are placed in the imagination, afterwards they drip the poison

of sinful pleasure inside the heart of man. This pleasure is the poison, by which the heart is polluted and then becomes unclean and guilty before the unsleeping eye of God. Just like the sense of sight, so it is also of touch, and also of taste and hearing and of smell. And so the five senses create analogous sinful images, which render the man unclean before the face of God. Here rests the entire philosophy of the spirit.

All sermons are beneficial, exactly because when a tree which is diseased is pruned, it is cleansed, and thus the word of God helps in the reduction of a passion. However, the teaching of the Fathers concerning watchfulness radically effects the cleansing from the passions. When the mattock, when the axe strikes the root, the entire tree falls down, it withers and is finished. So also when watchfulness takes a place in the life of the Christian, a tree of passion falls, it withers and thus in time, the old man, the man of sin and of passion, the earthly Adam is freed and he becomes a *new man*. For this reason, the *neptic* work frees us radically from evil. Here then we must give heed to our life. If we want to cleanse ourselves, we should make sure to enrich our *nous* by the application of watchfulness.

A part of watchfulness is also *noetic* prayer. The vision of God is another part of watchfulness. Spiritual warfare is also another part. All these parts, when they are united in an effort of man, in time bring about holiness.

Abba Paphnoutios, a great desert father, was going along one day on his way and there he saw two men committing some sin. The thought of his passion said: "Look what great evil they are doing!" The eye saw them and immediately the thought flared up, trying thereby to attack the purity of the saint's soul by judging the brother or also by his being tempted. Having watchfulness, however, he was being vigilant, immediately his mind was enlightened and he said to his thought, "They are sinning today, I will sin tomorrow. They will repent, but I know myself to be a hard man, unrepentant, egotistical, and thus, I won't repent. I will be punished since I am worse than these two. And what do I have to do about these careless sinners, since I am a much greater sinner and more passionate?" And speaking in this manner and putting a lock on the provocation of sin, he was saved and didn't judge the brothers who were sinning.

He didn't go very far and an Angel of God appeared before him having a double-edged cutless dripping blood; in other words, a knife which had cut from both sides and he says to him:

"Paphnoutios, you see this knife? Do you see that it is dripping blood?"

"I see it Angel of God."

"With this knife I kill by taking the heads of the ones who judge their neighbors. And since you didn't judge, you didn't condemn those who were in fact sinning—not imagining or guessing that they were sinners, but seeing them sin

with your own eyes—but you condemned yourself more, for this reason your name has been written in the book of eternal life.”

Success. His name is written in eternal life, because he didn't judge the sinners, he didn't condemn the sin of his brother. He would have judged if he hadn't had watchfulness, if he hadn't been vigilant *noetically* in guarding his soul. Do you see what good attention he produced? And do you see what harm he would have suffered, if he had been inattentive to the thought and allowed it to work within him! But his thought said that they were in fact sinning, he saw them. In spite of these things, however, even though the thought was spoken to him, the correct thought triumphed and thereby he escaped the shipwreck of his soul.

All of the passions have their own images, their own fantasies and their own pleasures. Murder has one image and another pleasure, gluttony has another and so many other sinful passions have others. All of the pleasures are otherwise poisons which bring about the death of the soul. We must take as our view that, if we want to clean the “inside of the cup,” the interior of the soul, our heart, this center of man, we must strive to keep watchful. We should take care to become better, that is, we should be vigilant to always have our hand on the trigger. With the first appearance of the enemy, we should shoot. As soon as an evil thought comes to us, immediately knock it down. A dirty image comes, immediately spoil it. We shouldn't allow it to become more vivid in colors and in appearance, because thereby we will come to immediate difficulty. When the evil is struck at the root, it is impossible to sprout and to increase. When this struggle comes about with diligence, we will cleanse our soul and thereby we will be found clean and with boldness before God.

A pagan priest asked some monks:

“Does your God appear to you? Do you see Him? Does he speak to you?”

The fathers said:

“No.”

The pagan says:

“If he doesn't speak to you and doesn't appear to you, this means that you don't have pure thoughts. When I pray, my God answers me.”

Naturally, God didn't answer the pagan, the demons answered him, but nevertheless the fathers took it as an occasion of benefit and said:

“Indeed, the impure thoughts prevent man from communicating with God.”

Watchfulness does nothing less than cleanse the *nous* and the heart from every impurity. For this reason, with a little ascetical toil, watchfulness brings about the greatest spiritual results. When we strive ascetically and aren't mindful of our thoughts, we accomplish nothing.

The Sacred Chrysostomos wrote many chapters about **prayer** and about wakefulness. And in the midst of them he says something very beautiful:

Prayer, he says, is enlightenment of the soul, true consciousness of God, a mediator between God and man, a physician of the passions, an antidote against diseases, medicine against every illness, tranquility of the soul, a guide which carries us to heaven, which doesn't revolve around the earth, which marches towards the apse of heaven. It passes over the buildings, it passes mentally through the air, it walks above the air, it passes over the whole of the stars, it opens the gates of heaven, it surpasses the angels, it transcends the Thrones and Principalities, it passes over the Cherubim and when it has passed through all of the foundation of nature, it comes near to the unapproachable Trinity. There it worships the Divinity. There it is made worthy to become an interlocutor in the Heavenly Kingdom. Through this (the prayer), the soul, which is lifted up in the air to the heavens, embraces the Lord in an inexpressible manner, exactly as the baby embraces its mother and with tears cries loudly, desiring the enjoyment of divine milk. But it seeks the things which are necessary and receives a gift superior to all visible nature.

Prayer is our venerable representative. It gladdens the heart. It gives rest to the soul. It creates within us the fear of the punishment of hell, the desire for the Kingdom of Heaven. It teaches humility, it grants awareness of sin and in general it adorns man with every good thing, like a robe adorned with all the virtues which enfolds the soul. It brought a gift to Anna, Samuel, and it made known that Prophet of the Lord. This prayer also made Elias a zealot of the Lord. And it became a guide for the descent of the heavenly fire for the sacrifice. For while the priest of Baal was calling all day long to the idol, he, after he lifted up his voice which came from his pure heart and cried out through his mouth and his soul, the fire came down from heaven as a sign of the righteousness of his prayer. Since he was standing like an eagle over the altar with his fierce nature, he offered everything as a sacrifice. But the great servant of God, the zealot Elias, did this, as all that happened then, teaching us by the spirit, that we also crying loudly from the depths of our soul to God, should move the ineffable fire of the Holy Spirit to come down to the altar of our heart and to offer ourselves fully as a sacrifice to God.

All of the great fathers of the Church, especially the fathers of the desert, succeeded in becoming worthy of great gifts exclusively and only with watchfulness and vision of God (*theoria*). Keeping vigil all night and coming to the vision of the Light of God.

We have St. Gregory Palamas, the instructor of the desert, the instructor of *neptic* activity, the teacher of *noetic* prayer. This saint would remain enclosed in his cell for the entire week. He didn't go outside at all. There on his knees and with hands upraised, he was vigilant about his *nous* and his heart and he received heavenly theology (literally “theology from above”—*trans.*) by the Holy Spirit. The theology which

made known the Uncreated Light of the Divine Glory, of the Divine Nature.

The Uncreated Light is the glory of the Divine Nature. There was the goal and the conclusion of asceticism and of prayer. When the saints received this Light, they became all Light. And since the light floods the *nous* and the heart, how could they know less than the mysteries of the secrets which are known only to the angels? Through watchfulness the fathers attained to the pinnacle of the virtues and of the graces.

And we, if we are watchful, if we pray, even if we are in the world, and even if we don't attain to similar states, no matter what, we will attain to a condition of purity. When we succeed by watchfulness in not judging our brother, this is no small achievement. We put into practice the commandment of our Christ, which is as follows: *Do not judge, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you.* (Mt 7:1-2).

It is the commandment of Christ. It is not the commandment of some saint. It is God's. And therefore we have put into practice a Divine commandment. When we do not judge, we will not be judged. Judge, and we will be judged. Sin is widespread. Wherever we turn our eyes and our imagination, we recognize the errors of men. Therefore, if we are inattentive, without watchfulness, we will always be found in the error of violation of this evangelical commandment of not judging our neighbor.

There was a monk in some monastery. The tempter had conquered him in negligence. He didn't do his canon, he didn't go to church, he didn't do his rule of prayer, and thus the fathers didn't know him and regarded him as negligent. The hour of death came and the fathers drew near him to see something, which perhaps God would show, in order that they may be benefited. Drawing near to the dying negligent monk, the fathers saw that he was very joyful. They were perplexed and they said in their thoughts:

"Look, why is he peaceful? The negligence which he had in his life doesn't worry him? What happened to the debts which have been gathered because of sloth? His conscience doesn't rebel? It doesn't make him worry? He doesn't despair?"

He continued to be joyful. They compelled him to answer their question:

"Forgive us, brother, we see you doing so-so. We know and you know that you lived in negligence and sloth in monastic duties. Now you are heading to the judgment of Christ, and you should be somewhat sorry, worried, etc. But we see you otherwise, joyful, peaceful, with hope and we question; what supports this condition of yours?"

He answered them and said:

"You are right, my fathers, that's how it is. I was negligent and didn't do what you did, but one thing I guarded in my life: not to judge my brother. I read in the Holy Gospel,

where the Lord says that the *one who does not judge, will not be judged*. Thus I tried, at least, not to judge. And I hope in the mercy of God that I will not be judged. For this reason I am departing with faith that God will apply his word."

The fathers looked into it among themselves and said that in fact the brother was very clever and masterfully gained his salvation.

If we are watchful, we will not criticize. For with the offense of judging, immediately watchfulness will set up a barrier and the thought of judgment will be prevented from continuing. Then will happen what took place with Abba Paphnoutios. And so we will escape from the sin of judging and of criticism of the tongue and our names will be written in eternal life. A man who keeps his tongue pure, both inner and outer, that is to say, the inner thought and the tongue, and does this in the knowledge of God, this is a guarantee that he is saved.

This spiritual attention becomes light and as light, illumines the path. And an illumined path of watchfulness is also a path to sacred **confession**. The attention illumines it, which urges the man to settle his account with God. And he is guided by the light of watchfulness to this great mystery and there he deposits the entire debt, all the uncleanness of sins. He enters into this bath and he comes out entirely clean. And I say that we must have much joy in our souls when we are accounted worthy to come into this bath. We must celebrate and thank the Lord who allowed this bath on earth, who allowed this authority of "binding and loosing." Whatever things your spiritual father looses, God also looses. Whatever the representative of God forgives, the Lord also forgives.

And when the man has been judged here below, he is not judged above in the great and fearsome judgment. It is a great occasion if the man arrives as far as that. For this reason, all those who have been accounted worthy of this bath and continuously cleanse every soiling of the soul with this spiritual bath of the mystery of God, should have very great joy, because the door of Paradise will always be open. And even if death follows, there is no anxiety. *He is prepared and not disturbed*. When the man is prepared, he is not disturbed at the approach of death. He knows that it is not possible for the word of God, which gave this authority, to be wrong. We experience it as a mystery of the Church and we see it in action and in application. When the man makes sacred confession with ardent desire, with humility, and with awareness, he feels the happiness within his soul, the lightness and the elation. A vivid proof that his sins have been forgiven. And when sins are forgiven, then every anxious and uncertain fear about the next life is removed.

Our thanks to God must be unceasing. Our thanksgiving must never stop, because we are made worthy every time we want to receive this cleansing, and every time we feel a sin, immediately turn the mind to God. *"I have sinned Lord, forgive me."* With this *"I have sinned Lord, forgive me,"* God

answers: *My child, you are forgiven; the power of the law is remitted. Proceed to the application of the law.* And the application is beneath the *petraheli* (stole). There, all the sinfulness of man is ended. Forgiveness is so easy! It is very wrong for man, when this forgiveness is so easy and so free, because of his egoism not to want to receive it, not to want to open the doors of paradise and walk eternally in the glory of God!

Many men say: "Man should call upon God because of one sin? But this thing is wrong. Where is the love of God? Isn't God a father?" Yes, he is a father, but when every good moment comes for him to forgive you, why do you turn your back? Why do you not receive His mercy? Why do you refuse His embrace and go far away? Why do you accept the embrace of the devil and not of God? Perhaps your god seeks money or possessions or favors and you don't have all these things and for this reason you don't come to let go of your debt? No.

God is very rich, as we see also in the parable of the prodigal son. He wanted to depart far away. He demanded that part of the possessions which belonged to him. And God gave him what he was owed as physical gifts. He didn't deprive him of them. However, he squandered these gifts, the spiritual possessions, living prodigally. And when he arrived at the wretched end, he came to his senses, he came to himself. For he was not himself when all the prodigality reigned. And when he came to himself he said: *How many serve my father and they enjoy the good things of His possessions, and I His child, par excellence His child, am in such misery that I graze pigs and am allotted husks! I will return; He is a Father, He will receive me. I will ask forgiveness and will say to him, do not receive me as Your child, neither restore me to the first adoption, but I will ask him to become one of His servants. And this will be a great thing.* When he thought these things, already the Father came out from His house and waited for him with open arms. He accepted him with all his heart and all his soul. He embraced him, he kissed him, he wept from joy, because he was dead and he was restored to life, he was lost and was found. He made him His child again with all of the wealth. He forgave everything. He cleansed him of every filth. He clothed him in the original garments. In the end, he gave him everything.

The Heavenly Father also does this when one who is a sinner returns to Him. He cleanses him, washes him, he gives the original garments of baptism, he gives him sonship and makes him worthy of His Kingdom. Everything free. When the prodigal returned, he didn't seek an account, neither did he rebuke him nor did he seek to blame him. He begins where he returned; this was sufficient for the Father. Only to say "sinner," to leave his sins with humility, to understand his mistakes and from then on everything is loosed. But the sinful man doesn't do this. He doesn't return, he isn't humbled. He holds on to his egoism. The important thing is to get to the

confessional! It's just two steps. And from then on everything is finished. Yet the tears of egoism hold him. And when he comes to the hour of death and the reality of it, then he will repent and he will be remorseful, but he will be too late. In this, God respects the one who doesn't want to humble his spirit a little.

As for Lucifer, this great battalion commander, who was in the first place of the angelic hosts, what was the cause of the fall? What was the cause of the collapse, of the transformation from angels to demons? Pride and egoism. The error came from these two passions. And as with the angels, so also with our forebears. The fall of our forebears came about from pride and egoism. Because, before God accomplished the verdict of guilt, he approached the man Adam and said to him: *Adam, why did you do this?* Adam didn't seek forgiveness, he didn't say: *God forbid, I was wrong.* If he had done this, he wouldn't have been turned out from Paradise and neither would we have all this banishment and suffering today. By not saying *God forbid* all this mob of evil came about. And thus now man doesn't say *God forbid* and remains in his evil. But just say it, *O God stretch out the arms of forgiveness,* and He takes him in.

And again I say that because we have been made worthy to know as Orthodox Christians this mystery of sacred confession, we should have very great joy, because even if any time we fall down in some sin, into something evil, we can run immediately to correct it and to preserve the health of our souls. And when death comes, we will go to meet the Lord, cleansed, repentant, as prodigal sons returned, for our Heavenly Father accepts us and places us in the Paradise of eternal bliss which has no end, which has no conclusion to that bliss, which cannot be compared to anything earthly.

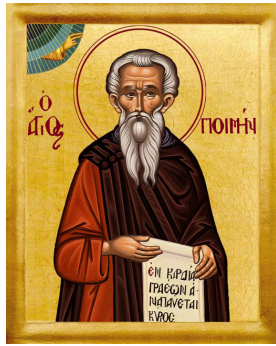
Even the holy Apostle Paul, who went up to the third heaven and saw the eternal good things, nevertheless was unable with his apostolic and graceful tongue to express with human words, the things of Paradise and the life above! So inexpressible is the happiness of the attainment through sacred confession.

Therefore with much yearning, with much love, with much awareness we should run to be cleansed, to be made ready and when death follows, to depart in peace. Amen.



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WORLDLY “HAPPINESS” CAUSES WORLDLY ANXIETY

By St. Paisios the Athonite.

The more people distance themselves from natural, simple life and embrace luxury, the more they suffer from anxiety. And as they distance themselves from God, they naturally cannot find rest in anything they do. This is why they go around restless; they even spin around the moon—like the belt of an old metal shop engine, spinning around the “crazy wheel”—since earth cannot contain all their restlessness.

Worldly stress is the result of worldly happiness, of worldly pleasures and self-indulgence. Educated externally and being full of anxiety, hundreds of people (even young children) are driven to psychoanalysis and psychiatrists. New psychiatric hospitals are being built and young psychiatrists go on for post-graduate studies. Many of them do not even believe in God or accept the existence of the soul. How can these people help the human soul, when they themselves are full of anxiety? How can one feel truly comforted, if he does not believe in God and in the true and eternal life after death? When man grasps the deeper meaning of this true life, stress goes away, divine consolation comes and he is healed. If someone went to psychiatric hospitals and read the Abba Isaac to the patients, those who believe in God would get well, because they would come to understand the deeper meaning of life.

People try to calm themselves with tranquilizers or with the theories of yoga, and they neglect altogether the true serenity that comes

when the soul is humble and God fills it with divine consolation. And imagine how all those tourists must suffer who come from other countries to Greece, and walk the streets in the hot summer sun, in the dusty and noisy streets! What great pressure they must feel inside, how stressed they must be if they need all this heat and noise to find comfort! It's like their own selves are driving them away, and all they can see in this trouble is rest!

When we see a person who has everything be stressed, anxious and sad, we must know that God is missing from his life. In the end, even wealth will make people suffer, because the material goods cannot really satisfy them. Theirs is a double affliction. I know wealthy people who have everything and are miserable. They do not even have children but they are still miserable. They are too lazy to lie down or take a walk. “Fine,” I told someone, “since you have some free time, do something spiritual; read one of the Hours of prayer, read a passage from the Gospel.” “I cannot,” he said. “Then,” I told him, “try doing something good; go to a hospital to visit some sick person.” “Why should I go all the way there,” he says, “what will become of it?” “Go help some poor person in your neighborhood.” “No,” he says, “that does not please me either.”

Can you believe that this person is miserable despite the fact that he has everything: free time, numerous houses and so on? Do you know how many people like this are in society? And these people suffer to the point that they lose their mind. What a dreadful thing! And if they happen to be independently wealthy and do not work, then they are the most miserable of all. If they at least had a job they would feel somewhat better.

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]

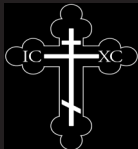
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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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CONSCIENCE AND OBEDIENCE

Source: "Counsels from the Holy Mountain," selected from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim, St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, Florence, AZ (1999), pp. 130-136.

When a person remains completely obedient to his conscience and implements whatever it tells him, he is not reproved by it anymore—not that its voice has weakened, but rather because of his good obedience, his conscience has nothing to reprove. The Apostle John says that when a man's conscience does not condemn him, he has confidence toward God. (cf. 1 Jn 3:21).

It is impossible for a person to proceed without ever stumbling somewhere, because from all sides the devil, the world, and the flesh are continuously inserting obstacles into his life, and he stumbles in proportion to his carelessness. Therefore, when he falls, he should arise at once and seek forgiveness. When one repents in proportion to the gravity of his fall, his conscience, which used to bother him, stops reproving him.

We must guard our conscience on three points—with respect to God, with respect to our neighbor, and with respect to things. One guards his conscience with respect to God when he avoids the various sins. He guards his conscience with respect to his neighbor when he does not grieve him, judge him, slander him, scandalize him, or push him towards evil deeds. He guards his conscience with respect to things when he does not cause destruction or damage to material things through carelessness, negligence, or unscrupulousness.

St. Theodore the Studite tells us many things about this "unscrupulousness."

When you see something burning or being damaged and you do not pick it up and protect it, this is unscrupulousness. When your clothes get torn and you neglect them, and then they get completely ruined, this is unscrupulousness. When you are able to work but instead of working you wander around here and there, this is also unscrupulousness. When you leave your food out and it goes bad and you throw it away, this is unscrupulousness because you should have taken care to eat it before it went bad. Therefore, unscrupulousness is when one errs in any way with respect to material things, and also when one offends God in any way.

The greatest wealth is obtained when one strives to preserve his conscience unburdened. But in the event that he senses that something has wounded him, he should correct it immediately, and thus he will return to his prior state.

How many times has our conscience reproved us! The more a person listens to his conscience, and the more he attends to it, the more precisely it guides him. And the more discreetly it guides and reproves him, the more he ascends in purity.

There is also the so-called "evil conscience," which often comes with the pretense and shape and form of the good conscience, yet in essence it is the evil, perverted conscience, the conscience which is opposed to God. The evil conscience is that voice which teaches things deceitful, perverted, and contrary. The good conscience has humility and obedience as its starting point, source, and foundation. The evil conscience has pride and disobedience as its source.

When one does not obey the Elder, when one resists, when one is deceitful,

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when one does not listen, then one has what is called self-reliance; such self-reliance is the evil conscience.

Humble-mindedness gives birth to the good conscience. Since the two consciences are entangled, one often asks himself, “Is this the evil conscience or the good one? Should I believe this thought or that one?” So to learn—or rather to be taught—what is the good conscience, one needs to have humility; but above all, he needs to place himself under the guidance of another, his superior, his leader, his spiritual father, and to obey whatever he says. Then little by little he will begin to perceive which thoughts are evil and which are good, what is the hue of the good conscience and what is the hue of the evil conscience. Thus, on the one hand, through the teaching and guidance of his spiritual father he avoids falling, and on the other hand, in time he is taught what the hue and appearance of the two consciences are and becomes a perfect man.

It is those who are without obedience who have suffered harm. For man is pressed by both consciences; the one works to save him and the other to destroy him, and many times he does not know which one to listen to. He who is under obedience avoids this danger and little by little becomes experienced and skilled in discerning the evil conscience from the good conscience.

Abba Poimen had two thoughts, and he went to tell them to his spiritual father, who lived very far away—he set out in the morning and arrived in the evening. He forgot one thought, however, and told him only the other one. When he returned to his cell, as soon as he put the key in the door, he remembered the second thought. So without even opening the door, he went back again to tell him his other thought. When his spiritual father saw his labor and his

exactitude, he exclaimed, “Poimen, Poimen, shepherd of angels! Your virtue will make your name known in all the world.” (The term “*poimen*” in Greek means shepherd).

For one to become experienced enough to distinguish the voice of the good conscience from the voice of the evil conscience, he must pass through obedience. If he does not pass through obedience, he is deficient. He may have gifts; he may be a good soul; he may do various good works—but you will see that he always hobbles in discernment and humility. The virtue that submission to an Elder gives is, first and foremost, discernment, which comes through humble-mindedness. That is to say, obedience forges a man’s character and gives him, above all, discernment and humility.

Ask your Father, says the Scripture, *and he will tell you.*” (Deut 32:7). We see **this in the patristic path the saints walked.** We read in the Lives of the Desert Fathers that a certain Zacharias saw a vision, but his spiritual father was not in a position to elucidate whether it was from God or from the demons. So he rebuked his disciple, telling him not to pay attention to visions. The disciple went to a discerning Elder who told him, “The vision is from God, but go and submit yourself to your spiritual father,” thus showing that being obedient is more important than seeing visions.

How much the Fathers have left us for our instruction! The best road, the most correct, the safest, the most free from responsibility, is the road of submission to an Elder. “He who practices obedience,” says Abba Palamon, “has fulfilled all the commandments of Christ.”

“The disciple has chosen the best road,” says Abba Moses. “Run, children, to wherever obedience is. There lie joy, peace, brotherly love, unity, vigilance, consolation, crowns, and wages.” But when we want to put forth our own will

as disciples, then the road becomes difficult, rough, and dangerous. When one practices obedience, he finds himself in love, in forcefulness, in brotherly affection, in crowns, in sanctification, in salvation.

Self-will is a great barrier, a great obstacle—it is a wall between the soul and God. Just as when a wall is in front of us and blocks the sun, the place is damp and unhealthful and does not bear fruit because the sun does not shine there, the same thing happens with the wall of self-will. When it stands in front of the soul, the soul is darkened and remains without fruit. The Sun of Righteousness is Christ; when the soul is not obstructed, the rays of Christ come and illuminate it, and man bears fruit and is sanctified.

Only the one who has tasted the fruit of obedience can speak about it. Obedience is the most grace-filled road. Above all, one who is obedient casts out the evil demon of selfishness and pride—which causes all evils—and brings humility and freedom from care.

We read in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* about two brothers who decided to become monks and left the world. One became a disciple in a coenobitic monastery; the other became a hermit. After two or three years the hermit said, “Let me go and see my brother who is in the monastery, living in the midst of cares and worries. Who knows how the poor thing is doing in the midst of so much bustle.” He was confident that through his *asceticism* he had reached a high spiritual level. He went to the monastery, and with the excuse that he supposedly needed his brother, he said to the abbot, “I would like to see my brother a little.” His brother came, and the abbot, who was a holy man, blessed them to go off by themselves and talk.

When they had gone some distance from the monastery, they saw on the path a dead man who was almost naked. The hermit said, “Don’t we have any clothes to cover the man with?” The monk from the monastery, in his simplicity said, “Wouldn’t it be better to pray for him to be resurrected?” “Let’s pray,” said the hermit. They both prayed, and the dead man arose. The monk from the monastery did not attach much importance to the miracle; he believed it came about through the prayers of his Elder. The hermit, however, said within himself that the miracle occurred because of his own virtues—because of his *asceticism* and fasting, his nightly vigils and the hardship he endured, his sleeping on the ground and all his other achievements.

When they returned, before they had a chance to speak, the abbot said to the hermit, “Brother, do not think that it was because of your prayers that God raised the dead man—no! God did it because of the obedience of your brother!” When the hermit saw that the abbot immediately read his thoughts, that he had the gift of clairvoyance and was a holy man, he believed that in reality he himself was deluded, and that his brother, who he thought was anxious and worried about many things within the monastery, was actually above him.

Think with what confidence the disciple said, “Let’s pray for him to be resurrected!” Here you see simplicity, guilelessness, faith. The hermit considered it impossible, but the monk from the monastery considered it natural; he trusted in the prayers of his Elder. What a struggle he must have undergone to reach such humility! How his egotism and pride must have been smashed in the monastery! What

person coming from the world does not have egotism and pride? How many disciples were sanctified and gave forth myrrh after death!

On the Holy Mountain, in the region of St. Anne’s Skete, there was a monk who hauled sacks of wheat up from the harbor with much labor and sweat. At one point he began to say in his thoughts, “I wonder if we will have a reward for all the sweat and labor we endure in order to obey our Elders?” As he reflected on these things, he sat down to rest a little. A light sleep came

upon him, and as he was half asleep, he saw the Panaghia before him. “Do not be dismayed, my child” she said to him. “This sweat which you shed to haul your provisions for the sake of obedience is counted as the blood of a martyr before my Son.” Then he came to himself, and his thoughts and distress left him. The fathers inscribed that event on the stone wall there, and whoever passes by there reads it.

Near the main church of St. Anne’s Skete, there is a little house called “The Patriarch’s.” A Patriarch by the name of Cyril lived there in *asceticism*; he had abandoned the patriarchal throne and came to live as a simple monk. The fathers hauled their things on their backs, but they said to the Patriarch, “You are old, your All-holiness, and not accustomed to our way of life. We will get you a little donkey to load your provisions on.” So they got him a little donkey, and he went up and down the mountainside with it.



**Elder Ephraim of Arizona (R) with
Elder Ephraim of Katounakia (+1998)**

One day, as the Patriarch climbed up with the animal and the other fathers had their provisions on their backs, they sat down to rest a little. And as the Patriarch was half awake, he suddenly saw the Panaghia together with the Angels. The Panaghia was holding a vessel and was giving a drink to the fathers who were carrying their things on their backs; the Angels were holding handkerchiefs and wiping away their sweat.

He saw with surprise that they even wiped the sweat from the donkey, and he begged them, "Wipe me also, please." Then the Panaghia said to him, "Father, you have not sweated; we will wipe the donkey because it has." Then he woke up and came to himself. He said to the fathers, "Take away the donkey, because I am missing out on many blessings. The Panaghia and the angels wiped the donkey and not me!" From then on, he also carried his things on his back.

How very many such things have happened in the lives of the Fathers! If only we were there to see them! Now such things are rarely encountered; they have all been lost.

So let us be attentive to our conscience. Let us acquire a good conscience through obedience, contrition, confession, and humble-mindedness. Let us avoid self-will, which begets self-reliance and the evil conscience. Amen.



GOD NEVER LEAVES

From "The Evergetinos."

A brother was beset by the demon of lust. It so happened that the brother once passed by a village in Egypt and saw a beautiful woman, who was the daughter of a pagan priest. On seeing her, he was wildly aroused and, under the influence of his passions, went to the father of the girl and said: "Give me your daughter as my wife."

"I cannot give her to you," the pagan priest answered, "without asking my god. Wait a bit."

Indeed, the pagan priest went to his god's oracle (through which, as we know, the Devil speaks) and asked: "A monk came to my home and wants my daughter as his wife. Shall I give her to him?"

The demon hidden in the oracle answered him: "Ask him if he will deny his God, his baptism, and the vows he made as a monk."

When the pagan priest returned, he said to the monk: "Will you deny your God, your baptism, and your monastic vocation?" Indeed, the monk accepted his terms. But immediately he saw something bright come from his mouth and, like a dove, go up into the heavens.

Right away, the pagan priest ran to the demon and said: "Behold, the monk did all that you asked." Then the demon said to him: "Do not give you daughter to him as a wife, for his God has not departed from him, but is still helping him."

So once again, the pagan priest went to the monk and told him: "I cannot give my daughter to you as a wife, since your God continues to remain near you and help you."

On hearing this response, the monk was deeply moved and said within himself: "Even though God in His singular goodness has bestowed upon me so many good things, I—wretch that I am—have denied Him, His Holy baptism, and monastic vows. But despite my denial, God has not departed from me, though I have so greatly betrayed him, and continues to help me. After that, do I not have duty to run to Him, grounded in the surety of His boundless goodness?"

Having now recovered from the dizziness of passion, the brother left immediately for the desert and went to his Elder, to whom he confessed his denial, as well as all of his thoughts.

With kindness the Elder told him: "Brother, remain with me in my cave and fast for two days at a time for three weeks: that is you can fast strenuously for two days and on the third relax the fast. And I will ask God to forgive you."

The Elder did indeed grieve for the brother and entreated God with earnestness: "My God," he would say, "Give me the soul of this monk and receive his repentance."

God, as merciful as he is, heard the sincere and fervent prayer of the Elder, especially since it came forth from genuine love. When the first week of the cloistered monk's penance had been fulfilled, the Elder visited him and told him: Have you perhaps beheld something?"

"Yes," the monk answered, "I saw a dove depart for the heavens in front of my head."

The Elder said to the repentant monk, "Take care for yourself and ask God with the whole of your soul, without cessation, to forgive you." With these recommendations, the Elder once again departed.

As soon as the second week had passed, the Elder came again to the cave where the monk was cloistered: "How is it going, Brother? Perhaps you have seen something again?" he asked with fatherly concern and care.

"Yes, Elder, I saw a dove next to my head."

The Elder, having advised him anew to pray with earnestness and to stay in a state of vigilance in his soul, took leave. When at last the third week had elapsed, the Elder went to the cloistered monk and said to him: "Have you seen anything more?"

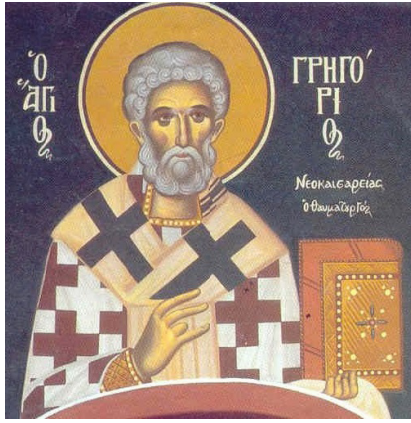
With joy, the monk answered: "I saw the dove come and perch on my head. So, when I stretched out my hand with joy to grab him, he flew into my mouth."

When the Elder heard this answer, he thanked God and said to the repentant monk: "Do you see, my brother? God has accepted your repentance. Therefore, be careful with yourself from now on."

Crying, the emotion-filled brother answered the Elder: "From now on and ever after, Father, I will remain near you, and shall not leave you until I die." And indeed the monk remained with the Elder and never left.

ON THE ANNUNCIATION TO THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY

By St. Gregory of Neocaesarea, known as *Thaumaturgus* (Ὁ Θαυματουργός—*O Thaumaturgos, The Miracle-Worker*) (+275).



Today the choir of angels sings strains of praise joyfully, and the light of the advent of Christ shines brightly upon the faithful. Today is the glad springtime to us, and Christ the Sun of righteousness has beamed with clear light around us, and has illumined the

minds of the faithful. Today Adam is made anew, and moves in the choir of angels, having winged his way to heaven. Today the whole circle of the earth is filled with joy, since the sojourn of the Holy Spirit has been realized to men. Today the grace of God and the hope of the unseen shine through all wonders transcending imagination, and make the mystery that was kept hidden from eternity plainly discernible to us. Today are woven the chaplets of never-fading virtue. Today, God, willing to crown the sacred heads of those whose pleasure is to hearken to Him, and who delight in His festivals, invites the lovers of unswerving faith as His called and His heirs; and the heavenly kingdom is urgent to summon those who mind celestial things to join the divine service of the incorporeal choirs. Today is fulfilled the word of David, *Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad.*

The fields shall be joyful, and all the trees of the wood before the Lord, because He comes. David thus made mention of the trees; and the Lord's Forerunner also spoke of them as trees that should bring forth fruits meet for repentance, or rather for the coming of the Lord. However, our Lord Jesus Christ promises perpetual gladness to all those who believe in Him. For He says, *I will see you, and you shall rejoice; and your joy no man takes from you.*

Today is the illustrious and ineffable mystery of Christians, who have willingly set their hope like a seal upon Christ, plainly declared to us. Today Gabriel, who stands by God, came to the Pure Virgin, bearing to her the glad annunciation, *Hail, thou that art highly favored! And she cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. And the angel immediately proceeded to say, The Lord is with you: fear not, Mary; for you have found favor with God. Behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob*

forever: and of His kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? Shall I remain a virgin, she asks? Do I not then lose the honor of virginity?

And while she was yet in perplexity as to these things, the angel placed shortly before her the summary of his whole message, and said to the Pure Virgin, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God.* For what it is, that also shall it be called by all means; for *with God nothing shall be impossible.*

Meekly, then, did divine grace make election of the pure Mary alone out of all generations. For she proved herself prudent truly in all things; neither has any woman been born like her in all generations. She was not like the primeval virgin Eve, who, keeping holiday alone in paradise, with thoughtless mind, unguardedly hearkened to the word of the serpent, the author of all evil, and thus became depraved in the thoughts of her mind; and through her that deceiver, discharging his poison and refusing death with it, brought it into the whole world; and in virtue of this has arisen all the trouble of the saints.

In the holy Virgin alone is the fall of that (first mother) repaired. Yet this holy one was not competent to receive the gift until she had first learned who it was that sent it, and what the gift was, and who it was that conveyed it. While the holy one pondered these things in perplexity with herself, she says to the angel, *Whence have you brought to us the blessing in such wise? Out of what treasure-stores is the pearl of the word dispatched to us? Whence has the gift acquired its purpose toward us? From heaven you have come, yet you walk upon earth! You exhibit the form of man, and (yet) you are glorious with dazzling light. These things the holy one considered with herself, and the archangel solved the difficulty expressed in such reasoning by saying to her: *The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you.* Therefore, also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God. And *fear not, Mary;* for I am not come to overpower you with fear, but to repel the subject of fear. *Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God.* Question not grace by the standard of nature. For grace does not endure to pass under the laws of nature. You know, O Mary, things kept hidden from the patriarchs and prophets. You have learned, O virgin, things which were kept concealed till now from the angels. You have heard, O purest one, things of which even the choir of inspired men was never deemed worthy. Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and Daniel, and all the prophets, prophesied of Him; but the manner they knew not. Yet you alone, O purest virgin, are now made the recipient of things of which all these were kept in ignorance, and you learn the origin of them.*

Where the Holy Spirit is, there are all things readily ordered. Where divine grace is present, all things are found possible with God. The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you. Therefore, also that holy thing which shall be born of you *shall be called the Son of God*. And if He is the Son of God, then is He also God, of one form with the Father, and co-eternal; in Him the Father possesses all manifestation; He is His image in the person, and through His reflection the (Father's) glory shines forth. And as from the ever-flowing fountain the streams proceed, so also from this ever-flowing and ever-living fountain does the light of the world proceed, the perennial and the true, namely Christ our God.

It is this that the prophets have preached: The streams of the river make glad the city of God. And not one city only, but all cities; for even as it makes glad one city, so does it also the whole world. Appropriately, therefore, did the angel say to Mary the holy virgin first of all, *Hail, you who are highly favored, the Lord is with you*; inasmuch as with her was laid up the full treasure of grace. For of all generations she alone has risen as a virgin pure in body and in spirit; and she alone bears Him who bears all things on His word. Nor is it only the beauty of this holy one in body that calls forth our admiration, but also the innate virtue of her soul. Wherefore also the angels addressed her first with the salutation, *Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with you*, and no spouse of earth; He Himself is with you who is the Lord of sanctification, the Father of purity, the Author of incorruption, and the Bestower of liberty, the Curator of salvation, and the Steward and Provider of the true peace, who out of the virgin earth made man, and out of man's side formed Eve in addition. Even this Lord is with you, and on the other hand also is of you.

Come, therefore, beloved brethren, and let us take up the angelic strain, and to the utmost of our ability return the due share of praise, saying, *Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with you!* For it is yours truly to rejoice, seeing that the grace of God, as he knows, has chosen to dwell with you—the Lord of glory dwelling with the handmaiden; He that is fairer than the children of men with the fair virgin; He who sanctifies all things with the undefiled. *God is with you*, and with you also is the perfect man in whom dwells the whole fullness of the Godhead. *Hail, thou that art highly favored*, the fountain of the light that lightens all who believe

upon Him! Hail, thou that art highly favored, the rising of the rational Sun, and the undefiled flower of Life! Hail, thou that art highly favored, the mead of sweet savor! Hail, thou that art highly favored, the ever-blooming vine, which makes glad the souls of those who honor you!

Hail, thou that art highly favored!—the soil that, all untilled, bears bounteous fruit. You have brought forth, in accordance with the law of nature indeed, as it goes with us, and by the set time of practice; and yet in a way beyond nature, or rather above nature, by reason that God the Word from above took His abode in you, and formed the new Adam in your holy womb, and inasmuch as the Holy Ghost gave the power of conception to the holy virgin; and the reality of His body was assumed from her body. And just as the pearl comes of the two natures, namely lightning and water, the occult signs of the sea; so also our Lord Jesus Christ proceeds, without fusion and without mutation, from the pure, and chaste, and undefiled, and holy Virgin Mary; perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, in all things equal to the Father, and in all things consubstantial with us, apart from sin.

Most of the holy fathers, and patriarchs, and prophets desired to see Him, and to be eye-witnesses of Him, but did not attain hereto. And some of them by visions beheld Him in type, and darkly; others, again, were privileged to hear the divine voice through the medium of the cloud, and were favored with sights of holy angels; but to Mary the pure virgin alone did the archangel Gabriel manifest himself luminously, bringing her the glad address, *Hail, thou that art highly favored!* Thus, she received the word, and in the due time of the fulfilment according to the body's course, she brought forth the priceless pearl.

Come, then, you too, dearly beloved, and let us chant the melody which has been taught us by the inspired harp of David, and say, *Arise, O Lord, into Your rest; You, and the ark of Your sanctuary*. For the holy Virgin is in truth an ark, wrought with gold both within and without, that has received the whole treasury of the sanctuary. *Arise, O Lord, into Your rest*. Arise, O Lord, out of the bosom of the Father, in order that You may raise up the fallen race of the first-formed man. Setting these things forth, David in prophecy said to the rod that was to spring from himself, and to sprout into the flower of that beauteous fruit, *Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear, and forget your own*



people and your father's house; so shall the King greatly desire your beauty: for He is the Lord your God, and you shall worship Him. Harken, O daughter, to the things which were prophesied before time of you, in order that you may also behold the things themselves with the eyes of understanding. Harken to me while I announce things beforehand to you, and harken to the archangel who declares expressly to you the perfect mysteries.

Come then, dearly beloved, and let us fall back on the memory of what has gone before us; and let us glorify, and celebrate, and laud, and bless that rod that has sprung so marvelously from Jesse. For Luke, in the inspired Gospel narratives, delivers a testimony not to Joseph only, but also to Mary the mother of God, and gives this account with reference to the very family and house of David: *For Joseph went up, says he, from Galilee, unto a city of Judea which is called Bethlehem, to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child, because they were of the house and family of David. And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered; and she brought forth her son, the first-born of the whole creation, and wrapped him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

She wrapped in swaddling clothes Him who is covered with light as with a garment. She wrapped in swaddling clothes Him who made every creature. She laid in a manger Him who sits above the cherubim, and is praised by myriads of angels. In the manger set apart for dumb brutes did the Word of God repose, in order that He might impart to men, who are irrational by free choice, the perceptions of true reason. In the board, from which cattle eat, was laid the heavenly Bread, in order that He might provide participation in spiritual sustenance for men who live like the beasts of the earth.

There was no room for Him in the inn. He found no place, who by His word established heaven and earth; for though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor, and chose extreme humiliation on behalf of the salvation of our nature, in His inherent goodness toward us. He, who fulfilled the whole administration of unutterable mysteries of the economy in heaven in the bosom of the Father, and in the cave in the arms of the mother, reposed in the manger. Angelic choirs encircled Him, singing of glory in heaven and of peace upon earth. In heaven, He was seated at the right hand of the Father; and in the manger, He rested, as it were, upon the cherubim. Even there was in truth His cherubic throne; there was His royal seat. Holy of the holy, and alone glorious upon the earth, and holier than the holy, was that wherein Christ our God rested.

To Him be glory, honor, and power, together with the Father undefiled, and the altogether holy and quickening Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of the ages. Amen.

SPIRITUAL GEMS

St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

A devout elder lay on his death bed. His friends gathered around him and mourned him. With that, the elder laughed three times. The monks asked him: "What are you laughing at?" The elder replied: "I laughed the first time, because all of you are afraid of death; the second time, for none of you are prepared for death; the third time, because I am going from labor to rest."

Behold, how a righteous man dies! He is not afraid of death. He is prepared for death. He sees, that through death, he passes from the difficult life to eternal rest.

When the nature of man imagines itself in its original state in Paradise, then death is unnatural, the same way that sin is unnatural. Death emanated from sin. Repented and cleansed from sin, man does not consider death annihilation, but the gate to life eternal.

If, at times, the righteous prayed to God to prolong their earthly life, that was not because of love for this life nor because of the fear of death but solely that they would gain more time for repentance and cleansing from sin in order that they may present themselves before God, more sinless and more pure. Even if they showed fear before death, that was not out of fear of death but the fear of God's judgment. What kind of fear then must the unrepentant sinner have before death?

A man went into the forest to choose a tree from which to make roof-beams. And he saw two trees, one beside the other. One was smooth and tall, but had rotted away inside, and the other was rough on the outside and ugly, but its core was healthy. The man sighed, and said to himself:

"What use is this tree to me if it is rotten inside and useless for beams? The other it is rough and ugly, is at least healthy on the inside and so, if I put a bit more effort into it, I can use it for roof-beams for my house."

And, without thinking any more about it, he chose that tree to make roof-beams.

So will God choose between two men for His house, and will choose not the one who appears outwardly righteous, but the one whose heart is filled with God's healthy righteousness.

Blessed is the man who uses his sufferings, knowing that all suffering in this brief life is loosed on men by God in His love for mankind, for the benefit and assistance of men. In His mercy, God looses suffering on men because of their sins—by His mercy and not His justice. For, if it were by His justice, every sin would inevitably bring death, as the Apostle says: *Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.* (Jas 1:15). In place of death, God gives healing through suffering. Suffering is God's way of healing the soul of its sinful leprosy and its death.

THE SINNER'S CONDITION

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. 88-92.

For the most part, the Word of God depicts the sinner, who is faced with the necessity of renewal in repentance, as being submerged in deep slumber. The distinguishing characteristic of such people is not always outright depravity, but rather the absence in the strictest sense of inspired, selfless zeal for pleasing God, together with a decided aversion for everything sinful. Devotion is not the main concern of their cares and labors; they are attentive about many other things, but are completely indifferent to their salvation, and do not sense what danger they are in. They neglect the good life and lead a life that is cold in faith, though it be occasionally righteous and outwardly irreproachable.

Particulars for a Person Who Lacks Grace

That is the general characteristic. Here are the particulars for a person who lacks grace: Once he has turned away from God, the person dwells on himself, and makes self the main goal of his life and activity. This is because at this point, after God, there is for him nothing higher than self, especially because, having previously received every abundance from God and having now forgotten Him, he hurries and takes care to fill himself up with something.

The emptiness that has formed inside him because of his falling away from God causes an unquenchable thirst inside him that is vague but constant. The person has become a bottomless abyss. He makes every effort to fill this abyss, but he cannot see or feel it getting full. Thus, he spends his entire life in sweat, toil and great labors; he busies himself with various occupations in which he hopes to find a way to quench his unquenchable thirst. These occupations take up all his attention, all his time and all his activity. They are the highest good, in which he lives with his whole heart.

Thus, it is clear why a person who makes self his exclusive goal is never himself; instead, everything is outside him, in things either created or acquired by vanity. He has fallen away from God, Who is the fullness of everything. He himself is empty; it remains for him to seemingly pour himself out into an endless variety of things and live in them. Thus, the sinner thirsts, fusses, and troubles himself with occupations

and numerous things outside himself and God. This is why a characteristic trait of sinful life is, in its disregard for salvation, *the care and trouble about many things.* (Lk 10:41).

The Care and Trouble about Many Things

The nuances and distinctions of this care and trouble about many things depends on the kinds of emptiness that have formed in the soul. There is the emptiness of the mind that has forgotten the One Who is everything; this gives rise to care and trouble about learnedness, inquisitiveness, questioning and curiosity. There is the emptiness of the will that has been deprived of possession by the One Who is everything; this creates desire for many things, the longing to possess many things, so that everything is in our control, in our hands; this is self-interest. There is the emptiness of the heart that has been deprived of the enjoyment of the One Who is everything; this forms a thirst for the satisfaction of many and various things, or a search for an infinite number of objects in which we hope to find pleasure for our senses, both internal and external. Thus, the sinner is continually

troubled about learnedness, the possession of many things, and the desire for many pleasures. He amuses himself, he possesses, he questions. He goes around in circles his entire life. Curiosity beckons, the heart hopes to taste sweet things, and he is enticed by the will. Anyone can convince himself of this if he ob-



The Last Judgement

serves the movements of his soul over the course of only a single day.

If left alone, the sinner will continue going in circles, because this is our nature when it is enslaved to sin. However, when the sinner is in the company of others, the circles he goes around increase in number a thousand-fold and become more convoluted.

There is an entire world full of people who are continually doing things, questioning, amusing themselves, and scrounging about, whose every way in all of this has led to a system, placed everyone under its laws, and made these laws a necessity for everyone who belongs to this sphere. In this common alliance, they inevitably come into contact, rub up against each other, and in this rubbing succeed in elevating inquisitiveness, self-interest, and self-pleasure to the tenth, hundredth and thousandth degree, thereby placing all happiness, joy and life in this frenzy. This is the world of vanity, in which occupations, ways, rule, connections, language, diversions, amusements, concepts—everything, from the smallest to the greatest thing—are permeated by the spirit

of these three friends of many cares and trouble mentioned above. It is what constitutes the dreary going around in circles by the spirits of worldly people. Being in living communion with this entire world, each sinner is caught up in its thousand-fold net, and is so deeply entangled in it that it is invisible to him.

Such a heavy burden lies on each worldly person and each of his parts, that he does not have the strength to be stirred in the smallest way by anything that is not worldly, because this would seem like raising a thousand-pound weight to him. Thus, no one undertakes such an unmanageable task, and no one thinks to undertake it; instead, everyone lives on, moving in the rut into which they have fallen.

The Seductions of the Prince of This World

Even worse is the prince of this world who is unparalleled in his cunning, spitefulness and experience in seduction. It is through the flesh and materialism with which the soul became mingled at the fall that he has free access to the soul. In his approach, he kindles curiosity, self-interest, and pleasure-loving self-comfort in various ways. Through various enticements, he holds the soul in these things with no escape; through various suggestions he suggests plans for satisfying them and then either aids in fulfilling them, or thwarts them through instruction of other more ambitious plans.

All this is accomplished with one purpose: to prolong and deepen a person's involvement in them. This is what constitutes the change of worldly misfortune and fortune, unblessed by God.

The prince of this world has an entire horde of servile spirits of malice that are subordinate to him. At each instant they scurry along every boundary of the inhabited world to sow various things in different places, deepen entanglement in the net of sin, repair traps that have become weak and broken, and especially to guard against anyone who might take it into his mind to rid himself of his bonds and escape to freedom. In the latter case, they hurriedly gather around the self-willed person. First they come one by one, then by detachments and legions until finally, the entire horde is there. This happens in various ways and forms so as to block all exits and mend the strands and nets, and, using the other analogy, to push back into the abyss any person who has begun to crawl out along its steep slopes.

The Invisible Kingdom of Spirits in Which Each Sinner Is Immersed

This invisible kingdom of spirits has special places. There are the throne rooms, where plans are drawn up, instructions arrive and reports are received with the approval or reproaches of the chiefs. These are the inner sanctums of Satan, as St. John the Theologian expressed it. On earth, in the middle kingdom of people, there are leagues of evil-doers, profligates, and especially nonbelievers and blasphemers,

whose deeds, words and writings pour out sinful gloom everywhere and block out the divine light. The aggregate of worldly ways, pervaded with sinful elements that stupefy and draw one away from God, is the organ through which they express their will and power here.

This is the structure of the sinful sphere! Each sinner is immersed in it, but is kept there largely on account of some particular thing. This thing, perhaps, is in appearance tolerable, even laudable. Satan has a single concern; that is, where a person is completely occupied in his consciousness, attention, and heart, that God not be the sole occupier, but that something outside Him be attached to his mind, will, and heart, so the person has something in place of God and only cares about what he knows and what he enjoys and possesses. Here there are not only carnal and mental passions, but also Specious things such as learnedness, artistry, and worldliness that can serve as the bonds of Satan for keeping blinded sinners in his power and not allowing them to come to their senses.

The Inner Mood and Condition of the Sinner

If one looks at the sinner in his inner mood and condition, it happens sometimes that he is knowledgeable, but is blind with regard to divine things and the matter of his own salvation. Even if he constantly takes care and troubles over things, he is idle and careless in regard to arranging his own salvation; even if he continually experiences anxieties or pleasures of the heart, he is completely insensitive to everything spiritual. In this regard, all forces of being are afflicted by sin; and there is blindness, negligence and insensitivity in the sinner. He does not see his own condition, and therefore does not sense the danger of his situation. He does not sense his danger and therefore does not take the trouble and care to be delivered from it.

The necessity to change and be saved does not even enter his mind. He has complete, unshakable confidence that he is at his proper station in life, wants for nothing and must therefore leave everything the way it is. Therefore, he considers any reminder about another kind of life to be superfluous for himself; he does not listen, and cannot even understand what it is for. He avoids and shuns it...



Orthodoxy is life. If we don't live Orthodoxy, we simply are not Orthodox, no matter what formal beliefs we might hold. It is later than you think! Hasten, therefore, to do the work of God.

Fr. Seraphim Rose (+1982)

MAN AND HIS FALL

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, from "Entering the Orthodox Church—the Catechism and Baptism of Adults."

As we analyze the Parable of the Prodigal Son, let us go on to make a man-centered analysis of this parable. It will show us the true value of man and what true life is.

The father in the parable had two sons. Both sons lived at home and enjoyed their father's goods.

God is called Father both in relation to His only-begotten Son and in relation to man. However, there is a vast difference between the two. The Father gave birth to the Son before all ages, whereas He created man within time. Man is also a child of God, but by grace, whereas the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is a Son by nature.

We can use an example to make this more comprehensible. An artist constructs a painting, which is his own spiritual creation, his own work. In a way, you could call it "his child," because it expresses his thoughts and his gifts. At the same time, he begets children. Thus, he makes the painting, but begets the child. The same thing, with appropriate analogy, happens with God the Father in relationship to the Logos and men.

God created the whole world. In the beginning, He created the angels, what is known as the *noetic realm*. He then went on, within the space of five days, to create all the sensible world, nature, birds, fish, animals, plants and so on. Then, on the sixth day He created man, who was both *noetic* and *sensible* [sensory], i.e., he had a soul and body. As the Fathers of the Church say, first He created the Kingdom, the palaces, and then He created the King, man. From his very creation, man was called to be king of the world.

The Holy Scriptures say that man was made by God in His *Image* and *Likeness*. The *Image* refers to the noetic faculty and his free-will, i.e., he has a nous and freedom. Whereas the *Likeness* refers to the fact that he was created to become by grace what God is by nature. That is to say, he was created to become a "god" through grace. Of course, according to the Holy Fathers, the *Image* refers to the triune nature of the soul. Just as God is *Nous*, *Logos* and *Spirit* man also has a nous, logos and spirit. The nous is the center of his personality. The logos or reason is the articulated and spoken word that is formulated with reason. Finally, the spirit, which is man's noetic *eros*, his intense longing, the power he has within him to achieve *theosis*.

This means that the archetype of his creation, we could say the model of man's creation is God, and more especially the *Logos* of God, the Second Person [*Hypostasis*] of the Holy Trinity. Man did not happen alone; he had a model. We can compare man to having a film and printing off many photographs. In this case, the film is Christ, and man is in the image of the *Logos*, a photograph of the *Logos*. This is why

he should be like its original archetype. He must keep his photograph clean; otherwise, it does not correspond to its original creation, and, therefore, loses its value completely.

The term *the image* demonstrates his *ontology*, that is, the reality of his nature. Whereas *the likeness* demonstrates where he should go and what his objective is. This means that man must always bear his noble lineage in mind. He is a prince and noble. He comes from an important and elevated family. He should also know that he ought to strive to live up to this great mission. Man's objectives are not exhausted on himself. That is to say, he should not only consider his food, drink, clothing and recreation, instead he should have high targets. Nor yet is it man's goal to study, work get married, etc. He will do these things to provide for and serve his life here. Ultimately, however, the deeper aim of his life is to become "god" by grace. St. Gregory the Theologian would make an amazing definition of man's purpose. *Man*, he said, *is a living creature sustained here, but transferred elsewhere, and, the completion of the mystery, is deification through its inclination towards God*. That is to say, man lives and is provided for in this earthly existence, but he is journeying to the other life. This journey from biological life to spiritual life is called a *mystery*. Furthermore, the end of the mystery is to become deified, by God's grace.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the two sons are shown living in their Father's house. According to the interpretation of the Holy Fathers, this shows that immediately following his creation, man lived in the house of God, i.e., in Paradise, and he had true communion with God. Paradise was both sensible and noetic. That is to say, it was a special place, but also a personal relationship with God. In the Old Testament, in the book of Genesis in particular, we see that Adam had grace from God immediately following the Creation. This is why both he and Eve lived just like the angels in heaven.

The younger son in the parable sought his own share of his inheritance: "Give me the portion of goods that falls to me." So he divided them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. (Lk 15:12-16)

At this point, the parable is fully compatible with the Fall of man and his detachment from God. We will look at its more central points.

According to St. Gregory Palamas, the younger son sought his corresponding property from his father, which means that sin comes later, whereas virtue is first-born. God created man pure, with the capacity to attain *theosis*. Whereas, sin is

“younger,” a “discovery born later.” It is the result of man’s bad choice. Man used his freedom to choose abandonment of God and his detachment from Him. Man’s sin was that he sought to appropriate God’s work and he attempted to continue his life according to his own will, and not according to the will of God. As can be seen in the Old Testament, man wanted to be obedient to himself and his own reason, and not to the will of God. He made himself and his desires the center of everything, instead of God. This is the essence of the tragedy of *ancestral sin*, and, indeed, of all sin.

In reading the Parable of the Prodigal Son, we observe the stages of the Fall, as well as the tragic figure of the younger son. We can delineate it as follows: appropriation of the property, emigration, squandering of the essentials, deprivation and subjugation. Within this framework, we can see the tragedy of the sin of the forefathers, as well as the tragedy of every other sin that man commits.

When one tries to expend all his life within the bounds of his biological life, interpreting it rationally, this constitutes a departure from God. Man emigrates to a far country. He loses his communion and unity with God. From the moment of his creation, man has a body and soul inseparably joined together. The soul is the life of the body, whereas the life of the soul is the Holy Spirit. Thus, without the Holy Spirit, man is spiritually dead. It is characteristic that, when his son returns, the father in the parable says, *for this my son was dead and is alive again*. (Lk 15:24). This means that departure from God creates this death. Indeed, without God, man is spiritually dead. He may move, work, have a high place in society, yet, without God, everything is dead and life is insipid.

St. John the Damascene, in mentioning the Fall of Adam and Eve, says through sin man lost divine grace, his image was darkened and he [willingly through beguilement] was stripped of divine grace, resulting in the feeling of nakedness in the body, too. The consequences were horrific. Having lost divine grace, death came. First, spiritual death and then bodily death, i.e., sicknesses, mortality and finally, later, the separation of the soul from the body.

The life of a man without the God Who created him is true deprivation. In that case, nothing has meaning in his life. He is completely discontented, because he has lost his archetype, God. He loses true love; he is even deprived of real freedom. This means that he is subjugated to the citizens of that country, far away from his father’s house. These citizens of Hell are, in fact, the devil. He becomes the devil’s minion. This is true deprivation and subjugation of man. He was made to be a prince, to live in the royal palace and he preferred to be naked, in rags, a swineherd. That is to say, he preferred to expend himself solely on his biological strengths and the indulgence of his senses.

It is an absolute truth that, without the Holy Spirit, man is spiritually dead. St. Makarios the Egyptian uses two im-

ages to make this reality comprehensible. The first image is of unsalted meat. In this case, it quickly goes off and gives off a terrible stench. The other image is of a coin that does not have the King’s image upon it. Such a coin would be a counterfeit and would be worthless. The same thing is true of a man who does not have the energy of the All-Holy Spirit within him. He is not a natural man, and he does not have the true life.

St. Gregory of Nyssa would say something quite characteristic: *The person who does not live truly, does not have a true life; the life of sinners is not a life, as such, it is merely labelled as one*. This means that God is man’s life. Besides, Christ Himself said, *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*. (Jn 14:6). Whoever lives apart from God does not have actual life. This is why the life of sinners is simply called life, in name only, but in fact, it is not a life at all. This means that it is tragic. He is locked up within the prison of his senses, of mortality and of corruption. He cannot reach out to the clear skies of freedom. He is tormented by all life’s tragic problems. He can find no escape. He is exiled to a desert island and there is no hope of salvation, unless he returns to God, through his own free will.

Far from God, man is a prodigal. He loses his beauty and his worth. He has no father. He has no house. He does not have love. He has no friends. Everybody takes advantage of him. This is why, sometimes, from within his bitterness and tragedy, he seeks for God. The desire for Baptism can be seen in precisely this perspective. He wants to obtain life, which is God, and he wants to have a personal relationship with God, who is his archetype. The quest for Baptism does not have a social character; it should not be inspired by external, human questions. Rather, it must be placed within this perspective. Someone wants to be baptized so that they can return from death to life, from that far country to his father’s house, from deprivation to abundance, from being an orphan to having a father.



Food is not evil, but gluttony is. Childbearing is not evil, but fornication is. Money is not evil, but avarice is. Glory is not evil, but vainglory is. Indeed, there is no evil in existing things, but only in their misuse.

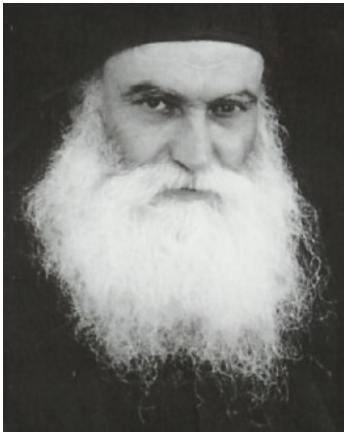
St. Maximus the Confessor

Our world is guided by two principles and sources: God and the devil. All that is better in the world of men has its source in God, and all that is bad has the devil as its principle and source. In the final account, all good comes from God, and all evil from the devil.

St. Justin Popovich

ECUMENISM IS DOMINATED BY UNCLEAN SPIRITS

From the book "Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church - A Synod lacking in Synodicity and Orthodox self-awareness," a publication by "Synaxis of Orthodox Romaics 'Fotis Kontoglou,'" Trikala, March 2016. This book is the transcript of the 3-hour program of the conversation between the manager of the Piraeus Church Radio Station, Mr. Lykourgos Markoudis and professor Demetrios Tseleggides—professor Tseleggides details Elder Ephraim's of Katounakia attestation to him relative to the topic of ecumenism.



In what follows, I will say something that pertains to a personal deposition. I was associated for several decades with Elder Ephraim of Katounakia, of renowned ethos and conscience. Also renowned was the fact that he possessed a "spiritual television." As for me, I had gone to him on many occasions, always with the intention of posing certain very specific

questions, in a specific sequence, and using my own vocabulary. When I would visit him, and without ever stipulating or presenting to him my questions, he would give me the replies that I sought, in the sequence and even using the vocabulary to which I was accustomed. I am mentioning this as a *de facto* personal experience; such experience is not an unprecedented phenomenon—it has been experienced by many others as well.

There was one time when—as a young professor at the School of Theology at the time, about thirty years ago—I had mentioned the following to him. Given that the clime of Ecumenism has also been flourishing in the School of Theology—especially that of Thessaloniki—I had certain nagging problems and questions, because I could see it being represented by otherwise respected professors. Naturally, both my conscience as well as my learning had reacted against it, however, I desired—beyond my scientific status—to also obtain a charismatic reply, which is something that I did for many other issues. Thus, I asked him on the matter in hand—if he could tell me what kind of thing Ecumenism is.

He replied outrightly and without any difficulty:

This question, my child, had also been posed by someone else, sometime before you. I myself have been up here on these rocks for forty years... I have even forgotten my Greek (note that he had completed Middle School) and as such, I haven't preoccupied myself with that issue. But, because I had to reply—seeing that I had been asked about it, and since I had no knowledge

of the matter—I went to my cell and prayed, asking Christ to inform me what Ecumenism is. I received His reply, which was that Ecumenism has a spirit of wickedness and is dominated by unclean spirits.

So I asked him exactly how that was verified. He replied that: *After praying, my cell became filled with an unbearable stench, which caused my soul to feel asphyxiated; I couldn't breathe, spiritually-speaking.*

I asked him if that had been an extraordinary event for him, or if that was the way that Christ responds in analogous cases, and he assured me that... *in all the cases that are involved with sorcery, with unclean spirits, that is the state in which He introduces me. Sometimes there is a spoken response, but in the present case, that was His answer and I have the absolute certainty that Ecumenism does not have the Holy Spirit, but the unclean spirit.*

What I am saying at this moment one might say has the character of intentional impressions. However, I want to inform you that I was overjoyed, because what the Elder had told me in person, I had also seen recorded by his pious monks, who had published a book about his person, his spirituality and his words. Thus, it has been certified in there as well, but it has also been verified through discussions with other, trustworthy theologians, who likewise happened to have heard it personally.

I had not publicly mentioned this until now; however, things have taken such a turn, that I am obliged to bring it up. Of course, it had played a decisive role in my stance towards Ecumenism. As a professor, a scientist, I am naturally obliged in every case to examine the matter with scientific criteria and to substantiate my viewpoint scientifically—and that is what I do in my classes also, step by step; however, I regard this deposition to be significant, because it was delivered in a charismatic manner by a man who knew nothing about the issue. He had never read, never heard of it, and yet, he deposited his direct spiritual experience. I think that things speak for themselves here.



We must pay close attention to everything we do, and struggle to uproot the ferocious beast of egotism that eats away at us. Our ego! When it erupts within us, we become enraged, we criticize, we make demands, we curse, we ridicule and humiliate others. It is a beast! This is what impels us to criticize. This is what inflates us with the idea that we have accomplished great things, that we are good, that we possess virtues and thousands of other things. The origin of all good things is humility. Conversely, the origin of all evils is egotism.

Elder Ephraim of Arizona

Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή, Πορεία προς τὸ Πάσχα

Τοῦ Πατρὸς Ἀλεξάνδρου Σμέμαν, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή», ἐκδόσεις Ἀκρίτας, Ἀθήνα 1999.

Όταν κάποιος ξεκινάει γιὰ ἓνα ταξίδι θὰ πρέπει νὰ ξέρεي ποῦ πηγαίνει. Αὐτὸ συμβαίνει καὶ μὲ τὴ Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή. Πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα, ἡ Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή εἶναι ἓνα πνευματικὸ ταξίδι ποὺ προορισμὸς του εἶναι τὸ Πάσχα, ἢ «Ἐορτὴ Ἐορτῶν». Εἶναι ἡ προετοιμασία γιὰ τὴν «πλήρωση τοῦ Πάσχα, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ πραγματικὴ Ἀποκάλυψη». Γιὰ τὸ λόγο αὐτὸ θὰ πρέπει νὰ ἀρχίσουμε μὲ τὴν προσπάθεια νὰ καταλάβουμε αὐτὴ τὴ σχέση ποὺ ὑπάρχει ἀνάμεσα στὴ Σαρακοστή καὶ τὸ Πάσχα, γιὰτὶ αὐτὴ ἀποκαλύπτει κάτι πολὺ οὐσιαστικὸ καὶ πολὺ σημαντικὸ γιὰ τὴ Χριστιανικὴ πίστη καὶ ζωὴ μας.

Ἄραγε εἶναι ἀπαραίτητο νὰ ἐξηγήσουμε ὅτι τὸ Πάσχα εἶναι κάτι πολὺ περισσότερο ἀπὸ μίαν ἀπλὴ γιορτὴ, πολὺ πέρα ἀπὸ μίαν ἐτήσια ἀνάμνηση ἐνὸς γεγονότος ποὺ πέρασε; Ὁ καθένας ποῦ, ἔστω καὶ μίαν μόνο φορὰ, ἔζησε αὐτὴ τὴ νύχτα «τὴ σωτήριο, τὴ φωταυγὴ καὶ λαμπροφόρο», ποὺ γεύτηκε ἐκεῖνη τὴ μοναδικὴ χαρὰ, τὸ ξέρει αὐτό. Ἀλλὰ τί εἶναι αὐτὴ ἡ χαρὰ; Γιατὶ ψέλνουμε στὴν Ἀναστάσιμη Λειτουργία: «Νῦν πάντα πεπλήρωται φωτὸς, οὐρανός τε καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ καταχθόνια»; Μὲ ποιά ἔννοια ἐορτάζομεν—καθὼς ἰσχυριζόμαστε ὅτι τὸ κάνουμε— «θανάτου τὴν νέκρωσιν, Ἄδου τὴν καθαίρεσιν ἄλλης βιοτῆς τῆς... αἰωνίου ἀπαρχῆν...»;

Σὲ ὅλες αὐτὲς τὶς ἐρωτήσεις ἡ ἀπάντησις εἶναι: Ἡ νέα ζωὴ ἡ ὁποία πρὶν ἀπὸ δυὸ χιλιάδες περίπου χρόνια ἀνέτειλεν ἐκ τοῦ τάφου, προσφέρθηκε σὲ μᾶς, σὲ ὅλους ἐκείνους ποὺ πιστεύουν στὸ Χριστό. Μᾶς δόθηκε τὴν ἡμέρα ποὺ βαφτιστήκαμε, τὴν ἡμέρα δηλαδὴ ποὺ ὅπως λέει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «Συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὡσπερ ἠγέρθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πατρὸς, οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν». (Ρωμ. 6:4).

Ἔτσι τὸ Πάσχα πανηγυρίζουμε τὴν Ἀνάστασις τοῦ Χριστοῦ σὰν γεγονὸς ποὺ ἔγινε καὶ ἀκόμη γίνεται σὲ μᾶς. Γιατὶ ὁ καθένας ἀπὸ μᾶς ἔλαβε τὸ δῶρο αὐτῆς τῆς νέας ζωῆς καὶ τὴ δύναμις νὰ τὴν ἀποδεχτεῖ καὶ νὰ ζήσει διὰ μέσου της. Εἶναι ἓνα δῶρο ποὺ ριζικὰ ἀλλάζει τὴ διάθεσή μας ἀπέναντι σὲ κάθε κατάστασις αὐτοῦ τοῦ

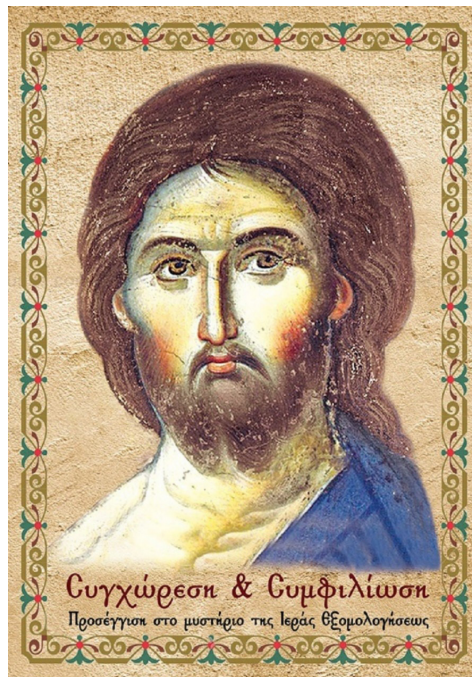
κόσμου, ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπέναντι στὸ θάνατο. Μᾶς δίνει τὴ δύναμις νὰ ἐπιβεβαιώνουμε θριαμβευτικὰ τὸ «νικῆθηκε ὁ θάνατος».

Φυσικὰ ὑπάρχει ἀκόμα ὁ θάνατος, εἶναι σίγουρος, τὸν ἀντιμετωπίζουμε, καὶ κάποια μέρα θὰ ἔρθει καὶ γιὰ μᾶς. Ἀλλὰ ὅλη ἡ πίστις μας εἶναι ὅτι μὲ τὸ δικὸ Του θάνατο ὁ Χριστὸς ἄλλαξε τὴ φύση ἀκριβῶς τοῦ θανάτου. Τὸν ἔκανε πέρασμα-διάβασις στὴ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, μεταμορφώνοντας τὴ δραματικότερη τραγωδία σὲ αἰώνιο θρίαμβο, σὲ νίκη. Μὲ τὸ «θανάτω θάνατον πατήσας», μᾶς ἔκανε μέτοχους τῆς Ἀνάστασής Του. Ἀκριβῶς γι' αὐτὸ στὸ τέλος τοῦ ὄρθρου τῆς Ἀνάστασις—στὸν Κατηχητικὸ Λόγο τοῦ Ἰωάννου Χρυσοστόμου—λέμε θριαμβευτικὰ: «**Ἀνέστη Χριστός, καὶ ζωὴ πολιτεύεται. Ἀνέστη Χριστός, καὶ νεκρὸς οὐδεὶς ἐν τῷ μνήματι.**».

Τέτοια εἶναι ἡ πίστις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ποὺ ἐπιβεβαιώνεται καὶ φανερώνεται μὲ τὴ ζωὴ τῶν ἀναριθμητῶν ἁγίων της. Ἀλλὰ μήπως δὲ ζοῦμε καθημερινὰ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι αὐτὴ ἡ πίστις σπάνια γίνεται καὶ δική μας ἐμπειρία; Μήπως δὲ χάνουμε πολὺ συχνὰ καὶ δὲν προδίνουμε αὐτὴ τὴ νέα ζωὴ ποὺ λάβαμε σὰν δῶρο, καὶ στὴν πραγματικότητα ζοῦμε σὰν νὰ μὴν ἀναστήθηκε ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ σὰν νὰ μὴν ἔχει νόημα γιὰ μᾶς αὐτὸ τὸ μοναδικὸ γεγονὸς; Καὶ ὅλα αὐτὰ ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἀδυναμίας μας, τῆς ἀνικανότητάς μας νὰ ζοῦμε σταθερὰ μὲ πίστις ἐλπίδα καὶ ἀγάπη, στὸ ἐπίπεδο ἐκεῖνο ποὺ μᾶς ἀνέβασε ὁ Χριστὸς ὅταν εἶπε: «Ζητεῖτε πρῶτον τὴν Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην Αὐτοῦ».

Ἄπλουστατα ἐμεῖς ξεχνᾶμε ὅλα αὐτὰ γιὰτὶ εἴμαστε τόσο ἀπασχολημένοι, τόσο βυθισμένοι στὶς καθημερινὲς ἐγνοιες μας καὶ ἀκριβῶς ἐπειδὴ ξεχνᾶμε, ἀποτυχαίνουμε. Μέσα σὲ αὐτὴ τὴ λησμοσύνη, τὴν ἀποτυχία καὶ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἡ ζωὴ μας γίνεται ξανὰ παλαιὰ, εὐτελής, σκοτεινὴ καὶ τελικὰ χωρὶς σημασία, γίνεται ἓνα χωρὶς νόημα ταξίδι γιὰ ἓνα χωρὶς νόημα τέρμα. Καταφέρνουμε νὰ ξεχνᾶμε ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ θάνατο καὶ τελικὰ, ἐντελῶς αἰφνιδιαστικά, μέσα στὶς «ἀπολαύσεις τῆς ζωῆς» μᾶς ἔρχεται τρομακτικὸς, ἀναπόφευκτος, παράλογος.

Μπορεῖ κατὰ καιροὺς νὰ παραδεχόμαστε τὶς ποικίλες ἁμαρτίες μας καὶ νὰ τὶς ἐξομολογούμαστε, ὅμως ἐξακολουθοῦμε νὰ μὴν ἀναφέρουμε τὴ ζωὴ μας σ' ἐκεῖνη τὴ νέα ζωὴ ποὺ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀποκάλυψε καὶ



μᾶς ἔδωσε. Πραγματικά **ζοῦμε σὰν νὰ μὴν ἦρθε ποτὲ Ἐκείνος**. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ μόνη πραγματικὴ ἁμαρτία, ἡ ἁμαρτία ὅλων τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, ἡ ἀπύθμενη θλίψη καὶ τραγωδία ὅλων τῶν κατ' ὄνομα Χριστιανῶν.

Ἄν τὸ ἀναγνωρίζουμε αὐτό, τότε μπορούμε νὰ καταλάβουμε τί εἶναι τὸ Πάσχα καὶ γιατί χρειάζεται καὶ προϋποθέτει τὴ Μεγάλῃ Σαρακοστή. Γιατὶ τότε μπορούμε νὰ καταλάβουμε ὅτι ἡ Λειτουργικὴ παράδοση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ὅλος ὁ κύκλος τῶν ἀκολουθιῶν τῆς ὑπάρχουν, πρῶτα ἀπ' ὅλα, γιὰ νὰ μᾶς βοηθήσουν νὰ ξαναβροῦμε τὸ ὄραμα καὶ τὴν γεύση αὐτῆς τῆς νέας ζωῆς, ποὺ τόσο εὐκόλα χάνουμε καὶ προδίνουμε, καὶ ὕστερα νὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ μετανοήσουμε καὶ νὰ ξαναγυρίσουμε στὴν Ἐκκλησία.

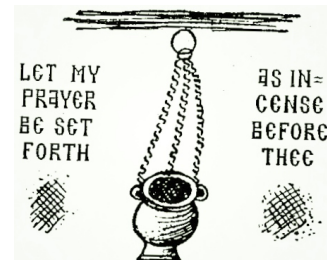
Πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἀγαπᾶμε καὶ νὰ ἐπιθυμοῦμε κάτι ποὺ δὲν τὸ ξέρουμε; Πῶς μπορούμε ἂν βάλουμε πάνω ἀπὸ καθετὶ ἄλλο στὴ ζωὴ μας κάτι ποὺ ποτὲ δὲν ἔχουμε δεῖ καὶ δὲν ἔχουμε χαρεῖ; Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια, πῶς μπορούμε, πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἀναζητήσουμε μιὰ Βασιλεία γιὰ τὴν ὁποία δὲν ἔχουμε ιδέα; Ἡ λατρεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἦταν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴ καὶ εἶναι ἀκόμα καὶ τώρα ἡ εἴσοδος καὶ ἡ ἐπικοινωνία μας μὲ τὴ νέα ζωὴ τῆς Βασιλείας. Μέσα ἀπὸ τὴ Λειτουργικὴ τῆς ζωῆς ἡ Ἐκκλησία μᾶς ἀποκαλύπτει ἐκεῖνα «*ποὺ ὀφθαλμοὺς οὐκ οἶδε καὶ οὐκ ἤκουσε καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἀνέβη, ἃ ἠτοίμασεν ὁ Θεὸς τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν*». (Κορ. 2:9). Καὶ στὸ κέντρο αὐτῆς τῆς Λειτουργικῆς ζωῆς, σὰν καρδιά τῆς καὶ μεσουράνημά τῆς—σὰν ἥλιος ποὺ οἱ ἀκτίνες του διαπερνοῦν καθετὶ—εἶναι τὸ Πάσχα. Τὸ Πάσχα εἶναι ἡ πόρτα, ἀνοιχτὴ κάθε χρόνο, ποὺ ὀδηγεῖ στὴν ὑπέρολαμπρη Βασιλεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶναι ἡ πρόγευση τῆς αἰώνιας χαρᾶς ποὺ μᾶς περιμένει, εἶναι ἡ δόξα τῆς νίκης ἢ ὁποία ἀπὸ τώρα, ἂν καὶ ἀόρατη, πλημμυρίζει ὅλη τὴν κτίση: **Νικήθηκε ὁ θάνατος**.

Ὀλόκληρη ἡ λατρεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι ὀργανωμένη γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ Πάσχα, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Λειτουργικὸς χρόνος, δηλαδὴ ἡ διαδοχὴ τῶν ἐποχῶν καὶ τῶν ἐορτῶν, γίνεται ἓνα ταξίδι, ἓνα προσκύνημα στὸ Πάσχα, ποὺ εἶναι τὸ Τέλος καὶ ποὺ ταυτόχρονα εἶναι ἡ Ἀρχή. Εἶναι τὸ τέλος ὅλων αὐτῶν ποὺ ἀποτελοῦν τὰ παλαιὰ, καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς νέας ζωῆς, μιὰ συνεχῆς διάβαση ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον τοῦτο στὴν Βασιλεία ποὺ ἔχει ἀποκαλυφτεῖ ἐν Χριστῷ.

Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ἡ παλαιὰ ζωὴ, ἡ ζωὴ τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τῆς μικρότητας, δὲν εἶναι εὐκόλο νὰ ξεπεραστεῖ καὶ ν' ἀλλάξει. Τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο περιμένει καὶ ζητᾶ ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ κάνει μιὰ προσπάθεια ἢ ὁποία, στὴν κατάστασι ποὺ βρίσκεται τώρα ὁ ἄνθρωπος, εἶναι οὐσιαστικὰ ἀπραγματοποίητη. Ἄντιμετωπίζουμε μιὰ πρόκλησι. Τὸ ὄραμα, ὁ στόχος, ὁ τρόπος τῆς νέας ζωῆς εἶναι γιὰ μᾶς μιὰ πρόκλησι ποὺ βρίσκεται τόσο πολὺ πάνω ἀπὸ τὶς δυνατότητές μας!

Γι' αὐτὸ, ἀκόμα καὶ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι, ὅταν ἄκουσαν τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Κυρίου τὸν ρώτησαν ἀπελπισμένα: *Τίς ἄρα δύναται σωθῆναι;* (Ματθ. 19:26). Ἀληθῶς, δὲν εἶναι καθόλου εὐκόλο νὰ ἀπαρνηθεῖς ἓνα ἀσήμαντο ἰδανικὸ ζῶης καμωμένο μὲ τὶς καθημερινὲς φροντίδες, μὲ τὴν ἀναζήτησι τῶν ὑλικῶν ἀγαθῶν, μὲ τὴν ἀσφάλεια καὶ τὴν ἀπόλαυσι καὶ νὰ δεχτεῖς ἓνα ἄλλο ἰδανικὸ ζῶης τὸ ὁποῖο βέβαια δὲν στερεῖται καθόλου τελειότητας στὸ σκοπὸ του: *Γίνεσθε τέλειοι ὡς ὁ Πατὴρ ἡμῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς τέλειος ἐστίν.*

Αὐτὸ ὁ κόσμος μὲ ὅλα του τὰ μέσα, μᾶς λέει: νὰ εἶσαι χαρούμενος, μὴν ἀνησυχεῖς, ἀκολούθα τὸν «εὐρὸν» δρόμο. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο λέει: Διάλεξε τὸ στενὸ δρόμο, ἀγωνίσου καὶ ὑπόφερε, γιὰτὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ δρόμος γιὰ τὴ μόνη ἀληθινὴ εὐτυχία. Καὶ ἂν ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν βοηθᾶει πῶς θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ κάνουμε αὐτὴ τὴ φοβερὴ ἐκλογὴ; Πῶς μπορούμε νὰ μετανοήσουμε καὶ νὰ ξαναγυρίσουμε στὴν ὑπέροχη ὑπόσχεσι ποὺ μᾶς δίνεται κάθε χρόνο τὸ Πάσχα; Ἀκριβῶς αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ στιγμὴ ποὺ ἐμφανίζεται ἡ Μεγάλῃ Σαρακοστή. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ «*χείρα βοηθείας*» ποὺ ἀπλώνει σὲ μᾶς ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Εἶναι τὸ σχολεῖο τῆς μετάνοιας ποὺ θὰ μᾶς δώσει δύναμι νὰ δεχτοῦμε τὸ Πάσχα ὄχι σὰν μιὰ ἀπλὴ εὐκαιρία νὰ φᾶμε, νὰ πιοῦμε, ν' ἀναπαυτοῦμε, ἀλλά, βασιικά, σὰν τὸ τέλος τῶν «*παλαιῶν*» ποὺ εἶναι μέσα μας καὶ σὰν εἴσοδό μας στὸ νέο.



Ἡ φιλαργυρία εἶναι αἰτία ὅλων τῶν κακῶν τῆς ἁισχροκέρδειας, τῆς τσιγγουνιάς, τῆς ἀστοργίας, τῆς ἀπιστίας, τῆς μισανθρωπίας, τῆς ἀρπαγῆς, τῆς ἀδικίας, τῆς πλεονεξίας, τοῦ τόκου, τοῦ δόλου, τοῦ ψεύδους, τῆς ἐπιτορκίας καὶ ὅλων τῶν ὁμοίων μὲ αὐτά. Ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς φιλαργυρίας γίνονται ἱεροσυλίες, λωποδυσίες καὶ κάθε εἶδος κλοπῆς· ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς φιλαργυρίας δὲν ὑπάρχουν μόνο στοὺς δρόμους καὶ στὴν ξηρὰ καὶ στὰ πελάγη ἄρπαγες καὶ ληστὲς καὶ πειρατὲς, ἀλλὰ καὶ μέσα στὴν πόλιν ἄδικα σταθμὰ καὶ ζύγια καὶ διπλὰ μέτρα καὶ περίεργη κοπὴ καὶ παραχάραξι νομισμάτων, ὑπέρβασι ὁρίων, κακοὶ ἀνταγωνισμοὶ γειτόνων. Αὐτὴ καὶ ἔθνη ἐναντίον ἐθνῶν ὀδήγησε, καὶ φιλίες δυνατὲς διέλυσε, καὶ μερικὲς φορὲς διέσπασε καὶ συγγένειες, καὶ τὴν πατρίδα κανεὶς πρόδωσε καὶ πρὶν ἀπὸ ὅλα ὁ καθένας προδίδει τὴν ψυχὴ του.

Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς

Ἡ ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἀπὸ τοὺς Φραγκολατίνους

Γράφει ὁ πατὴρ Γεώργιος Μεταλληνός, ὁμότιμος καθηγητὴς τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Ἀθηνῶν.

Εκείνον τὸν Ἀπρίλιο, τοῦ 1204... Ἄν ἡ 29^η Μαΐου εἶναι ἡμέρα πένθους γιὰ τὸν Ἑλληνισμό, διότι φέρνει στὴ μνήμη μας τὴν ἄλωση τῆς Πόλης ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὀθωμανοὺς τὸ 1453, ἄλλο τόσο ἀποφρὰς εἶναι γιὰ τὸ Γένος μας καὶ ἡ 13^η Ἀπριλίου, διότι κατ' αὐτὴν ἔπεσε ἡ Πόλις τὸ 1204 στοὺς Φράγκους. Τὸ δεῦτερο γεγονός δὲν ὑστερεῖ καθόλου σὲ σημασία καὶ συνέπειες ἔναντι τοῦ πρώτου. Αὐτὴ εἶναι σήμερα ἡ κοινὴ διαπίστωση τῆς ιστορικῆς ἔρευνας. Ἀπὸ τὸ 1204 ἡ Πόλις, καὶ σύνολη ἡ Αὐτοκρατορία τῆς Νέας Ῥώμης, δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ ξαναβρεῖ τὴν πρώτη της δύναμη. Τὸ Φραγκικὸ χτύπημα ἐναντίον της ἦταν τόσο δυνατό, ποὺ ἔκτοτε ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολις ἦταν «μία πόλις καταδικασμένη νὰ χαθεῖ» (Ἑλ. Ἀρβελέρ). Ἀξίζει, συνεπῶς, μία θεώρηση τοῦ γεγονότος αὐτοῦ ἔστω καὶ στὰ περιορισμένα ὄρια ἐνὸς ἄρθρου.

[1] Στὶς 12/13 Ἀπριλίου 1204, καὶ ἔπειτα ἀπὸ μία πεισματικὴ καὶ μακρόχρονη πολιορκία, κατελάμβαναν οἱ Φραγκολατῖνοι Σταυροφόροι τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολις. Ἡ Χριστιανικὴ Αὐτοκρατορία τῆς Ῥωμανίας / Βυζαντίου ἔσβηνε κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ θανάσιμο πλήγμα τῆς Φραγκικῆς Δύσεως. Τὸ γεγονός αὐτὸ ἦταν σημαντικώτατο σὲ δύο κατευθύνσεις: α) ἐσωτερικά, διότι σφράγισε καθοριστικὰ τὴν περαιτέρω πορεία τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας, καὶ β) ἐξωτερικά, διότι καθόρισε ἐπίσης τελεσίδικα τὶς σχέσεις μετὰ τὴν Δύση, ἀλλὰ καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἀνερχόμενη δύναμη τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν. Ἡ τραγικὴ ιστορικὴ ἐπιλογή τοῦ Ῥωμαίου, ποὺ ἐκφράζεται μετὰ τὸν γνωστὸ ἐκεῖνο λόγο «κρεῖττον (...) φακιδόλιον (...) Τοῦρκων ἢ (παρὰ) καλύπτρα Λατινική», ὑποστασιώνεται στὰ 1204, ὅταν πλέον ἀποκαλύπτονται ἀδιάστατα οἱ διαθέσεις τῆς Φραγκιάς ἔναντι τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς Ἀνατολῆς.

Ἀπὸ τὸ 1095 ἀρχίζον οἱ Σταυροφορίες, ἐκστρατείες δηλαδὴ τοῦ Χριστιανικοῦ κόσμου τῆς Εὐρώπης, μετὰ σκοπὸ, κατὰ τὶς ἐπιφανειακὰ διακηρύξεις, τὴν ἀπελευθέρωση καὶ ὑπεράσπιση τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων. Στὶς ἐπιχειρήσεις αὐτές, ποὺ κράτησαν ὡς τὸν 15^ο αἰῶνα, πρωτοστατοῦσαν οἱ ἐκάστοτε Πάπες, διότι ἦσαν «ἔροισι πόλεμοι» κατὰ τῶν ἀπίστων. Βέβαια ἡ ἔρευνα ἔχει ἐπισημάνει στὶς ἐκστρατείες αὐτές καὶ ταπεινὰ ἐλατήρια, λ.χ. τυχοδιωκτισμὸς, δίψα πλουτισμοῦ, κ.ἄ.

Εἶναι ὅμως σήμερα πέρα ἀπὸ κάθε ἀμφιβολία ὅτι οἱ Σταυροφορίες κύριο σκοπὸ εἶχαν τὴν Φραγκικὴ κυριαρχία στὴν Ὀρθόδοξη Ἀνατολή καί, τελικά, τὴν διάλυση τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Αὐτοκρατορίας τῆς Νέας Ῥώμης, ποὺ ἦταν τὸ ἐμπόδιο στὸν ἐπεκτατισμὸ καὶ

τὰ μονοκρατορικὰ σχέδια τῆς μετακαρλομάγειας Φραγκοσύνης. Τὸ 1204, ἡ ἄλωση τῆς Πόλης ἀπὸ τοὺς Φράγκους, ἡ διάλυση τῆς «Βυζαντινῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας» καὶ ἡ ἐπακολουθήσασα Φραγκοκρατία ἐπιβεβαιώνουν τὴν ἐκτίμησιν αὐτή.

[2] Τὰ γεγονότα τοῦ 1204 συνδέονται μετὰ τὴν Δ' Σταυροφορία. Ἡ σχετικὴ βούλησις γι' αὐτὴν ἐκφράσθηκε τὸ 1199 μετὰ τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ πάπα Ἰννοκεντίου Γ' (1198-1216), «πνευματικοῦ πατέρα» τῶν δύο βασικῶν ἐπεκτατικῶν μέσων τῆς Φραγκοπαπικῆς ἐξουσίας, τῆς «Ἱερᾶς Ἐξετάσεως» (Inquisitio) καὶ τῆς Οὐνίας (ὡς ιδέας). Συνεργάτης αὐτόκλητος παρουσιάσθηκε ὁ δόγης (δούκας) τῆς Βενετίας Δάνδολος μετὰ τὸ στόλο του. Σπουδαῖο ιστορικὸ πρόβλημα εἶναι ἡ ἐκτροπὴ τῆς Δ' Σταυροφορίας ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἁγίους Τόπους πρὸς τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολις. Ἦταν σκοπὸς ἀνομολόγητος ἢ τραγικὴ σύμπτωση; Ἡ πλειονότητα τῶν ιστορικῶν, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν ἀδέσμευτων, δέχεται τὸ πρῶτο.

Ἐπρόκειτο γιὰ καλὰ ὀργανωμένο σχέδιο, ποὺ ἀποσκοποῦσε στὸ νὰ δοθεῖ ἰσχυρὸ χτύπημα στὴν Ὀρθόδοξη Αὐτοκρατορία, ποὺ περνοῦσε περίοδο κάμψους λόγῳ τῆς ἐντάσεως τοῦ τουρκικοῦ κινδύνου. Κατὰ τὰ δυτικὰ χρονικά, μάλιστα, κάποιοι Λατῖνοι ἄρχοντες ἀρνήθηκαν νὰ συμμετάσχουν, ὅταν ἔμαθαν τὴν ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ σκοποῦ τῆς Σταυροφορίας. Οἱ περισσότεροι ὅμως συμβιβάσθηκαν ἀπὸ οἰκονομικὴ ἀνάγκη.

Ἐμειναν κυρίως οἱ «μνημένοι» στὴ συνωμοσία κατὰ τῆς Νέας Ῥώμης κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν «πνευματικὴ» ἡγεσία τοῦ Πάπα καὶ τὴν στρατιωτικὴ τοῦ Δόγη, ποὺ μετέβαλε τὴν Βενετία σὲ θαλασσοκράτειρα δύναμη μετὰ τὴν ἐκμηδένισιν τοῦ «Βυζαντίου». Ὁ βενετικὸς στόλος μετέφερε στὴν Προποντίδα ἄγριες μάζες Φλαμανδῶν, Φράγκων, Γερμανῶν—τὰ χειρότερα στρώματα τῆς δυτικῆς κοινωνίας, κακοποιούς, ἐγκληματίες, καιροσκόπους. Ἡ ἀμοιβὴ τοῦ Δόγη: Ἡμισὴ λεία ἀπὸ τῆς λεηλασίας τῆς πλουσιότερης πρωτεύουσας τοῦ τότε κόσμου.

[3] Βέβαια, τὰ Φραγκοπαπικὰ σχέδια διευκολύνθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ ἀρρυθμία τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας. Ἀπὸ τὸν 11^ο αἰῶνα ἄρχισε προοδευτικὰ ἡ παρακμὴ της. Τὸ 1071 στὸ Ματζικέρτ ὁ «Βυζαντινὸς» στρατὸς δέχθηκε μεγάλη ἥττα ἀπὸ τοὺς Σελτζούκους Τοῦρκους, μετὰ συνέπεια τὴν ἀπώλεια μεγάλου τμήματος τῆς Μ. Ἀσίας.

Παράλληλα (1071) χάθηκε τὸ τελευταῖο ἔρεισμα τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως στὴν Ἰταλία, ἡ Βάρις (Bari), πέφτοντας στὰ χέρια τῶν Νορμανδοφράγκων. Οἱ ἀνορθωτικὲς προσπάθειες τῶν Κομνηνῶν δὲν εἶχαν σημαντικὰ ἀποτελέσματα καὶ τὸ κράτος ὑποχωρεῖ σταδιακὰ στὴν οἰκονομικὴ ἰσχύ τῶν ἰταλικῶν πόλεων. Ἡ Αὐτοκρατορία παραχωρεῖ σημαντικὰ προνόμια

στή Βενετία, Πίζα και Γένοβα με ἀντάλλαγμα στρατιωτική βοήθεια. Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ὅμως ἦταν νὰ δημιουργηθοῦν ἀκμαῖες δυτικὲς παροικίες στὴν Ἀνατολή, μεταβάλλοντας τὸ ἔδαφος τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας σὲ δικό τους ἐμπορικὸ χῶρο. Οἱ Ἴταλοφράγκοι ἐδραιώθηκαν στὴν Ἀνατολή καὶ ἐνίσχυσαν τὴν βουλμία τῆς εὐρύτερης Φραγκικῆς οἰκογένειας.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ κοινωνικὸ κλίμα τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἦταν τὴν ἐποχὴ αὐτὴ ἀρκετὰ ἀντίξοο. Ἡ Πόλη ἔχει πιά ἀπομονωθεῖ καὶ ἀναπτύσσονται φυγόκεντρος τάσεις λόγω τῆς δυσαρέσκειας τῶν ἐπαρχιῶν. Διοίκηση καὶ πολίτες συναγωνίζονται μεταξύ τους σὲ διαφθορά. Οἱ φορολογίες εἶναι δυσβάστακτες καὶ βαρύνουν τοὺς πολίτες τῶν ἐπαρχιῶν. Ἡ κεντρικὴ ἐξουσία ἀμφισβητεῖται καὶ σημειώνονται ἐπαναστατικὰ κινήματα.

Ἡ φήμη γιὰ τὴν μυθώδη πολυτέλεια τῆς Πόλης καὶ τῶν κατοίκων της εἶχε διαδοθεῖ καὶ στὴ Δύση μὲ εὐλογες συνέπειες. Τὰ ἀμύθητα πλούτη τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἔτρεφαν τὴν φαντασία τῶν πολλῶν καὶ διευκόλυναν τὰ ἐπεκτατικὰ σχέδια τῶν λίγων, τῆς Φραγκικῆς ἡγεσίας. Βέβαια, οἱ ἀθῶοι καὶ ἀνύποπτοι ἐπαρχιωτὲς τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας εἶδαν στὴν ἀρχὴ ὡς θεία τιμωρία τὴν καταστροφὴ τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἀπὸ τοὺς Φράγκους, ὁ δὲ ὄχλος της ἔλαβε μέρος στὴ λεηλασία. Ἀργότερα ὅμως θὰ συνειδητοποιηθοῦν οἱ σκοποὶ τῶν Φράγκων καὶ θὰ ἐκτιμηθοῦν σωστὰ τὰ γεγονότα.

[4] Ἡ ὁργάνωση τῆς Σταυροφορίας ἄρχισε τὸ 1201. Σημαντικοὶ Φράγκοι φεουδάρχες δήλωσαν συμμετοχὴ: Ὁ κόμης τῆς Φλάνδρας Βαλδουίνος, ὁ κόμης τῆς Καμπανίας Τιμπῶ, ὁ ἱστορικὸς Γοδεφρείδος Βιλλεαρδουίνος καὶ ὁ μαρκήσιος Βονιφάτιος Μομφερατικός. Ἡ συγκέντρωση τοῦ στρατοῦ ἔγινε τὸν Ἰούνιο τοῦ 1202 στὴ Βενετία. Τὸ Νοέμβριο τοῦ 1202 καταλήφθηκε γιὰ λογαριασμὸ τῶν Βενετῶν ἡ δαλματικὴ πόλη Ζάρα, ποὺ εἶχε ἀποστατήσει καὶ ὑπαχθεῖ στὸ βασιλεῖο τῆς Οὐγγαρίας.

Οἱ δυναστικὲς ἔριδες στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη («Ἄγγελοι») διευκόλυναν—ὡς συνήθως—τὰ δυτικὰ σχέδια. Οἱ Σταυροφόροι στὶς 24.5.1203 ξεκίνησαν ἀπὸ τὴν Ζάρα καὶ μέσῳ Κερκύρας κατευθύνθηκαν γιὰ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ἡ θέα τῆς πόλεως τοὺς ἄφησε κατάπληκτους. «Δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ φανταστοῦν πῶς ὑπῆρχε στὸν κόσμον τόσο ἰσχυρὴ πόλη», σημειώνει ὁ Γ. Βιλλεαρδουίνος στὴν ἱστορία του. Στὶς 6 Ἰουλίου

ἄρχισε ἡ πρώτη πολιορκία, μὲ λεηλασίες στὰ προάστια καὶ τὶς ἀκτὲς τῆς Προποντίδας.

Προσπάθεια τῶν πολιορκουμένων, τὴν νύκτα τῆς Πρωτοχρονιάς τοῦ 1204, νὰ πυρπολήσουν τὸν ἐχθρικὸ στόλο, ἀπέτυχε. Ἐπεκράτησε τότε ἀναρχία. Στὶς 25 Ἰανουαρίου ὁ λαὸς ἀνεκήρυξε Αὐτοκράτορα τὸν Νικόλαο Καναβό, ἐνῶ ὁ Αὐτοκράτορας Ἀλέξιος Δ΄ συνελήφθη καὶ ἐκτελέστηκε (8.2.1204). Νέος Αὐτοκράτορας ἐκλέχθηκε ὁ Ἀλέξιος Ε΄ ὁ Μούρτζουφλος. Μάταια προσπάθησε νὰ ὀργανώσει τὴν ἄμυνα καὶ νὰ περιορίσει τὶς λεηλασίες. Οἱ Σταυροφόροι ἤδη τὸ Μάρτιο τοῦ 1204 εἶχαν ὑπογράψει συνθήκη γιὰ τὴν τύχη τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας μετὰ τὴν πτώση τῆς πρωτεύουσας.

Βασικὲς ἀποφάσεις: Θὰ ἐκλεγόταν Λατίνος Αὐτοκράτορας καὶ Λατίνος Πατριάρχης. Ἔτσι φάνηκαν καὶ οἱ ἀληθινοὶ σκοποὶ τῆς ἐκστρατείας. Ἐπίσης καθορίστηκε ὁ τρόπος διανομῆς τῆς λείας καὶ τῶν ἐδαφῶν τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας. Ἡ μεγάλη ἐπίθεση κατὰ τοῦ θαλασσίου τείχους ἔγινε στὶς 9 Ἀπριλίου. Ἡ τελικὴ ὅμως ἐπίθεση ἔλαβε χώρα στὶς 12 καὶ ξημερώνοντας 13 ἔπεσε ἡ Πόλη. Ἡ ἡγεσία εἶχε ἤδη διαλυθεῖ. Αὐτοκράτωρ καὶ εὐγενεῖς ἐγκατέλειψαν τὴν πόλη καὶ μόνο οἱ κληρικοὶ ἔμειναν, γιὰ νὰ προὔπαντήσουν τοὺς Σταυροφόρους καὶ νὰ τοὺς δηλώσουν τὴν ὑποταγὴ τῆς Βασιλεύουσας. Ὁ λαὸς πίστευε στὰ Χριστιανικὰ αἰσθήματα τῶν νικητῶν, ἀλλὰ διαψεύσθηκε οἰκτρά.

[5] Ἡ συμπεριφορὰ τῶν Σταυροφόρων ἀπεκάλυψε στοὺς ἀνατολικοὺς τὴν Φραγκικὴ Δύση, ἑκατὸν πενήντα χρόνια μετὰ τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ σχίσμα. Ἔγιναν ἀπὸ τοὺς Φράγκους ἀκατονόμαστες πράξεις ἀγριότητος καὶ θηριωδίας. Φόνευαν ἀδιάκριτα γέροντες, γυναῖκες καὶ παιδιά. Λεηλατοῦν καὶ διαρπάζουν τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς «βασίλισσας τῶν πόλεων τοῦ κόσμου». Στὴ διανομὴ τῶν λαφύρων μετέσχε, κατὰ συμφωνία καὶ ὁ Πάπας.

Τὸ χειρότερο: πυρπόλησαν τὸ μεγαλύτερο μέρος τῆς Πόλης καὶ ἐξανδραπόδισαν ἓνα τμήμα τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ της. Σ' αὐτὰ πρέπει νὰ προστεθοῦν οἱ μαδικοὶ βιασμοὶ τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τὰ πάμπολλα ἄλλα κακουργήματα. Μόνο τὴν πρώτη μέρα φονεύθηκαν 7.000 κάτοικοι τῆς Πόλης. Ἰδιαιτέρως δὲ στόχος τῆς θηριωδίας ἦταν ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος κληρικός. Ἐπίσκοποι καὶ ἄλλοι κληρικοὶ ὑπέστησαν φοβερὰ βασανιστήρια καὶ κατασφάζονταν μὲ πρωτοφανῆ μανία. Ὁ Πατριάρχης



μόλις μπόρεσε Ξυπόλητος και γυμνός να περάσει στην απέναντι ακτή.

Η Κωνσταντινούπολη απογυμνώθηκε από τους θησαυρούς της. Έσυλήθηκαν οι ναοί και αυτή η Αγία Σοφία, μάλιστα μέσα σε σκηνές φρίκης. Στη λεηλασία πρωτοστατούσε ο Λατινικός κληρός. Κανείς δεν φανταζόταν ότι η Πόλη θα έκρυβε τόσο ανεκτίμητους θησαυρούς. Έπι πολλά χρόνια τα δυτικά πλοία μετέφεραν θησαυρούς στη Δ. Ευρώπη, όπου και σήμερα κοσμούν εκκλησίες, μουσεία και ιδιωτικές συλλογές, π.χ. Άγιος Μάρκος, Βενετία. Ένα μέρος των θησαυρών (κυρίως χειρόγραφα) καταστράφηκε. Μέγα μέρος από τους «Βυζαντινούς» θησαυρούς του Αγίου Μάρκου εκποιήθηκε το 1795 από την Βενετική Δημοκρατία για πολεμικές ανάγκες.

[6] Βαθύτερα ίχνη από την ίδια την καταστροφή «της πόλης των Πόλεων» χαράχθηκαν μέσα στις ψυχές των Όρθοδόξων. Για τους Ρωμηούς ήταν πια απόλυτα βεβαιωμένο ότι η Δ΄ Σταυροφορία είχε απ' αρχής στόχο την άλωση της Πόλης και την διάλυση της Ρωμαϊκής Αυτοκρατορίας. Και είναι γεγονός ότι οι δυτικές πηγές βλέπουν την καταστροφή της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ως τιμωρία των «αίρετικών» (Γραικών), που ήταν «άσεβεις και χειρότεροι από τους Έβραίους».

Την άλωση της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως την βλέπουν ως «νίκη της Χριστιανοσύνης». Το χάσμα, συνεπώς, μεταξύ Άνατολης και Δύσεως, που είχε ανοίξει με το σχίσμα (1054), γίνεται τώρα άγεφύρωτο. Οι «Βυζαντινοί» είχαν την ευκαιρία, άλλωστε, να ζήσουν το μίσος των Φράγκων έναντίον τους. Κατά τον ιστορικό Νικήτα Χωνιάτη, αυτόπτη μάρτυρα της άλωσης, η άρπακτικότητα και βαρβαρότητα των Σταυροφόρων δεν συγκρίνεται με την ηπιότητα των μουσουλμάνων, οι οποίοι μόλις κατέλαβαν τα Ίεροσόλυμα άρκέστηκαν απλώς στην έπιβολή μικρού φόρου, αποφεύγοντας κάθε βιαιότητα.

Οι «Βυζαντινοί» συνειδητοποίησαν ότι μετά το 1204 οι Λατίνοι - Φράγκοι ήταν ο ουσιαστικός έχθρός τους, γιατί μόνο απ' αυτούς κινδύνευε η Όρθόδοξη πίστη και η παράδοση του Γένους. Έτσι, διαμορφώθηκε η στάση των άνθωνωτικών, που προσέκριναν την πρόσκαιρη συνεργασία με τους Όθωμανούς από την «φιλία» των Φράγκων, επιλέγοντας μεταξύ δύο κακών. Μία στάση που θα έκφρασθεϊ θεολογικά και από τον άγιο Κοσμά τον Αιτωλό κατά τον 18ο αιώνα.

Η άλωση του 1204 όμως είχε και ευεργετικές συνέπειες σε μία άλλη διάσταση. Ο μέσος Ρωμηός θα συνειδητοποιήσει την σημασία της διαλύσεως της Αυτοκρατορίας. Όσο μάλιστα θα παρατείνεται η Φραγκοκρατία, η αντίπαθεια έναντίον των Λατίνων θα μεταστοιχειωθεί σε όμοψυχία. Λόγω δέ της διασπάσεως της ενότητας των έπιμέρους έθνοτήτων

της Αυτοκρατορίας μετά το 1204, θα αρχίσει ο τονισμός της έθνικότητας, με εμφάνιση της έθνικης συνειδήσεως. Ό τραυματισμός δέ του έθνικου γοήτρου θα γεννήσει την Μεγάλη Ίδέα, ως πόθο επανακτήσεως της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως και ανασυστάσεως της Αυτοκρατορίας.

Η πορεία των πραγμάτων οδήγησε την χώρα μας να καταλήξει, από τη σχέση «προστασίας» σε συμμαχίες με τις μεγάλες δυτικές δυνάμεις και σήμερα σε «νομαρχία» της Ένωμένης Ευρώπης. Το Ευρωπαϊκό «Διευθυντήριο» έχει την δυνατότητα να συνεχίζει την άλωση του Γένους/Έθνους μας με άλλους τρόπους. Πόσο το συνειδητοποιούν αυτό οι Πολιτικοί μας στις συναλλαγές τους με την Δυτική Ήγεσία; Τουλάχιστον, για να μετριάζεται η άκρατη αισιοδοξία μας και να μη πορευόμαστε με αυταπάτες...



Προορισμός μας ύψιστος είναι η θέωσίς μας, το να γίνουμε όμοιοι με τον Θεό. Αυτή την άπεριγραπτο τιμή μās κάνει η αγάπη του. Αφοϋ ο Θεός μās έδωσε, τρόπον τινά, τον Έαυτό του, δεν είναι έπόμενο να δίνουμε και έμεις τον έαυτό μας στους αδελφούς μας; Ό,τι έχουμε, δεν πρέπει να το προσφέρουμε στον πλησίον μας; Από αυτή την αναλογία έξαρτάται η σωτηρία μας, η θέωσή μας. Αν ο Θεός μās άξιώνη να γίνουμε κοινωνοί της θείας του φύσεως, με την μετάληψη του Σώματος και του Αϊματος του Υίου Του, έτσι και έμεις πρέπει να αφήνουμε στους αδελφούς μας το δικαίωμα να κοινωνούν σε ό,τι έχουμε. Να επισκεπτώμαστε τον άρρωστο. Να παρηγορούμε τον θλιμμένο. Να καταρτίζουμε τον άγνοούντα. Να ξεχνάμε τις άδικίες που μās έκαμαν οι άλλοι, γιατί όλοι άνήκουμε στον Χριστό, είμαστε του Χριστού. Και ο Χριστός θα άνταμείψη για κάθε τέτοια θυσία τον καθένα.

Άγιος Ίωάννης της Κρονστάνδης
Έκείνος, που περιεργάζεται και άσχολείται με τις άμαρτίες των άλλων και κατακρίνει τον αδελφόν του, διότι τον ύποψιάζεται, δεν έχει αρχίσει ακόμη το έργον της μετανοίας, αλλά ούτε έρευνά για να έλέγξη τις δικές του άμαρτίες, που είναι βαρύτερες από την πιο μεγάλη ποσότητα μολύβδου, ούτε άντελήφθη από ποια αίτια γίνεται ο άνθρωπος βαρυνκάρδιος, αγαπώντας την ματαιότητα και ζητώντας το ψέμα...

Άγιος Μάξιμος ο Όμολογητής

«Καρδιά Πάσχα, Νοὺς Λάμπα, Μάπα Δάκρυα»

Τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου Ἱεροθέου, ὁμιλία κατὰ τὸν πρῶτο Κατανυκτικὸ Ἑσπερινό.



Ὅτι ἤθελα νὰ σᾶς πῶ μία διήγηση ἀπὸ ἓναν σύγχρονο ἀγιορείτη μοναχό, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔζησε σὲ ἓνα Φιλοθεΐτικο Κελλί τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους καὶ ὁ ὁποῖος γεννήθηκε

στὴν Ρωσία, στὴν Πολτάβα, τὸ 1882, καὶ κοιμήθηκε τὸ 1965 στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος, στὴν ιδιόρρυθμη τότε Ἱερά Μονὴ Φιλοθέου.

Λεγόταν Αὐγουστίνος μοναχός, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο γράφει ὁ ἅγιος Παΐσιος στὸ βιβλίο ποὺ συνέγραψε γιὰ τοὺς Γέροντες ποὺ συνάντησε στὰ Μοναστήρια καὶ στίς Σκήτες τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους. Ὁ Γέροντας αὐτός, ὁ π. Αὐγουστίνος, ζοῦσε μέσα στὸ πνεῦμα αὐτὸ ποὺ σᾶς εἶπα προηγουμένως, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ ἀναφέρω...

Τὸ διακόνημά του ἦταν νὰ συγκεντρῶν ὅλα τὰ γέρικα ζῶα τῆς περιοχῆς, τὰ ὁποῖα οἱ ἄλλοι μοναχοὶ εἶχαν—δὲν ὑπῆρχαν αὐτοκίνητα τότε στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος, τουλάχιστον τότε, καὶ ὅλες οἱ ἐργασίες γίνονταν μὲ τὰ μουλάρια—ὅταν αὐτὰ γερνοῦσαν καὶ δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ προσφέρουν καμμία ἐργασία, τὰ ἄφηναν στό... δάσος νὰ τελειώσουν μόνα τους καὶ πολλές φορές κατασπαράσσονταν ἀπὸ τὰ θηρία καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς λύκους, κλπ.

Ἐκεῖνος, λοιπόν, λυπόταν αὐτὰ τὰ ζῶα, τὰ συγκέντρωνε καὶ τὰ γηροκομοῦσε... Ἦταν γηροκόμος καὶ νοσοκόμος τους. Τὸ ἔκανε ἀπὸ ἀγάπη καὶ εὐγνωμοσύνη, γιὰ τὴν τόσα χρόνια ἐξυπηρετοῦσαν τοὺς μοναχοὺς στὰ ἔργα τους. Καὶ ὅταν ἀργότερα οἱ δυνάμεις του δὲν τοῦ ἐπέτρεπαν νὰ ἀνταποκριθῆ στὸ ἔργο αὐτὸ καὶ χρειάστηκε ὁ γερο-Αὐγουστίνος νὰ πάη στὸ γηροκομεῖο τῆς Μονῆς, ζήτησε νὰ ἀναλάβῃ κάποιος ἀπὸ τοὺς μοναχοὺς τὸ διακόνημα αὐτό.

Ἐπίσης, αὐτός ἔδειχνε πολὺ μεγάλη ἀγάπη σὲ κάθε προσκυνητή. Εἶχε πολὺ μεγάλη εὐαισθησία ἐσωτερικὴ καὶ κάθε ἓναν ποὺ συναντοῦσε τοῦ ἔκανε ἐδαφιαία, στρωτὴ μετάνοια. Καὶ ὅταν τοῦ ἔλεγαν: «Γιατί, Γέροντα, βάζεις ἐδαφιαία μετάνοια στοὺς λαϊκούς;» ἐκεῖνος ἀπαντοῦσε: «Γιατὶ ἔχουν τὴν Χάρη τοῦ ἁγίου Βαπτίσματος». Δηλαδή, ἔβλεπε σὲ κάθε Ὁρθόδοξο Χριστιανὸ τὴν Χάρη τοῦ ἁγίου Βαπτίσματος καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τὸν τιμοῦσε...

Φυσικά, δὲν ἀρκεῖ νὰ ἔχη κανεὶς τὴν Χάρη τοῦ ἁγίου Βαπτίσματος, θὰ πρέπει αὐτὴ ἡ Χάρη νὰ εἶναι ἐνεργῆς, ζωντανή. Ἐκεῖνος, ὅμως, ἔβλεπε αὐτὴ τὴν δυνατότητα τὴν ὁποία ἔχει ὁ κάθε Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανός νὰ γίνῃ ἅγιος, καὶ ὅσο ἀμαρτωλός καὶ ἄν εἶναι, μπορεῖ νὰ σωθῆ...

Κοινωνοῦσε τῶν Ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων μὲ πολλὴ ἀγάπη καὶ ζήλο. Μάλιστα μία φορὰ αἰσθάνθηκε τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία ὡς σάρκα καὶ αἷμα, τόσο πολὺ, ποὺ τὴν μασοῦσε γιὰ πολλὴ ὥρα. Καὶ ἐνῶ τὴν μασοῦσε, συγχρόνως αἰσθανόταν μεγάλη ἀγαλλίαση στὴν καρδιά του καὶ ἔκλαιγε ἀπὸ μεγάλη χαρὰ.

Ἀκόμη, τὸ βράδυ διάβαζε τὸν κανόνα του καὶ τὰ βιβλία χωρὶς νὰ χρησιμοποιῆ φῶς, γιὰ τὴν φώτιζε τὸ κελλί του τὸ Φῶς τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ κελλί του τὰ μεσάνυχτα μετατρέποταν σὲ μέρα...

Ἐπίσης, εἶχε ἐπισκέψεις ἁγίων. Πολλές φορές εἶδε Ἁγίους, Ἀγγέλους καὶ τὴν ἴδια τὴν Παναγία. Καὶ ὅταν μάλιστα ἦταν στὸ Γηροκομεῖο, ἔβλεπε τοὺς Ἀγγέλους καὶ τοὺς Ἁγίους καὶ σκουντοῦσε τοὺς ἄλλους Γέροντες μοναχοὺς νὰ σηκωθοῦν. Ἔλεγε: «Ἡ Παναγία», «ὁ Ἄγγελος». Ὁ γηροκόμος τὸν θεωροῦσε πλανεμένο. «Σηκωθεῖτε, ἦλθε ὁ τάδε Ἅγιος», καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι δὲν ἔβλεπαν τίποτα καὶ τὸν θεωροῦσαν ὅτι εἶναι σαλός.

Ὁ ἅγιος Παΐσιος ποὺ ἦταν ἓνα διάστημα στὴν Μονὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Φιλοθέου γράφει γιὰ τὸν γερο-Αὐγουστίνου: «Ἡ μορφὴ τοῦ Γέροντα ἦταν φωτεινὴ, γιὰ τὸν εἶχε ἐπισκιάσει ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ μόνο νὰ τὸν ἔβλεπες, ξεχνοῦσες κάθε στενοχώρια γιὰ τὴν σκορποῦσε χαρὰ μὲ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ του καλοσύνη. Ἡ ἐξωτερικὴ του φορεσιά, τὸ ζωστικὸ του τὸ καταμπαλωμένο, ἦταν χειρότερο ἀπὸ τὸ ροῦχο ποὺ κρεμαίει ὁ κηπουρός ὡς σκιάχτρο γιὰ τὴν κουροῦνες. Ἐάν τύχαινε νὰ τοῦ δώση κανεὶς κανένα καλὸ πράγμα, τὸ ἔδινε καὶ αὐτός σὲ ἄλλον...

Ἔτσι χαρούμενος μὲ τὴν πολλὴ καλοσύνη του, δοξολογώντας τὸν Θεὸ καὶ προσευχόμενος ἀδιαλείπτως, πέρασε ἢ μᾶλλον ἔζησε παραδεισένια ζωὴ στὸ Περιβόλι τῆς Παναγίας. Μέσα του εἶχε τὸν Χριστό, ἡ καρδιά του ἦταν Παράδεισος, καὶ ἀξιώθηκε νὰ δῆ καὶ ἀπὸ δῶ Ἀγγέλους καὶ Ἁγίους, ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν Παναγία, καὶ στὴν συνέχεια νὰ ἀγάλλεται αἰώνια.

Τὴν ὥρα ποὺ θὰ ἔφευγε ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ Γερο-Αὐγουστίνου τὸ πρόσωπο του ἄστραψε τρεῖς φορές! Οἰκονόμησε δὲ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ βρισκεται ἐκεῖ δίπλα του καὶ ὁ Γηροκόμος, ὁ ὁποῖος θαύμασε καὶ βεβαιώθηκε γιὰ τὴν θεῖες ἐπισκέψεις ποὺ εἶχε ὁ Γέροντας».

Αὐτὰ εἶναι λόγια τοῦ Ἁγίου Παΐσιου καὶ φυσικὰ τὰ ἀποδεχόμαστε πλήρως, ὅχι γιὰ τὴν πληροφορήθηκε ἀπὸ κάποιον ἄλλον, ἀλλὰ τὰ εἶδε ὁ ἴδιος καὶ τὰ περιγράφει, εἶναι αὐτόπτης καὶ αὐτήκοος μάρτυς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ εὐλογημένου αὐτοῦ μοναχοῦ.

Τὸ ἀπόσταγμα ὅλων αὐτῶν ποὺ ἔζησε ὁ Γέροντας αὐτός, ὁ π. Αὐγουστίνος ὁ Φιλοθεΐτης, ἦταν μία φράση τὴν ὁποία ἔλεγε. Ξέρετε, ὅταν πάη κανεὶς στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος καὶ βλέπῃ μοναχοὺς, ρωτᾷ: «Γέροντα, πές μου κάτι». Καὶ οἱ Γέροντες λένε ἀνάλογα μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ ζοῦν, καὶ ὅχι αὐτὰ ποὺ ἔχουν διαβάσει. Ἐκεῖνος ζοῦσε

πολλά, αλλά όλα αυτά, όλη η ζωή του ήταν κλεισμένη σε μία φράση. Τι έλεγε; Ήταν Ρώσος στην καταγωγή, μιλούσε σπαστά Έλληνικά και έλεγε:

«Καρδιά Πάσχα, νούς λάμπα, μάτια δάκρυα».

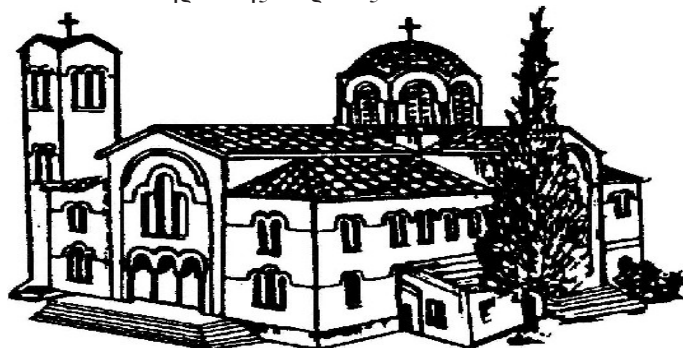
Είναι καταπληκτικό! Όταν τὸ διάβασα για πρώτη φορά—δὲν ἔτυχε νὰ τὸν γνωρίσω, γιατί τὸ 1966 πῆγα για πρώτη φορά στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος—ἐνθουσιάστηκα, γιατί αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ἀπόσταγμα μιᾶς ζωῆς. Τι δίδασκε καὶ τι ἔλεγε: **Στὴν καρδιά σας νὰ ζητε τὸ Πάσχα, στὸν νοῦ σας νὰ ἔχετε τὸ φῶς-λάμπα, στὰ μάτια σας δάκρυα.**

Ἄν αὐτὸ τὸ ἀναστρέψουμε καὶ πούμε «στὰ μάτια δάκρυα-μετάνοια, στὸν νοῦ φῶς-λάμπα, καὶ στὴν καρδιά Πάσχα», τότε καταλαβαίνουμε πῶς προχωρεῖ κανεὶς στὴν πνευματικὴ του ζωή...

Εἶναι αὐτὸ ποὺ οὐσιαστικὰ λένε οἱ Πατέρες: **κάθαροις, φωτισμός, θέωσις.**

Τὸ νὰ ζῆ κανεὶς μέσα στὴν καρδιά του τὸ Πάσχα, δηλαδή τὴν ἀγαλλίαση, τὴν Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὴν χαρὰ—ὄχι τὴν συναισθηματικὴ χαρὰ, ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ τὴν χαρὰ ποὺ εἶναι καρπὸς τοῦ Παναγίου Πνεύματος—τόν Χριστό, αὐτὸ δὲν ἔρχεται εὐκόλα. Προηγεῖται τὸ φῶς μέσα στὸν νοῦ, δηλαδή ὁ νοῦς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀπαλλάσσεται ἀπὸ τὸν σκοτασμό, τὴν σύγχυση, τοὺς πολλοὺς λογισμοὺς, καὶ προσεύχεται καθαρὰ στὸν Θεό, καὶ φυσικὰ ὑπάρχουν τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας.

Ποιὸς δὲν θέλει νὰ ζήσει τὸ Πάσχα στὴν καρδιά του; Ποιὸς δὲν θέλει νὰ ἔχη φωτισμένο νοῦ καὶ νὰ μὴν ἔχη σύγχυση; Naί, αὐτὸ ἀρχίζει ἀπὸ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας... Γιατὶ πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία ποὺ ἔχουμε στοὺς Ναοὺς καὶ τὶς ἀκολουθίες, ὑπάρχει καὶ ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ ἀκολουθία, ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ λειτουργία μέσα στὴν καρδιά, αὐτὴ ἡ ἀδιάλειπτη προσευχή, ἡ καρδιακή, ἡ ἀγρυπνία ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ μέσα στὴν καρδιά, στὸ θυσιαστήριο τῆς καρδιάς.



Ἄν δὲν κυριευθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὸν ἔρωτα τῶν οὐρανίων ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν πόθον τῆς ἄνω Ἱερουσαλὴμ (ποὺ εἶναι ἡ Βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν), ἀλλὰ μένουμε προσκολλημένοι στὴν ἐπίγεια ζωή, κυλιόμενοι μέσα στὸν βοῦρκο τῶν πολλαπλῶν κοσμικῶν φροντίδων, δὲν θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ ἀπολαύσουμε τὴν Οὐράνια Πατρίδα!

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος

Ἡ 25^η Μαρτίου καὶ τὸ Πραγματικὸ Νόημά της

Γράφει ὁ Μητροπολίτης Προικονήσου Ἰωσήφ, «Ὀσμὴ Ζωῆς», ἔκδ. Ἀθῶς, σ. 290-296.



Ἡ 25^η Μαρτίου μᾶς φέρνει καὶ πάλι μπροστὰ στὴ μεγαλύτερη καὶ ἱερώτερη ἐπέτειο τῆς ἱστορίας τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης. Ἐκεῖνη τοῦ ξεσηκωμοῦ τοῦ Γένους ἐνάντια

στὸν κατακτητὴ καὶ τύραννο, ποὺ γιὰ περισσότερους ἀπὸ τέσσερις αἰῶνες τὸ σταύρωνε καὶ τὸ εὐτέλιζε στὸν Γολγοθᾶ τῆς δουλείας. Τοῦ ξεσηκωμοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς παλιγγενεσίας ποῦ, Θεοῦ εὐδοκήσαντος, ἀκολούθησε. Βρισκόμαστε πάλι μπροστὰ σὲ μνήμες ἱερῆς γεγονότων σπουδαίων καὶ μεγάλων, ποὺ σημάδεψαν ὄχι μόνο τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ, μὰ καὶ τὴν πανανθρώπινη ἱστορία. τὸ Μεσολόγγι, γιὰ παράδειγμα, τὸ Κούγκι, τὸ Ζάλογγο, ἡ Ἀραπίτσα, τὸ Μανιάκι, ἡ Ἀλαμάνα καὶ τόσα ἄλλα, ποὺ «ἐπιλείψει μὲ διηγούμενον ὁ χρόνος» (Ἐβρ. 11: 32), σημάδεψαν τὴν πανανθρώπινη ἱστορία ἀνεξίτηλα! Καὶ πίσω ἀπ' αὐτὰ βρίσκονται ἄνθρωποι μεγάλοι, ἐλεύθεροι μέσα στὴν ἐξωτερικὴ σκλαβιά, γενναῖοι καὶ δυνατοί. Καί, γιὰ νὰ θυμηθῶ τὸν ποιητὴ, «Γιὰ τοὺς μεγάλους, γιὰ τοὺς ἐλεύθερους, γιὰ τοὺς γενναίους, τοὺς δυνατοὺς, ἀρμόζουν τὰ λόγια τὰ μεγάλα, τὰ ἐλεύθερα, τὰ γενναῖα, τὰ δυνατά». Λυπᾶμαι ποὺ ὁ λόγος μου εἶναι φτωχὸς καὶ δὲ θὰ μπορέσει νὰ σταθεῖ ἀντάξιος τους. Ἄς μὲ συγχωρήσουν οἱ ἱερεῖς τους σκιές...

Πολλὰ γράφτηκαν μέσα στὶς δεκαετίες ποὺ κύλισαν ἀπὸ τότε, σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ νόημα τοῦ ξεσηκωμοῦ ἐκείνου καὶ τῆς θυσίας τῶν προγόνων μας. Ἐγὼ θὰ προτιμοῦσα ν' ἀκουστῆ ἡ ἤρεμη φωνὴ τοῦ ποιητῆ, ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζει τὴν ἱστορία μὲ τὴν εὐαισθησία ποὺ χαϊδεύει ἓνα λουλουδί, μὲ τὴ λαχτάρα ποὺ ἀκούει τὰ πρῶινὰ τὸν ὄρθρο τῶν πουλιῶν καὶ μὲ τὴν εὐλάβεια ποὺ ἀκούει τὸ κλάμα ἑνὸς παιδιοῦ. Λέει, λοιπόν, ὁ μεγάλος μας Σεφέρης:

**Γιὰ μᾶς ἦταν ἄλλο πρᾶγμα ὁ πόλεμος
γιὰ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ
καὶ γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
καθισμένη στὰ γόνατα τῆς Ὑπερμάχου Στρατηγοῦ,
ποὺ εἶχε στὰ μάτια ψηφιδωτὸ
τὸν καμὸ τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης.**

«Γιὰ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ», λοιπόν, καὶ «γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου», ἦταν ὁ ξεσηκωμὸς τοῦ '21! Γιὰ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ χλευαζόταν καθημερινὰ ἀπ' τὸν ἀλλόθρησκο κατακτητὴ καὶ βιαζόταν ἀδιάντροπα ἀπὸ τὶς ἀσταμάτητες προσπάθειες

τοῦ σατανικοῦ ἐξισλαμισμού. Καὶ γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ τὸν εἶπαν «ραγιά» καὶ τὸν ξάπλωσαν στὸ προκρούσειο κρεβάτι τοῦ γούστου τοῦ τελευταίου ἀνθρωποειδοῦς ποὺ ἄκουε στὴν προσφώνηση «ἀγάς»! Γιὰ τὴν πίστι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ κυνηγήθηκε ἐπίμονα, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα τὸ μέγα ἱερὸ νέφος τῶν Νεομαρτύρων ἀπὸ τὴ μία μεριά, καὶ τὸ φαινόμενο τοῦ «Κρυπτοχριστιανισμού», μὲ ἔξαρση στὸν Πόντο, τὴν Κρήτη καὶ τὴν Κύπρο (λινομπάμπακοι). Ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς πολλοὺς—δυστυχῶς—ἐξισλαμισμοὺς, ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη! Καὶ γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ μὲ τὸ «παιδομάζωμα», τὸν τρομερὸ κι ἀπάνθρωπο «ντεβσιρμέ» (ἔτσι τὸ ἔλεγαν), ἀπέθαινε χίλιες φορὲς πρὶν ἔρθει ἡ ὥρα τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ κορμιοῦ!... Γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ ἔλειωνε σὰν τὸ κερὶ κάθε φορὰ ποὺ ὑποχρεωνόταν νὰ κάμει «τεμενά», γιατί ἤξερε νὰ κάμπει τὰ γόνατά της μόνο ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ κι ὄχι ἀνθρώπων!... Γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ κυνηγημένη ἔπαιρνε τὰ βουνὰ καὶ ζούσε σὰν τ' ἀγρίμια, μὲ τὴ ρετσίνα τοῦ «κλέφτη» τοῦ «χαϊνή». Μία ρετσίνα, ποὺ ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν πραγμάτων τὴν ἔκαμε τίτλο τιμῆς! Γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ διψασμένη γιὰ παιδεία καὶ μάθηση, ἦταν ἀναγκασμένη νὰ τρέχει νύχτα σὲ Κρυφὰ Σχολεῖα γιὰ μία χούφτα κολυβογράμματα! γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ κυνηγημένη σὰν στρουθί, ἔπαιρνε τῶν ὀμματιῶν της, ζητώντας μία λεύτερη ἀνάσα σ' Εὐρώπες καὶ Ρωσίες, σὲ κόσμους καὶ πολιτισμοὺς ξένους κι ἀλλόκοτους, μὲ τὸ σαράκι τῆς ξενιτειᾶς νὰ τὴ χτικιάζει!...

Γι' αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα ἔγινε ὁ ξεσηκωμὸς τοῦ '21! Καὶ τὸν εὐλόγησε ἀπὸ πάνω ὁ Θεός, ποὺ «εἶχε βάλει τὴν ὑπογραφή Του νὰ λευτερωθεῖ τὸ Γένος». Καὶ τὸν προστάτεψε ἡ Μάννα τοῦ λαοῦ μας, ἡ Ὑπέρομαχος Στρατηγός, «ποὺ εἶχε στὰ μάτια Τῆς ψηφιδωτὸ τὸν καημὸ τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης». Καὶ πέτυχε! Μὲ ὀδυνηρότατες θυσίες! Μὲ αἶμα ἄφθονο καὶ δάκρυα περισσότερα! Μὲ σκοντάμματα κι ἀνασηκώματα! Παρὰ τὰ πάθη καὶ τὴν ἀγριάδα ποὺ τὰ τετρακόσια χρόνια τοῦ «χειροπιαστοῦ σκοταδιοῦ» τῆς «πικρῆς σκλαβιάς» εἶχαν σωρέψει στοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ τὸν τόπο μας! Παρὰ τίς τρικλοποδιὲς τῶν μεγάλων! Παρὰ τίς προδοσίαις τῶν χαμερπῶν! Παρὰ τίς παρασπονδίαις καὶ τίς ἐγκαταλείψεις ἀφίλων φίλων! Παρὰ τίς κάθε λογῆς κακομοιριὲς κι ἀντιξοότητες!...

Καὶ σήμερα, «στοῦ κύκλου τὰ γυρίσματα», εἶναι χρέος νὰ μνημονεύσουμε τοὺς αἴτιους. Τοὺς ἀφανεῖς καὶ τοὺς ἐπιφανεῖς. Τοὺς ἄγνωστους καὶ τοὺς γνωστούς κατ' ὄνομα. Τὶς μαννάδες καὶ τίς γιαγιάδες ποὺ λίκνισαν τὰ παιδιά τους καὶ τὰ γαλούχησαν μὲ τ' ὄνειρο τῆς λευτεριάς. Τοὺς ἀπροσκύνητους πατεράδες καὶ παπποῦδες, τὰ λεβεντοπαλλήκαρα τῆς Κλεφτουριάς. Κολοκοτρωναίους, Καραϊσκάκηδες, Μακρυγιάννηδες

καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους. Τοὺς θαλασσόλυκους Κανάρηδες, καὶ Μπουμπουλίνες. Τοὺς Φαναριώτες ἄρχοντες, Ὑψηλάντηδες, Μαυροκορδάτους καὶ λοιπούς. Τοὺς Δημογέροντες καὶ τὸν ἀπλὸ λαὸ τῶν πόλεων, τῶν χωριῶν καὶ τῶν μαρτυρικῶν νησιῶν μας. Τοὺς Φιλικούς ποὺ ὀρκίζονταν στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο νὰ σώσουν τὴν Πατρίδα. Τοὺς πλούσιους ποὺ ἔδωσαν τὰ πάντα γιὰ τὸν ἱερὸ ἀγώνα. Τοὺς φτωχοὺς ποὺ ἔθεσαν στὴ διάθεση τοῦ Γένους τὸν πλοῦτο τῆς γενναίας τους ψυχῆς. Τοὺς ταπεινοὺς καλόγερους καὶ παπάδες, ποὺ στὸ μοναστήρι τους, τὴν ἐκκλησίά τους, τὸ Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο τους, κράτησαν ζωντανὴ ὄχι μόνο τὴν Πίστι καὶ τὴ γλώσσα τοῦ λαοῦ μας, μὰ καὶ τὴν ἴδια τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ Γένους. Τοὺς θεοφώτιστους Διδάχους, ποὺ μὲ κορυφαῖο ἕναν Κοσμᾶ Αἰτωλό, κράτησαν ἄσβηστο τὸ φῶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῆς ἔνθεης παιδείας μέσα στὸ ἔρεβος τῆς τουρκικῆς σκλαβιάς. Τοὺς μαρτυρικοὺς Ἱεράρχες καὶ Πατριάρχες, ποὺ ἀπὸ τὸν πολύμουσο Ἅγιο Κύριλλο Λούκαρι ὡς τὸν Ἅγιο Γρηγόριο τὸν Ε' καὶ τὸν Κύριλλο τὸν ΣΤ', μὲ τὸ παράδειγμά τους, τὴ διδαχὴ τους καὶ τὸ αἶμα τοῦ μαρτυρίου τους ἐφώτισαν τὸ Γένος, ἐπότισαν κι ἐκαλλιέργησαν τὸ δένδρο τῆς ἐλευθερίας του κι ἐπλήρωσαν τὸ βαρὺ τίμημά της.

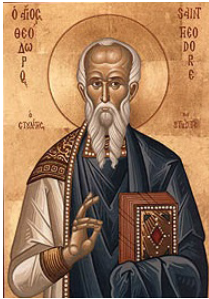
Δὲν ἔγινε τὸ '21 ἀπλῶς γιὰ νὰ περάσουν μερικὰ ὀνόματα στὴν ἀθανασία! Ἐγινε γιὰ νὰ βροῦμε ἐμεῖς, κι αὐτοὶ ποὺ θὰ ῥθουν μετὰ ἀπὸ μᾶς, τὸ μίτο τοῦ νήματος ποὺ ὀδηγεῖ τὰ ἔθνη καὶ τοὺς λαοὺς στὴν ἀλήθεια! Κι αὐτὸς ὁ μίτος εἶναι τὸ Χριστιανικὸ πνεῦμα τῆς θυσίας γιὰ χάρη τῶν μεγάλων ἰδανικῶν! Τὸ Χριστιανικὸ αἶσθημα τῆς ἀδελφικῆς ἀλληλεγγύης! Τὸ Χριστιανικὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀπαλλαγῆς ἀπὸ τὴ σκλαβιά κυρίως τῶν παθῶν, τῶν ἐσωτερικῶν αὐτῶν ἐπικίνδυνων ἐχθρῶν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου! Τὸ πατριωτικὸ αἶσθημα τῆς εὐθύνης γιὰ ὅσα συμβαίνουν γύρω μας. Τὸ αἶσθημα τῆς ἀξιοπρέπειας καὶ τῆς δικαιοσύνης. Τῆς εὐθύνης «γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου»! Τὴν ψυχὴ τὴ δική μας, τῶν παιδιῶν μας, τῶν συμπαροίκων μας, κι ὅσων ἀκόμη μοιράζονται μαζί μας τὸν Ἑλλαδικὸ ἥλιο...

Αὐτὴ θὰ εἶναι ἡ καλύτερη καταξίωση ἐνὸς Μεσολογγίου, ἐνὸς Σουλίου κι ἐνός—ἀργότερα—Ἄρκαδιου! Ἡ δικαίωση τῶν ἀγόνων καὶ τῶν ὀραματισμῶν ἐνὸς Στρατηγοῦ Μακρυγιάννη! Ὁ καλύτερος φόρος τιμῆς σ' ὅσους ἔβαλαν τοὺς ὤμους τους νὰ σηκώσουν, σὰν ἄλλοι Ἄτλαντες, τὸ βάρος τῆς εὐθύνης γιὰ τὸ Ἔθνος. Εὐθύνης ἀπέναντι στὸν Θεό, στὸν κόσμο καὶ στὴν Ἱστορία, ὅταν ὁ Ὑψηλάντης διάβηκε τὸν Προῦθο καὶ λίγο ἀργότερα ἡ Ἁγία Λαύρα ἔδωσε τὸ σύνθημα, κι ὁ Παλαιῶν Πατρῶν Γερμανὸς ἐσήμανε τὴν καμπάνα τοῦ χρέους!

Ἄς εἶναι ἀγέραστη κι ἀθάνατη ἡ ἅγια μνήμη τοῦ '21! Κι ἂς γίνεῖ ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη τοῦ σήμερα ἀντάξιά της!

LENTEN HUMILITY AND PATIENT ENDURANCE

By St. Theodore the Studite, given on the Wednesday of Holy Week, from Catechesis 72: "On the Saving Passion and Teaching on Humility and Patient Endurance." These Catecheses were given when St. Theodore and his monks were in exile from Constantinople during the reign of Michael II (820-829).



Brethren and Fathers, the present day is holy and to be venerated, for from this day the Lord begins to take on himself the sufferings of the Cross, for our sake, in accordance with David's words: *Why did the nations rage and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth rose up and the rulers assembled together against the Lord and against his Christ.* [Pss 2:1-2]. They assembled together to plot an evil plan against the Master.

The deceitful Judas denies him utterly and betrays the teacher with a deceitful kiss. The Lord of all things is led away prisoner, stands before the judgement seat, is interrogated and answers; and when He answers—O fearful report!—He is struck by a slave and bears it with long-suffering, saying: *If I have spoken evil, give testimony to the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?* [Jn 18:23]. Then He is scoffed at, mocked, jeered at, ridiculed, spat at, buffeted, scourged. He ascends the Cross, and when He has ascended He prays for His murderers: *Father, forgive them their sin, for they do not know what they do.* [Lk 23:33]. Then He is given gall with vinegar, He is pierced by a lance, the Immortal is put to death...

These in brief are the Master's sufferings, and one who hears them with understanding is not angry, or embittered, or enraged, or puffed up, or arrogant towards his brother; is not envious, or filled with vainglory. Rather he is humbled, crushed, considers himself to be earth and ashes, desires communion in Christ's sufferings, is eager to be conformed to His death, so that he may have a part in the glory of His resurrection.

Nevertheless, you too take courage, because you have shared and are sharing in the Master's sufferings. For you see where you are. Is it not for the sake of His word and His testimony that you are in exile and persecution? Have you not previously experienced prison? Have you not shed your blood under tortures? Have not some of our brothers died a martyr's death? Such then is our boast in the Lord, such our gift. However, the end beatitude is not assured because of the ease of reversal and the impossibility of knowing what the morrow will bring to birth; thus, stand your ground unflinching and unmoving in the Lord *striving side by side with one spirit and one soul for the faith of the Gospel, in no way intimidated by your opponents* [Phil 1:27-6], *not giving*

offence in anything, but in everything recommending ourselves as God's ministers [2 Cor 6:3-4], by obedience, humility, meekness, long-suffering, great endurance. *For you need endurance in order to do God's will and obtain the promise. For in a little while He who is coming will come and not delay.* [Heb 10:36-37]. And, if He will come and not delay, why do we hate being in afflictions and do not rather choose to die each day for the Master? For it is written: *If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we disown Him, He will also disown us; if we are unfaithful, He remains faithful; He cannot disown Himself.* [1 Tim 2:11-13].

How great joy the saints will have when they see the Lord "coming from heaven with the angels of His power. [2 Thess. 1:7], inviting them with inexpressible joy, crowning them and becoming their companion for ever and ever? What anguish will they have who have disobeyed the Gospel and transgressed His commandments? *They will suffer the penalty, as it is written, of eternal destruction, cut off from His presence and from the glory of His strength, when He comes to be glorified in His saints and marvelled at among all who have believed.* [2 Thess 1:9-10].

And so, brethren, as we contemplate and think on these things, again and again *let us purify ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* [2 Cor 7:1], zealous for what is better, striving for what is more perfect, *hating what is evil, holding fast to what is good, loving one another with brotherly affection, outdoing one another in showing honor, not lagging in zeal, being ardent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in affliction, persevering in prayer* [Rom. 12:9-12], that by such sincerity we may worthily celebrate the imminent Pascha, and be counted worthy to enjoy the eternal blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and might with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.



Today is the joyful forefeast of the time of abstinence, the bright threshold of the Fast. Therefore, brethren, together let us run the race with confident hope and with great eagerness.

First Canon of Cheesefare Monday, Ode 1

Let us venerate the Cross of the Lord, offering our tender affection as the cypress, the sweet fragrance of our faith as the cedar, and our sincere love as the pine; and let us glorify our Deliverer who was nailed upon it.

Wed Matins of the 4th Week of Lent, Ode 7

A WONDROUS VISION

From the book, "Soul Beneficial Visions and Narrations on the Other Life," "Orthodox Kypseli" publications, Thessaloniki, Greece.

A married man, who had children, servants and plenty of wealth, was immensely merciful and hospitable. One evening, after dinner, he fell asleep; in the morning, he was found lying on the ground, cold and unconscious as if dead. His relatives carried him to his bed giving him first aid and warming him in their effort to bring him back to consciousness. After several days of loving care by his relatives, he recovered and was asked by them to tell all what happened to him and where he was while he was as if dead for so many days. He would not respond, refusing to satisfy their request; instead, he would cry inconsolably and such tears of repentance and contrition continued unceasingly. Moreover, until his death (some years later) he told nobody. When he was approaching his end, he called his eldest son and decided to tell him (and all of his relatives that were present) of that experience. His words were clear and succinct and in front of everybody.

"My dear son, I give you this last commandment and order you to keep it strictly as much as you can. Be charitable to the poor and have a lot of affinity towards the strangers and travelers. Look after them in your home and with great love serve them willingly and give to them generously, as much as they need, just as you saw me do until now. Because hospitality is most welcome amongst all virtues by God, and receives great reward in the heavenly Kingdom. And to motivate you and all my relatives towards such a God-pleasing act of kindness and sympathy towards the strangers and the poor, on this day and during my last few hours, I shall relate this amazing vision I had, when you found me as dead down on the floor of our house, a few years ago.

"Know that from my early years I had great reverence for the Most Holy Theotokos and every day I would read her eulogies and blessings. For this longing and love that I had with all my soul and heart, the Despot (Christ) blessed me through her intercessions to receive many gifts and graces, especially for the sympathy I had for the poor and strangers, as you know, receiving everyone with love and giving generously, whatever and whenever was needed.

"That night I had the following vision: I heard a voice calling my name saying:

—Rise from the bed and follow me.

"When I got up, the one that had called me grabbed me firmly by the hand, and brought me to a valley. He then disappeared and I, left alone and not knowing what to do, suddenly heard behind me loud and obnoxious voices and disturbances. Turning back, I saw a huge crowd of demons who were rapidly coming towards me, to grab me, just as if they were savage beasts. As soon as I saw them, I started

running as fast as I could, with incredible fear, until I arrived at a house; after entering this house, I closed the door firmly shut. However, they broke the door and came in to grab me.

"So that you all understand better, listen to this. It had been three years prior to that experience that I received a stranger in our home, on the evening of the feast of All Saints, to host him just as was our custom. Arriving at the house, I met another stranger that had been received by your mother, according to my commandment to her, to receive and offer hospitality to everybody as if he were an angel of the Lord; shortly thereafter, your brother brought another one as well. I must tell you that your mother and I tasted great happiness for having been blessed to receive and offer hospitality in my home to these three strangers, similar to the "form" of the Most Holy Trinity. I offered them the richest and best hospitality, as much as I could, according to my custom. "So, going back to my vision, the demons had come in. And I, panicked and terrified, started to cry to the Lord to have mercy through the intercessions of His Most Holy Mother. It is then that I saw three extremely pleasant looking men tell me:

—Fear not for we have come to help you.

"Having expelled the demons they asked me if I knew them. I replied:

—No, my lords, I do not know you.

"They then replied:

—We are the three strangers you offered hospitality with rich and Abrahamic heart and we were sent by our Lord to help you, and reward you for all the love you showed us and thereby you are saved from the demonic hands.

"Having said that, they disappeared.

"I thanked God and fearing to go outside in case they disturb me again, I remained in the house for a while. After what appeared to be a long while, I crossed myself and went outside, hoping in the Lord. Having walked a little, I saw the demons running behind me again, screaming and saying:

—Let us run now to catch him in case he escapes.

"I once again became terrified and running faster, I cried to the Theotokos:

—Most Holy Theotokos help me.

"Thus running, I reached a flaming river, that was full of snakes, and other fearsome beasts of Hades. Their body was fully immersed in the flames and only their mouth was out, and open, as if they were hungry wishing to eat. The demons who chased me, were shouting to me to fall in the river or they would do it themselves. I then checked the surroundings for a possible different exit, when I saw a narrow bridge with one span and so tall that it looked to me as if it was reaching the sky. Not knowing what to choose between those three options, for example, to fall in the river where I feared the fire and the dragons, to submit to the authority of the demons that was worse,

or to climb on the bridge. I ended up choosing the third. Therefore, I climbed the steps one by one with great fear and danger of falling in the fire. The cunning demons followed me with shouts and threats. When I got to the top of the bridge, the demons reached me and with tears, I cried to the Theotokos:

—Most Holy Theotokos help me.

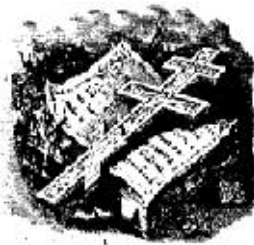
“Then, in front of me appeared the compassionate Mother of mercy and she stretched out her right hand, saying:

—Fear not, my dear servant; because you used to read for me eulogies and prayers and loved the poor, and all of the least brethren of my Son and my Despot, that is why I came to help you in your need.

“Having told me these words, she held me by the hand and oh what a miracle! In a split second, she brought me back to my house and my soul returned to my body; it was then that you all found me, thinking that I was dead.

“For this reason, my son, do not neglect your service to the Mother of the Almighty God the All blessed Theotokos, but every hour to sing hymns to her and glorify her as you should and as I, your father, did. This way you will have her as your helper in all of your earthly and after-life needs. This is my first commandment I give you. The second is, as I already told you earlier, force yourself to love as much as possible the strangers, the poor, the widows, the orphans and give them whatever they need, that is, if you wish to enjoy in the world everything good and to inherit the eternal Kingdom of God.”

The blessed one, having said to all those present, to venerate the God-Mother and to help the poor, he delivered his soul in the hands of God. His son, remembering all his life the fatherly advice, he exercised a life of virtue and after the end of his earthly life, he was found worthy of the heavenly bliss as well.

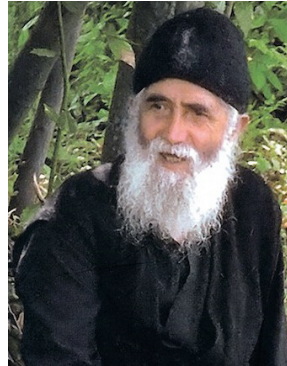


They asked Abba Sisoës, “If a brother sins, surely he must do penance for a year?” He replied, “That is a hard saying.” The visitors said, “For six months?” He replied, “That is too long.” They said, “For forty days?” He said, “That is a great deal, too.” They said to him, “What then? If a brother falls, and the *agape* is about to be offered, should he simply come to the *agape*, too?” The old man said to them, “No, he needs to do penance for a few days. But I trust in God that if such a man does penance with his whole heart, God will receive him, even in three days...”

The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

ON COMMON PRAYERS

By St. Paisios the Athonite, from the Book: “*With Pain and Love for the Contemporary Man*,” published by the Holy Monastery of Evangelist John the Theologian, Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece.



Today, unfortunately, the European so-called courtesy has come in and they try to show themselves as being nice. They wish to show superiority and finally they end up worshipping the two horned devil. “One religion,” they tell you, “should exist” and they level out everything. Some also come to me and tell me “All of us who believe in

Christ should create one religion.”

“Now it is as if you are telling me,” I told them, “about gold and copper, so many carats gold and that much copper, that was separated, to gather them and make them one again. Is it correct to mix them again? Ask a jeweler. Is it proper to mix trash with gold? So much struggle was waged to distill the dogma.”

The Holy Fathers must have known something for prohibiting the relationships with the heretics.

Today they say: “We should pray together not only with heretics but also with the Buddhist and with the fire worshiper and the demon worshiper. The Orthodox must also be present in common prayers and in their conferences. It is a presence.” What presence? They resolve everything with logic and justify the unjustifiable. The European mind believes that spiritual matters can also come into the Common Market. Some of the Orthodox who are shallow and wish to make a promotion, “a mission,” they arrange conferences with the heterodox to cause a sensation, believing this way that they promote Orthodoxy, by becoming, so to speak, “Hungarian goulash” with the false believers. Then the super-zealots take hold of the other end; they also blaspheme against the Mysteries of the New-Calendarists, etc., and in turn deeply scandalize the souls who have piety and Orthodox sensitivity.

On the other hand, the heterodox come to conferences, act like teachers, take whatever good spiritual thing they find from the Orthodox, they process it, they give it their own color and mark and they present it as a prototype. And the strange contemporary world becomes touched by such strange things and is thus spiritually destroyed.

The Lord, though, at the appropriate time, will present the St. Marks, the Eugenikos and the St. Gregorys Palamas who will assemble all our deeply scandalized brothers, to confess the Orthodox faith and strengthen the traditions of the Church and give great joy to our Mother, the Church.

FEAR EVIL LIKE FIRE

By St. John of Kronstadt.

Fear evil like fire. Do not let it touch your heart even if it seems just or righteous. No matter what the circumstances, do not let it come into you. Evil is always evil. Sometimes evil presents itself as an endeavor to God's glory, or as something with good intentions towards your neighbor. Even in these cases, do not trust this feeling. It is a wrong labor and is not filled with wisdom. Instead, work on chasing evil from yourself.

Evil, however innocent it looks, offends God's long-suffering love, which is His foremost glory. Judas betrayed his Lord for thirty silver pieces under the guise of helping the poor. Keep in mind that the enemy continuously seeks your death and attacks more fiercely when you are not alert. His evil is endless. Do not let self-esteem and the love of material goods win you over. When you feel anger against someone, believe with your whole heart that it is a result of the devil's work in your heart. Try to hate the devil and his deeds and it will leave you. Do not admit it as a part of yourself and don't justify it. I know this from experience. The devil hides himself behind our souls and we blindly think we are acting by ourselves. Then we defend the devil's work as something that is a part of us. Sometimes we think that anger is a fair reaction to something bad. However, the idea that a passion could ever be fair is a total and deadly lie. When someone is angry at you, remember that this evil feeling is in him. He is just fooled by the devil and is a suffering instrument in his hand. Pray that the enemy leaves him and that God opens his spiritual eyes, which have been darkened by the evil spirit. Pray to God for all people enslaved by passions because the enemy is acting in their hearts.

Perhaps you hate your neighbor, despise him, and do not want to talk to him peacefully and lovingly because he has been rude, arrogant, or disgusting in his speech or manners. You may despise him for being full of himself or proud or disrespectful. However, you are to blame more than he is. *Physician, heal yourself!* (Lk 4:23). Therefore, teacher, teach yourself. This kind of anger is worse than any other evil. How could evil be chased out by another evil? How can you take a needle from the eye of another person while having a log in your own? Evil defects must be fixed with love, kindness, resignation, and patience. Admit yourself as the worst of all sinners, and believe it. Consider yourself the worst one, chase away any boldness, anger, impatience and fury; you may start helping others. Be indulgent about the defects of others, because if you see their faults all the time, there will be continuous enmity. *The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.* (Psalm 129:3). *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* (Mt 6:14).

We can feel from time to time the most perfect love for God without loving each other. This is a strange thing, and only few care about it. However, love for our neighbor will never come without our own effort. A real Christian does not have any reason to be angry about anybody. Anger is the devil's deed. A Christian should have only love inside and since love does not boast, he should not boast or have any bad thoughts towards others. For example, I must not think about another person that he is evil, proud, etc.; and I must not think that if I forgive his offense he would laugh at me or upset me again. We must not let evil hide in us under any pretense. Evil and anger usually have many different veils. Do not yield to gloomy feelings in your heart but control and eradicate them with the power of faith and the light of the sane mind. These strengths will make you feel secure. *Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.* (Psalm 25:20).

Gloomy feelings usually develop deep in the heart. Someone who has not learned how to control them will be gloomy and pensive most of the time and it will be hard for him to deal with himself and other people. When they come close to you, sustain yourself with inner strength, happiness and innocent jokes: and they will leave you soon. This is from experience.

Lord, give me strength to love everyone like myself and never to get angry or work for the devil. Give me strength to crucify my self-esteem, my pride, my greed, my skepticism and other passions. Let us have a name: a mutual love. Let us not worry about anything. Be the only God of our hearts, and let us desire nothing except You. Let us live always in unifying love and let us hate anything that separates us from each other and from love. So be it! So be it! If God showed Himself to us and lives inside us as we in Him (according to His eternal Word), would He not give us everything? Would He ever trick us or leave us? *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* (Rom 8:32). Now be comforted, my dear, and know nothing but love. *These things I command you, that ye love one another.* (Jn 15:17).



Men are often called intelligent wrongly. Intelligent men are not those who are erudite in the sayings and books of the wise men of old, but those who have an intelligent soul and can discriminate between good and evil. They avoid what is sinful and harms the soul; and with deep gratitude to God they resolutely adhere by dint of practice to what is good and benefits the soul. These men alone should truly be called intelligent.

St. Anthony the Great

AN EXAMPLE FOR LIFE

A chapter from Semya Pravoslavnogo Khristianina, Holy Trinity Monastery 1958, reprinted in Pravoslavaaya Zhizn, April 1973.

Great Lent. Spring is approaching. The sun is beginning to give more warmth. The birds are chirping more merrily. There is a smell of spring in the air... The Lenten bell sounds drawn-out and doleful... In church, the black coverings and the subdued chanting inspire a pensive mood.

In the small village church, in a corner near the *kliros* (the section of the church where the chanters assemble for services, *Ed.*), stands an old woman with a boy, her beloved and only grandson. They are there every day. Both of them look devoutly at the icons and earnestly pray. The old woman is very weak and leans upon the boy. He is a tall, well-built eleven-year-old, with a serious face.

The service ends. The old woman slowly wanders home, supported by her grandson. The boy guides her carefully. They reach their small apartment; the boy unwraps his grandmother's outer garments and seats her carefully in a large easy chair. He spreads a warm shawl on her worn shoulders and lovingly lays his cheek upon her thin, feeble hand. The old woman is blind. Her eyes do not see the serious face of the child. She affectionately feels the head and face of the boy and gently kisses him.

At one time, this old woman was very wealthy. She was the daughter of a rich merchant, and did not know what it meant to be denied anything. Her mother died when she was still young, and her father found as a husband for his daughter a rich, gouty baron. The young girl, pretty and vivacious, became the wife and nursemaid of a capricious, ever-complaining spouse. With angelic patience, she looked after her husband, enduring his whims. She divided her time between looking after her husband and raising her daughter. In ten years' time the baron died. The baroness devoted all her selfless soul to her daughter, who was sickly and feeble. She lived and breathed only for her. When, a year after the daughter's marriage, the girl died, leaving a baby boy, the elderly baroness transferred all her love to the boy. Her son-in-law moved abroad, and the baroness moved with her grandson to a modest apartment. Almost all her estate she distributed to various orphanages and schools.

She raised the boy, taught him, and passed on to him her sensitive soul, her loving heart. In that quiet little corner, surrounded by gentle love, the young Seryozha grew and

developed. He loved his grandmother dearly; she was his quiet little corner of protection.

The years went by. Misfortune fell upon the baroness: she became blind. Her meek eyes no longer cast their gentle, caressing glance upon her grandson. For a long time, young Seryozha could not accept this and often wept. Then he became accustomed and did not leave his grandmother's side. Blind and frail, she did not forget works of love and mercy. Together with Seryozha, leaning on his boyish arm, she continued to be a guardian angel to the poor and unfortunate. Meanwhile, she herself faded day by day.

Every day they went together to their parish church. Returning home, she would sit down in her big chair and rest. The old woman had little strength left, she would not live much longer. They lived in a small, cozy apartment. Seryozha liked their clean, oak-trimmed dining room, his small, light-filled room, its window looking out onto the yard with its thick foliage. Moreover, he liked his grandmother's bedroom, with



a whole case of precious icons. He liked to sit there in the gathering twilight. In the evening, the stove was well stoked. It was warm in the room. The vigil lamps gently flickered before the icons. Shadows crawled along the walls. Outside the wind blew.

The boy's head was filled with serious thoughts beyond his years. In his heart, he promised to follow after his grandmother's example. With his child's

soul, he found in her something holy, something great. He wanted to grow up to be like her—kind and honest.

The blind woman, unmoving, looked somewhere into the distance. Her thoughts were also serious. She was thinking about her Seryozha. Would he remain, as he was, pure and kind? What would life make of him without her, once she was buried? Her heart pained her at the thought of a possible wrong life path by young Seryozha.

From the beginning of Great Lent, the old woman began to grow weaker and to feel poorly. Seryozha was sad.

—Seryozha, let's prepare for Holy Communion next week, said the old woman, sitting one evening with him in her room. Perhaps I will feel better.

Seryozha only pressed closer to his grandmother in silence. His heart ached for her. The next week they began to prepare. Every day they would stand in the corner of her room and pray fervently for one another, for all those who suffered and were oppressed. In the evenings, a lamp was lit in the small bedroom, and Seryozha read to his grandmother from the Bible. He read attentively and earnestly. The light from

the lamp fell upon the grey head of the old woman, upon her kind, gentle old face; it illumined the fine features of the boy, his serious, grave countenance. The old woman's hand rested upon the boy's head. Seryozha liked to read the Bible. His grandmother had taught him to understand the holy and truthful words.

Tears flowed down the boy's cheeks. The blind woman pressed him close to her and soothed him, telling him about God's merciful kindness, His righteousness and long-suffering. The old woman and her grandson prepared diligently to receive the Holy Mysteries. The blind woman became very weak. Seryozha noticed this, he noticed a change come over her face, and his heart was heavy with grief. She was barely able to make it to Confession. After confession, Seryozha went with his grandmother to visit some sick people. It was a clear day; the sun warmed the earth. The old woman smiled.

Meekly and at length, she spoke with the sick folk, who blessed her as she left with her grandson to go home.

That evening they sat for a long time in the little bedroom.

—Remember, Seryozha, my dear, said the grandmother, caressing the boy, remember that all people are not evil in their hearts. Learn to find what is good and holy in the soul of each person. Do not judge or blame others for anything, and no one will condemn you. Think more often of the Savior's Sermon on the Mount. I am old, Seryozha, and I do not know how much longer I will live. You have a father. I wrote to him, and he is returning in a few days. Love your father. Work all your life; do not forget that God gave you life that you might help the poor and suffering. Remember how the Savior suffered, and how during His Passion He thought only about the sinners. You and I had confession today. I sinned a great deal in my life, perhaps I also did much evil. You, however, still have a pure heart. Guard it, Seryozha; guard it from people and from evil! This is a great treasure, it is your wealth. If you grow up to be a good and honest man, my heart will rejoice and give glory. Do not forget God and your neighbor, Seryozha.

The voice of the old lady, although quiet and weak, conveyed such love, such kindness and fervent faith, and it awakened in the soul of the young boy good feelings and thoughts.

—Live with me, Grandma, pleaded the boy. I won't be able to live without you. I shall die. I can't live without your hands, your voice. Remember, Grandma, I shall die.

The boy wept bitterly, pressing against the beloved breast. Tears from the blind eyes fell upon his head.

The next day they received Holy Communion. The old lady was calm and cheerful. She spent the whole day talking with her grandson, explaining passages from the Scripture, caressing him. Before he went to bed, she kissed him warmly, and with her trembling hand, blessed him with the sign of

the Cross. A tear fell upon his brow. For the last time she kissed her beloved boy.

The next morning Seryozha awoke calm and cheerful. The sun peeped brightly through the window. The clean spring air poured through the open casement. Somewhere in the blue sky a lark was singing. Seryozha ran into his grandmother's room and stopped short. She sat in her chair, her head tilted back. In her hands rested a Bible.

Seryozha took her hand. It was cold and heavy. She did not breathe. Her heart no longer beat with infinite love and kindness as it used to. She had died. Seryozha fell unconscious beside the chair.

A few days later, the dear old lady was buried. Seryozha's father spared no expense for the funeral. However, the best reward she received were the tears of all the poor people who followed her coffin. Another grave in the cemetery. They sprinkled earth over Seryozha's grandmother, they wept, they left, and they calmed down. Only one poor child's heart refused to be consoled. Seryozha could not forget his Grandma. How much gentleness, how much kindness, how much self-denying love he had lost. The pain tore at his child's heart. For hours, the boy lay sobbing on the fresh grave, his tears watering the earth.

The sun shines warmly from the clear sky. The lark sings a cheerful song of spring. The honorable heart rests quietly in the damp earth, asleep forever...



It is remarkable that, however much we trouble about our health, however much care we take of ourselves, whatever wholesome and pleasant food and drink we take, however much we walk in the fresh air, still, notwithstanding all this, in the end we sicken and corrupt; whilst the saints, who despise the flesh, and mortify it by continual abstinence and fasting, by lying on the bare earth, by watchfulness, labours, unceasing prayer, make both their souls and bodies immortal. Our well-fed bodies decay and after death emit an offensive odor, whilst theirs remain fragrant and flourishing both in life and after death. It is a remarkable thing: we, by building up our body, destroy it, whilst they, by destroying theirs, build it up—by caring only for the fragrance of their souls before God, they obtain fragrance of the body also.

St. John of Kronstadt

THE HEALING OF THE MAN SICK OF THE PALSYP [MK 2:1-12]

SECOND SUNDAY OF THE GREAT AND HOLY LENT

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic, from "Homilies, vol. II," Lazarica Press, Birmingham (1996), pp. 145-150.

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, until 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 fail.* (Pss 15/16:9). 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 redouble 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.

THE PRAYER OF GETHSEMANE

By Elder Sophrony Sakharov (+2001), from "His Life is Mine," Chapter 13: The Prayer at Gethsemane, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, pp. 91-95.

Christ's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane is the noblest of all prayers by its virtue and power to atone for the sins of the world. Offered to the Eternal God the Father in a spirit of divine love, it continues to shine, a light that cannot be extinguished, forever drawing to itself souls that have preserved their likeness to God.

Christ included the whole human race in this prayer, from Adam to the last man to be born of woman. We lack existential knowledge of such love and so its permanent significance is hidden from us. Victorious in eternity, Christ's love on the earthly plane spells extreme suffering. No one has ever known such suffering as Christ endured. He descended into hell, into the most painful hell of all, the hell of love. This is a sphere of existence which can only be apprehended through spiritual love—how far we can penetrate the mystery depends on the measure of love that it has been granted to us to know from on High. It is vital to have experienced, if only once, the heavenly fire which Christ brought with Him; to know with our entire being what it is to be even a little like Christ.

And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Lk 22:44). Let those who are ignorant of such love, and who have no desire to know, refrain from expressing opinions about Christ. Let no one venture in his folly to disparage the appearance among us of Christ the Immortal King, lest at the end bitter shame compel him to cry *to the mountains and rocks, fall on me, and hide me from the face of him that sitteth on the throne.* (Rev 6:16).

Though the emphasis does not lie on the physical suffering of Christ crucified on the cross, the bodily pain makes the agony total in every respect. We know by experience that the soul can be more dreadfully wounded than the body. And if this is so with the soul in her earthly dimension, what must it be for the soul as spirit aspiring to eternity?

To know, if only *through a glass, darkly* (1 Cor 13:12) the way that Christ Himself travelled; to transform our physical nature into prayer at least palely reflecting His Gethsemane prayer during the most tragic night in the history of the world, we must accept tribulation. Adversity opens the heart to all the suffering in the world. The last stage of this great science of universal love comes when we arrive at the threshold of another life—when we are *dying*. Many, especially in our day, are more or less unconscious during their last hours, and die without prayer. But it would be well if the Christian could cross over in a state of prayer, realizing that he has arrived at the final judgment. Often we die little by little, and thanks to this gradual experience of death we become more and more

able to assume the tragedy of human history and to apprehend the mystery of Gethsemane and, maybe, even of Golgotha.

In the person of the first Adam all mankind suffered a fearful catastrophe, an alienation which is the root of all alienations. The body was wounded, the skeleton smashed, the countenance—the image of God—distorted. Succeeding generations have added many another injury and broken bone to the wounds of the first created man. The whole human corpus is sick. Isaiah described it well: *From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.* (Isa 1:6). The slightest touch is torment. When people are physically ill they realize that others want to help and they put themselves gratefully in the doctor's hands; but when it comes to spiritual suffering they are resentful and ascribe their pain to outside interference. Thus with Christ: He, the One True Physician, in His concern with the sores of our sin caused the most acute pain to all mankind.

There is nothing more dreadful than Christ—Truth. The whole world fears Him. Is it not a fact that if we did indeed accept Christ's absolute Truth, with our inborn longing for truth we could not refuse to follow Him? But a peculiar animal instinct of the flesh quickly tells us that to follow Him involves a readiness to be crucified for love of Him. Where and how shall we find the strength for such heroism? Christ's suffering is impossible to portray. In any case, no one would understand. Just as children do not realize the sacrifices their parents and teachers make to bring them up and pass on to them the hard-earned experience of a lifetime, so generally men did not understand Christ—and even the rare exception only partly understood. Thus the Word of Christ which calls for a radical altering of our whole life came as a cruel wound.

When Christ beheld our distress He suffered more than any of us. And he bore this cross all the years of His service in the world. Golgotha was only the last act, the culminating point, as it were, uniting the whole: the mental distress of an infamous death, the wild vindictive laughter of those to whom He had caused offence the physical pain of being crucified, the grief of His Spirit because men had spurned the tidings of the Father's love. He was condemned on all sides—by the Roman Empire in its zeal for legality and order; by the Church of the Old Testament founded on the Mosaic Law preserved from Mount Sinai; by the crowd who had received so much good at His hands. The disciples scattered. Christ was left alone, convicted and about to descend to those dwelling in the darkness of hell.

Christ is miracle beyond comprehension. He is the all-perfect revelation of God. He is also the all-perfect manifestation of man.

Every one of us will at some moment be brought to the invisible border between time and eternity. Arriving at this

spiritual boundary-line, we shall have to determine our future in the world that lies before us, and decide either to be with Christ, in His likeness, or to depart from Him. Once the choice—to identify with Christ or to refuse Him—has been made, of our own free will, for all eternity, time will no longer function.

Until this moment of decision, however, while we are still in this life we shall often waver in our self-determining, hesitating whether to fulfil the commandments or give way to our passions. Gradually, as we struggle, the mystery of Christ will be revealed to us if we devote ourselves totally to obeying His precepts. The moment will come when heart and mind are so suffused by the vision of the infinite holiness and humility of the God-Christ that our whole being will rise in a surge of love for God. Overwhelmed by self-loathing for the evil in us, we hunger and thirst to become like God in holy humility, and in this longing lies the seed of holiness. Ever-growing love for Christ naturally leads to experiences that liken us to Him; and an unimaginable panorama will unfold before our eyes. The sorrows of the world will grieve us sorely. And we shall forget our body, and our spirit, in so far as it is able, will live Christ's prayer in Gethsemane.

This is the beginning of the knowledge of Christ for the excellency of which St. Paul counted all other things but loss. To win Christ and attain unto the resurrection of the dead, he was ready to reject all other gain. St. Paul spoke thus, not because he had *already attained* but because he was *pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (cf Phil 3:7-14). So, therefore, if the great apostle Paul had not *already attained*, neither may we make hold to set ourselves on a level with Christ. There must be a certain parallel, however. It is essential for all of us to hear at least a fractional likeness if we would call ourselves Christians. But St. Paul aspired after a more perfect likeness and besought the Corinthians to emulate him (cf I Cor 4:16). Consequently, we must cast fear and faint-heartedness aside and in spirit follow after Christ that we may inherit life eternal in true knowledge of the Heavenly Father and of Christ, Whom He, the Father, sent into the world (cf Jn 17:3).

It can be said with some foundation that almost nowhere is genuine Christianity preached. Christianity so far surpasses the ordinary understanding that the praying heart does not venture to preach the Gospel word. People seek Truth. They love Christ. But, in our day especially, they try to reduce Him to dimensions of their own making, which debases the Gospels to the level of moralistic doctrine. Yet Christ declared, *Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.* (Mk 13:31; Lk 21:33).

To attain to knowledge of Truth demands far more effort than it takes to acquire practical and scientific learning. Neither the reading of a vast number of books, nor familiarity with the history of Christianity, nor the study of different theological

systems can bring us to our goal, unless we continuously and to our utmost cling to the commandments of Christ.

When a shadow of a likeness to the Gethsemane prayer is granted him, man then transcends the boundaries of his own individuality and enters into a new form of being—personal being in the likeness of Christ. By participating in the sufferings of His Divine love we, too, in spirit can experience a little of His death and of the power of His resurrection. *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death* (in deep prayer for the world and consuming desire for the salvation of all) *we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.* (Rom 6:5). When it is given to us from on High to enter this new sphere of Being, we arrive at *the ends of the world* (I Cor 10:11) and pass into the light of Divine Eternity.

And every man on whom God has bestowed the rare and dread privilege of knowing to a minute degree the agony of Christ's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane will stumble on, slowly and painfully, to a cogent awareness of the resurrection of his own soul and a perception of Christ's undeniable, ineluctable victory. He will know *that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.* (Rom 6:9). And his spirit within him will whisper: My Lord and my God... *Now, O Christ, by the gift of Thy love which passeth all understanding I, too, have crossed from death into life...*

Now—"I am."



THE TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY

By Archbishop Averky (Taushev) of Syracuse (+1976).

This is the Apostolic faith, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the Orthodox faith—confirm this universal faith.

† † †

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, you will hear these solemn and significant words in the Rite of Orthodoxy which the holy Church has established to be served on this day. The first week of Holy and Great Lent has ended a week of intensified prayer and ascetical repentance. Now the holy Church, desiring to encourage and console us, has established for us in this first week of Great Lent, on its first Sunday, a spiritual celebration, one most dear and close to our hearts—the triumph of Orthodoxy.

This celebration was first performed in 842 in Constantinople in the presence of the Blessed Empress Theodora by His Holiness Patriarch Methodius, in memory of the overthrow of the last terrible heresy to shake Christ's Church, the heresy

of iconoclasm. However, in this celebration the holy Church marks the triumph of the holy Orthodox faith in general, her victory over all impious heresies, false teachings and schisms.

Our Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour founded His Church on earth so that all belonging to her could be saved, could elude the nets of the devil and enter into the Heavenly Kingdom prepared for them. The devil exerted all his strength to overthrow and destroy the Church of Christ and, through this, to hinder the salvation of men. At first, he raised up terrible persecutions against the Church on the part of the Jews and pagans. For almost three centuries, the blood of Christian martyrs flowed without ceasing. Nevertheless, the devil did not succeed in his task. The blood of the martyrs, according to the apt expression of the Christian apologist Tertullian, became the “seeds of Christians.” Christianity triumphed over its persecutors. *The meek lambs of Christ’s flock transformed the wolf-like rage of their persecutors into lamb-like meekness.*

But the devil did not resist after the defeat he suffered at the hands of the martyrs. When the Church of Christ triumphed in the world, he raised up a new, even more dangerous persecution against her: from within the Church, as the holy Apostle Paul had foretold in his conversation with the Ephesian presbyters, men arose *speaking perverse things*. St. Paul called such men *grievous wolves*. (Acts 20:29-30).

These were so-called “heretics” who tried to pervert the true teaching of Christ concerning faith and piety in order to make this teaching ineffective for men. When this happened, the holy Church, in the person of its best servants, took up arms against these heretics in order to defend its true, un-distorted teaching. There began to be convoked first “local” and then “ecumenical” councils. Bishops came together from all the corners of the earth and through the Holy Spirit they gave voice to the pure and un-distorted Truth, following the example of the First Apostolic Council of Jerusalem, (Acts 15:6-29).

They also cut off heretics from the Church and anathematized them. This was in accordance with the clear commandment of Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who said, *If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican*. (Mt 18:17). And in accordance with the commandment of the holy Apostle Paul, that great “Apostle to the Nations” who said, *But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*. (Gal 1:8). And in another place he states: *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema*. (1 Cor 16:22).

Thus our moving, majestic and solemn Rite of Orthodoxy takes its beginning from our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and from his great Apostle, called by Him to be the “Apostle to the Nations”, i.e., of the whole pagan world. From the ninth century on the holy Church has established that this rite should be served on the first Sunday of holy Great Lent and that it be called “Sunday of Orthodoxy.”

The rite, brothers and sisters, is particularly important and significant in the evil times we are experiencing, times in which the Orthodox faith is wavering and shaking. This wavering and shaking of the Orthodox faith is due to those very persons who ought to be strengthening and supporting it in the souls of the faithful. Those who should be pillars of holy Orthodoxy—high-ranking hierarchs including the heads of certain Local Churches—are departing from the Truth of holy Orthodoxy. It is terrible to have to say that even the head of the Constantinopolitan Church, which is known as the “Ecumenical” Church, the man considered to be the first hierarch of all Orthodoxy, has set out on this path!

On all of this there undoubtedly lies the print of the Apostasy about which the holy Apostle Paul foretold (2Thess 2-3)—the apostasy of Christians from Christ. We are now face to face with this Apostasy. The major threat to true Christian faith, the Orthodox faith, is the so called “Ecumenical ‘Movement’,” headed by what is known as the “World Council of Churches.” This body denies the doctrine of the unity and infallibility of the True Church of Christ and attempts to create from all the presently existing and distracted faiths, a new “false-church.” This treacherous “church,” from our point of view, will without any doubt be the “church” of Antichrist, that false-church which the Antichrist, whose coming is now being rapidly prepared in the world, will head.

From the teaching of the Word of God and the holy Fathers of the Church, we know that the Antichrist will be both the religious and political leader of all humanity: he will stand at the head of the new universal false Church; he will also be the director of one new world government and will attempt to submit all to his absolute power.

The Orthodox faith—this is the “faith of the Apostles,” it is “the faith of the Fathers”—it is that faith which the Apostolic Fathers, the direct disciples of the holy Apostles, and the holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church and their lawful successors, established by the Holy Spirit, interpreted for us in their marvelous and inspired writings.

Brothers and sisters, we must hold this faith steadfastly if we desire eternal salvation! Now we shall perform with you this deeply instructive, moving and highly solemn rite which consists of two parts:

The first part is the prayer of the holy Church for all those who have gone astray or fallen away from the true Orthodox faith. **In the second part**, the holy Church pronounces dread anathema against all false teachers, heretics and schismatics who have grown stubborn in their malice and who do not wish to reunite with the true Church of Christ but instead struggle against her.

Then we shall chant *Eternal Memory* for all departed defenders of holy Orthodoxy and *Many Years* for those defenders of the holy Orthodox faith and Church who are still among the living. Amen!

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THE DIVINE POWER OF THE RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD CHRIST

By St. Justin Popovich.



In the Lives of the Saints it is clearly and obviously demonstrated: There is no spiritual death from which one cannot be resurrected by the Divine power of the risen and ascended Lord Christ; there is no torment, there is no misfortune, there is no misery, there is no suffering which the Lord will not change either gradually or all at once into quiet, compunctionate joy because of faith in Him.

And again there are countless soul-stirring examples of how a sinner becomes a righteous man in the lives of the Saints: how a thief, a fornicator, a drunkard, a sensualist, a murderer, and adulterer becomes a holy man—there are many, many example of this in the Lives of the Saints; how a selfish, egotistical, unbelieving, atheistic, proud, avaricious, lustful, evil, wicked, depraved, angry, spiteful, quarrelsome, malicious, envious, malevolent, boastful, vainglorious, unmerciful, gluttonous man becomes a man of God—there are many, many example of this in the Lives of the Saints

By the same token in the Lives of the Saints there are very many marvelous examples of how a youth becomes a holy

youth, a maiden becomes a holy maiden, an old man becomes a holy old man, how an old woman becomes a holy old woman, how a child becomes a holy child, how parents become holy parents, how a son becomes a holy son, how a daughter becomes a holy daughter, how a family becomes a holy family, how a community becomes a holy community, how a priest becomes a holy priest, how a bishop becomes a holy bishop, how a shepherd becomes a holy shepherd, how a peasant becomes a holy peasant, how an emperor becomes a holy emperor, how a cowherd becomes a holy cowherd, how a worker becomes a holy worker, how a judge becomes a holy judge, how a teacher becomes a holy teacher, how an instructor becomes a holy instructor, how a soldier becomes holy soldier, how an officer becomes a holy officer, how a ruler becomes a holy ruler, how a scribe becomes a holy scribe, how a merchant becomes a holy merchant, how a monk becomes a holy monk, how an architect becomes a holy architect, how a doctor becomes a holy doctor, how a tax collector becomes a holy tax collector, how a pupil becomes a holy pupil, how an artisan becomes holy artisan, how a philosopher becomes a holy philosopher, how a scientist becomes a holy scientist, how a statesman becomes a holy statesman, how a minister becomes a holy minister, how a poor man becomes a holy poor man, how a rich man becomes a holy rich man, how a slave becomes a holy slave, how a master becomes a holy master, how a married couple becomes a holy married couple, how an author becomes a holy author, how an artist becomes a holy artist...

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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THE VICTOR OVER DEATH

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic, from "Homilies, vol. 1," Lazarica Press, Birmingham (1996), pp. 205-211.

The frozen gather round the fire; the famished gather round the table; those who have endured great suffering through the long night rejoice at the sunrise; those exhausted by fierce battles cheer an unexpected victory. O risen Lord, Thou hast, by Thy Resurrection, become all things to all men! O most rich King, Thou hast, with one gift, filled all the empty hands stretched heavenward! Rejoice, O ye heavens, and O ye earth, rejoice! Rejoice, O ye heavens, as a mother rejoices when she feeds her hungry children; rejoice O ye earth, as children rejoice on receiving nourishment from their mother's hands!

Christ's victory is the only victory in which all humanity can rejoice, from the first-created to the last. Every other victory on earth has divided, and still divides, men from one another. When an earthly king gains the victory over another king, one of them rejoices and the other laments. When a man is victorious over his neighbor, there is singing under one roof and weeping under the other. There is no joyful victory on earth that is not poisoned by malice: the ordinary, earthly victor rejoices both in his laughter and in the tears of his conquered enemy. He does not even notice how evil cuts through joy.

When Tamerlaine was victorious over Sultan Bayazit, he put the latter in an iron cage and held a victory feast in front of it. His malice was his whole joy; his wickedness was food for his mirth. Oh, my brethren, how brief a joy is malice! Oh, how poisonous a food for mirth is evil! When King Stefan of Decani was victorious over the Bulgarian king, he

would not enter Bulgarian lands, nor take the Bulgarian people prisoner, but in deep distress went off to a hermitage to fast and pray. This latter victor was more noble than the former. But this victory, as every victory, was not without its barb for the conquered. And even the most exalted human history is like some sun, the rays of which are half bright, half dark.

Christ's victory alone is like a sun that sheds bright rays on all that are beneath it. Christ's victory alone fills all the souls of men with invincible joy. It alone is without malice or evil.

A mysterious victory, you will say? It is; but it is at the same time revealed to the whole human race, the living and the dead.

A generous victory, you will say? It is, and more than generous. Is not a mother more than generous when she, not just once or twice, saves her children from snakes but, in order to save them for all time, goes bravely into the snakes' very nest and burns them out?

A healing victory, you will say? It is, healing and saving forever and ever. This gentle victory saves men from every evil and makes them sinless and immortal. Immortality without sinlessness would mean only the extending of evil's reign, and of that of malice and wickedness, but immortality with sinlessness gives birth to unconfined joy, and makes men the brethren of God's resplendent angels.

Who would not rejoice in the victory of Christ the Lord? He was not victorious for His own sake, but for ours. His victory did not make Him greater, or more alive, or richer, but it did us. His victory is not selfishness, but love, not grabbing but giving. Earthly conquerors take the victory; Christ is the only Conqueror who brings it. No single earthly conqueror, king or commander desires

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that his victory be taken from him and given to another; only the risen Lord offers His victory with both hands to each one of us, and is not angered but rather rejoices when we, by His victory, become victors—that is: greater, more alive and richer than we were.

Earthly victories look better when viewed from afar, but uglier and more repulsive when seen close at hand; while, as for Christ’s victory, one could not say whence it looks better, from afar or from close at hand. Looking at this victory from afar, we marvel at it as unique in its brightness, purity and saving grace. Looking at it from close at hand, we marvel at it because of the terrible enemies who are overcome by it, and also because of the vast numbers of slaves who have been freed by it. Today is the day above all other days in the year consecrated to the celebration of this victory of Christ’s, and so it is fitting to look at this victory from close at hand, both for our better knowledge and for our greater joy.

Let us, then, draw near to our risen and victorious Lord, and ask ourselves: Firstly, over whom was He victorious by His Resurrection? Secondly, whom has He freed by His victory?

I

By His Resurrection, the Lord overcame the two fiercest enemies of human life and dignity: death and sin. These two enemies of the human race were born when the first man sundered himself from God, treading underfoot the commandments about obedience to his Creator. In Paradise, man knew neither death nor sin, neither fear nor shame. For, cleaving to the living God, man could know nothing of death, and, living in perfect obedience to God, could know nothing of sin. Where death is unknown, there is no fear; and where sin is unknown, there is no shame born of sin. As soon as man sinned against his saving obedience to God, both fear

and shame came with the sin: man felt himself infinitely far from God, and had a premonition of death’s sickle over him. Therefore, when God called to Adam, and asked: *Where art thou?*, he said: *I heard Thy voice in the garden and was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.* (Gen 3:9-10). Up till then, God’s voice had encouraged, gladdened and vivified Adam, but then, when the sin had been committed, this same voice weakened, terrified and deadened him. Up till then, Adam knew himself to be clad in the immortal vesture of the angels, but he then knew himself deflowered by sin, looted, debased to the level of the animals and reduced to the size of a pygmy.

So, my brethren, you see how terrible is the least sin of disobedience to God. Becoming afraid of God, Adam hid himself amongst the trees of the garden—like a domestic cat that, when it goes wild, makes for the hills and begins to hide from its owner and the hand that fed it! From irrational animals, over which Adam had till then had full authority, he began to seek protection aside from his Protector. One sin, with lightning-like speed, attracted a second, third, hundredth, thousandth, until man finally became of the beasts, beastly, and of the earth, earthly, in both body and soul. The sinful path on which Adam set out led him to the earth and into it. And so God said: *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return* (Gen 3:19), expressing not only God’s judgement but also a further process in man’s earthboundness and fragmentation, only just begun but making quick progress.

Adam’s descendants, generation after generation, became more and more earthbound and fragmented, sinning with shame and dying with fear and horror. Men hid from God amongst trees, rocks, gold and dust; but the more they hid themselves, the more separated they became from the true

God, and the more they forgot Him. Nature, that had once lain before men's feet, gradually grew up above his head, so that in the end it completely concealed God's face from him and took His place. And man began to make a god of nature: listening to it, behaving in accordance with it, praying to it and bringing it sacrifices. But the deifying of nature was not able to save either it or man from death and corruption. The terrible path that mankind was following was the path of sin; and this disastrous path led unrelentingly to one gloomy city, and one alone: the city of the dead. Kings of the earth ruled over men; sin and death ruled over both men and kings. The further it went, the greater the burden of sin grew, like a snowball when it rolls downhill. The human race had reached the depths of despair when the heavenly Hero appeared to save it.

This Hero was the Lord Jesus. Eternally sinless and eternally immortal, He passed through the graveyard of the human race, scattering the flowers of immortality as He went. The stench of sin fled from His breath, and the dead were revived at His word. But He, in His love for mankind, took the mountain of sin on Himself, in the same way that He, in His love for mankind, clothed Himself in mortal, human flesh. But human sin was so heavy and terrible that, under its weight, the Son of God Himself went down to the grave.

Blessed an hundredfold be that grave from which a river of immortality for the whole human race burst forth! The Hero went down beneath the grave to Hades, where He toppled Satan's throne and destroyed the breeding-ground of all the wicked plots against the human race. From this grave the Hero rose to the highest heavens, opening up a new path—to the city of the living. He destroyed hell in His might and, in His might, glorified His body and rose from the grave—in His own might, that is indivisible from that of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Meek as a lamb, the gentle Lord went to suffering and death, and mighty as God He endured the suffering and conquered death. His Resurrection is a real event, and is at the same time the prophecy and the image of our resurrection—for *the trumpet shalt sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible*. (1 Cor 15:52).

There are some who will ask: how can it be said that the risen Lord has conquered death, when men still die? They who come into this world through their mother's womb will leave it through death and the grave. This is the rule. Only, death for us who die in Christ is no longer a dark abyss, but

is birth into new life and a return to our homeland. The grave is, for us, no longer an eternal darkness but a gateway at which God's resplendent angels await us. For all who are filled with love for the beautiful and loving Lord, the grave has become only the last obstacle to His presence - and this obstacle is as weak as a spider's web. And so the glorious Apostle Paul cries: *For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain!* (Phil 1:21).

How has the Lord not conquered death, when death is no more visible in His presence? The grave is no more a deep abyss, because He has filled it with Himself; neither is the grave dark anymore, because He has illumined it; neither is it fear and horror any more, for it marks, not the end but the beginning; neither is it our eternal homeland, but only the door to that homeland. The difference between death before Christ's Resurrection and after it is like the difference between a terrible conflagration and the flame of a candle. Christ's victory is fundamental, and therefore, through Him, *death is swallowed up in victory*. (1 Cor 15:54).

There are others who will ask: how can it be said that the risen Lord has conquered sin, when men still sin? The Lord has indeed conquered sin. He conquered it by His sinless conception and birth; then by His pure and sinless life on earth; then by His suffering on the Cross, being righteous; and finally He crowned this conquest by His glorious Resurrection. He became the medicine,

the appropriate and infallible medicine, against sin. He who is infected by sin can only be healed by Christ. He who wants not to sin can only with Christ's help make this desire a reality. When men found a cure for smallpox, they said: we have conquered this disease! They said the same thing when they found a cure for tonsillitis, toothache, gout and other similar illnesses: we have overcome them! The finding of a cure for an illness, then, means the conquering of it. Christ is by far the greatest Physician in human history, for He brought men the cure for the sickness beyond all sicknesses—for sin, from which all other sicknesses and all man's other sufferings, both physical and spiritual, are born. This medicine is He Himself, the risen and living Lord. He is the one and only effective Medicine for sin. If men, even today, sin and, by sinning, come to ruin, this does not mean that Christ did not conquer sin, but only that the men in question have not taken the one and only medicine against their mortal sickness; it means either that they do not sufficiently know Christ as the medicine or, if they know the Lord, they do not make use



of Him for one reason or another. But history testifies, with thousand upon thousand of voices, that those who make use of this medicine for their souls and take it into their bodies, are healed and made whole.

Knowing the weakness of our being, the Lord Christ intended it for the faithful, for them to take Him as food and drink under the visible forms of bread and wine. This the Lover of Mankind did out of His immeasurable love for men, simply in order to facilitate their approach to the life-giving medicine for sin and for the corruption brought about by sin. *He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me and I in him and he shall live by Me.* (Jn 6:56-7). Those who sin feed on sin, and the life that is in them is gradually lost through sin. Those, though, who feed on the living Lord feed on life, and the life within them increases more and more, and death decreases. And as much as life is increased, so much is sin decreased. The insipid and gloomy sweetness of sin is replaced in them by the joyful and life-giving sweetness of Christ the Victor.

Blessed are they who have tested and experienced this mystery in their lives. They can be called the sons of light and children of grace. When they pass from this life, they will, as it were, leave hospital, being no longer sick men.

II

W e ask ourselves now: whom has the risen Lord freed by His victory over sin and death? People of only one nation, or one race? People of one class or social position? No; in no way. Such a freeing would, in its essentials, be the malicious victory of earthly conquerors. The Lord is not called “Lover of the Jews”, or “Lover of the Greeks”, or “Lover of the poor”, or “Lover of the aristocrats”, but Lover of mankind. He intended His victory to be for all men, with no consideration of the differences that men make among themselves. He won His victory for the good and the help of all created men, and has offered it to them all. To those who accept this victory and make it their own, He has promised eternal life and co-inheritance in the heavenly Kingdom. He imposes this victory on no-one, even though it cost so dearly, but leaves men free to make it their own or not. As man in Paradise freely chose the fall, death and sin at the hands of Satan, so he is now free to choose life and salvation at the hands of God the Victor.

Christ’s victory is a balm, a life-giving balm, for all men, all having become leprous from sin and death. This balm makes the sick well, and the well even healthier. This balm raises the dead and gives fuller life to the living. This balm makes a man wise, it ennobles and divinises him; it increases his strength an hundred-fold, a thousand-fold, and it raises his dignity far above all other nature, in its weakened state, even to the resplendence and beauty of God’s angels and archangels.

O most lovely and life-giving balm! What hand would not take you? What heart would not apply you to its wounds?

What throat would not sing your praises? What pen would not record the wonders you have wrought? What abacus would not count up all your healings of the sick and raisings of the dead up till now? What tears would not be shed in gratitude to you?

Come then, all you my brethren who fear death. Come closer to Christ the Risen and the Raiser, and He will free you from death and the fear of death. Come, all of you who live under the shame of your open and secret sins. Draw nearer to the living Fount that washes and cleanses, and that can make the blackest vessel whiter than snow. Come, all of you who seek health, strength, beauty and joy. Lo, the risen Christ is the rich Source of them all. He awaits you with compassion and yearning, desiring that no-one be lost.

Bow down before Him, in body and soul. Unite yourself with Him with all your mind and thoughts. Embrace Him with all your heart. Do not worship the enslaver, but the Liberator; do not unite yourself to the destroyer but to the Savior; do not embrace the stranger but your closest Kinsman and your dearest Friend.

The risen Lord is the Wonder of wonders, but He is, while being the Wonder of wonders, of the same nature as you are—of real human nature, the primal nature that was Adam’s in Paradise. True human nature was not created to be enslaved to the irrational nature that surrounds it, but to govern nature by its power. Neither does man’s true nature consist in worthlessness, sickness, mortality and sinfulness, but in glory and health, in immortality and sinlessness.

The risen Lord has torn down the curtain that divided true Godhead from true humanity, and has shown us in Himself the greatness and beauty of the one and the other. No man can know the true God except through the risen Lord Jesus; neither can any man know true man except through Him alone.

Christ is risen, my brethren!

By His Resurrection, Christ conquered sin and death, destroyed Satan’s dark kingdom, freed the enslaved human race and broke the seal on the greatest mysteries of God and man. 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.



W e 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.

St. Gregory the Theologian

THE SOUL'S PATH AFTER DEATH

Source: "Stories, Sermons, and Prayers of St. Nephon: An Ascetic Bishop," translated from Greek by J. E. Gentithes and Fr. I. Apostolopoulos, *Light and Life Publishing Company, Minneapolis, MN* (1989), pp. 78-87.

A pious Christian related to me the following amazing incident: He told me that one Saturday night, when he was praying in the narthex of Saint Anastasius during the usual resurrectional vigil, the servant of God Nephon also came, because he always observed vigils every Saturday night in the churches of the saints

"Well," my companion said, "I see a large number of white-clad men traveling with him, some in front of him and others behind him, rejoicing that that they were surrounding him. But even more dread a cross as tall as he and glittering as if made of pure gold was rising in front of him. Similar glittering crosses were on the right and left, in back and over the saint's head. They were entwined

and built a wall around him. When a temptation came during that moment of the battle, the Lord, wanting to test him, permitted the crosses to part. Thus they left a small opening amongst them through which the enemies were able to throw their arrows. A great number of angels and demons watched the battle. The saint would raise his hands toward the Most-High God and with his pure mind would ascend to Him. He would remain up there praying. Seeing him and fearing the wrath of God, Satan would tremble and say to his army: 'Let's go, boys, away from this Nephon, because he has ascended to heaven and is praying against us to the Great One. Let's disappear then before His wrath comes down and tortures us.'

"And immediately they would vanish. Then that blessed one would come down to earth after the prayer, come to himself and, not finding any enemy, he would thank the good Lord Who shielded him.

"Then the angels also departed happy, while the precious crosses came together again closing the entrance and guarding the righteous one.

"Many times," that good Christian continued, "the devil would come with a large number of demons to throw him in a passion but couldn't, because, surrounded by the power of the cross, he would ridicule them and spit on them. Thus the dark demons, thoroughly ashamed, would disappear, while he glorified God even more for granting him such power against the invisible enemies."



Once when he was praying and had his gaze turned to Heaven, a divine light shone in front of him. At the same time a white-clad angel, dressed as a deacon, appeared. He was holding a gold censer and censed first in the direction of Heaven and then Nephon. Suddenly the gates of Heaven opened and the angels of God ascended and descended like bees, transporting the souls of people who had died. The evil spirits of the air were struggling to grab them and throw them down, but the angels resisted violently, whipping them and saving the souls.

Astonished the saint saw a soul being taken up to heaven. But as soon as they approached the toll booth of immortality, its leader started to shake and become wild. "With what right," he was shouting, "do you take that soul which belongs to us?"

And the angels answered him: "Prove to us what authority you have over this man."

"Up until his death," the demon said, "he was wallowing voluntarily in all kinds of indecencies. And not only this, but

he also judged others. What crimes more horrible than these do you want "

"Yes," the angels admitted, "he was a slave to these passions, but he cut them before he died."

"No! It's not the way you're telling me," the demon squealed. "He died unrepented. To his last breath he violated the law without ever confessing his sins. He was and still is mine."

Then one of the angels said: "We are not about to believe you, who are entirely wallowing in falsehood. Let's call his angel. He will tell us the whole truth."

They called him, because he was still guarding the body until its interment. As soon as he came, they asked him: "Tell us, brother, did this soul repent for its sins or did it die with them? Tell us the whole truth."

Then the angel answered: "I am neither human nor an impudent spirit to tell lies, but before God I assure you: from the time he became ill, even before he took a turn for the worse, he thought of death. Then he began to cry and confess his sins to God. Continually he would raise his hands toward the Most High asking for mercy. If God wills, He will forgive him. If not, glory to His righteous judgment!"

As soon as the angels heard this, they laughed at the devil. Thus the humble soul was liberated from the snares of its enemies.

In a little while the saint saw another soul being carried up. It belonged to a blasphemous and hard man. The demons were accusing him and reminding him one-by-one of the

improper words and grave curses he used to say to the people when he was alive.

The angels said in rebuttal that he had a few rights to salvation. Many times, for example, even though he was thinking of doing something bad he would immediately repent, reproaching and degrading himself. Often he would sigh bitterly and sometimes he would tear. Once in a while he would even give a little charity to the poor. Having this in mind, the angels of light claimed that God would have mercy on that soul. Angered then the demons said: "From his youth he did things that were not right for a Christian: He polluted himself with different sins and, indeed sodomitic ones. Where shall we place his curses and anger? And the worst, he even committed murder. If therefore he must be saved, then take the whole world and all the sinners of the earth and save them gratis; because we are laboring and getting upset in vain!"

"Keep in mind, wretches, that he cut all his youthful sins and God forgave him. And if sometimes he did something bad, he cleansed it with repentance. What do you want then, wild beasts? That this soul be condemned? Impossible, since God forgives the sins people confess tearfully and humbly and do not repeat. *Anything that becomes visible is light.* (Eph 5:13). The righteous Judge punishes only those sins they take with them."

Thus the angels defeated the spirits of wickedness and entered into the gate of Heaven. Therefore, that creature of God was also liberated from the claws of the demons, and He Who saves freely granted him salvation.

Again the blessed one saw them lifting still another soul that was very devout and God-fearing. She spent all her life in purity, modesty, and a great deal of charity. She showed love toward all. The dragons of the air threatened her, gnashing their teeth. And that poor thing, terrified by their wildness, shriveled up in the bosom of the angels of God, while the angels descending to take other souls kissed her with love.

When that holy soul ascended into heaven, a large number of good spirits gathered around her, embracing and kissing her tenderly, and saying joyfully: "Glory to God Who delivered this soul from the dreadful dragon!"

It was a delight to see them. The heavenly powers always do this: they rejoice and celebrate for each Christian who is saved. When they reached the throne of Grace, they brought her to the feet of the Lord Jesus, and He permitted her to worship His Father and to be filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Later He turned her over to Michael, the lord of the covenant, to guide her to eternal rest, as indeed it happened.

Down further, however, the servant of God saw the demons dragging a soul to the infernal regions. It was the soul of some servant who had hung himself. Behind him followed his guardian angel weeping bitterly for his loss. In the midst of his tears he was saying: "Ah, the foxy demons who make people do such evil! There, this servant's master, obeying the demons, would become angry, hit him terribly, and let him starve to death. And this poor soul became desperate, took the rope and hung himself, offering his life wholly a sacrifice to Satan. Ah, alas! The Almighty gave him to me to guard after his baptism, and the filthy dragon snatched him from me suddenly and devoured him! How will I appear to my Lord in this grieving and bitter state? But also, how will I face my Maker sorrowful for the loss of this soul?"

While he was painfully saying this, another angel appeared from heaven. "Our Father, the Lord of hosts," he told him, "commands it go to Rome, where this very moment the son of a soldier is baptized. Take charge of him and guard him through the Holy Spirit given to him at baptism. And I shall punish the master of this servant and teach him not to become angry nor hit his servants nor let them starve to death.

The angel said this on behalf of God and ascended into heaven, while the former set out for Rome according to the divine command.

That instant Nephon saw them bringing up a soul with a lot of commotion. Multitudes of demons were making noise and were attempting to snatch the unfortunate soul. It was the soul of a clergyman who had spent his life in immorality. He even committed murders! He would lie in wait in the street at night and kill the passers-by. Then he would take their clothes and sell them to feed his jesters!

Therefore, as that wretched soul was ascending, it didn't make it through the fourth station: the dragon stretched out his hands with impudence, snatched it from the angels and cast it down to earth. The demons took it then, lowered it into the abyss and turned it over to the prince of darkness, so that it might remain captive there along with similar sinful souls, until the day of the common resurrection.

As the dark demons were returning again, they were puffed up and put on airs saying amongst themselves: "Look, we even beat the clergy of the Nazarene and trample them under foot!"

Then one of them sadly whispered: "Why are we bragging that we destroyed one unfortunate soul? I can show you a



large number of priests who shine with virtue; we can't even touch them."

"If they didn't have the mark of Jesus," the others answered, "and His help all around them, then you'd see our power!"

"And why should we fear the wood on which the Nazarene was nailed? This is an example of complete decadence!"

"It's not the wood, but the terrible lightning which pours forth from it. The bad part is that the lightning which burns us doesn't come only from the wood, but the same thing happens when the Christians sign themselves with this symbol."

Then to trap him the others said to him: "And when did you experience all this?"

"In Constantinople there is a relentless enemy of ours named Nephon. I and others of us threw ourselves at him from his youth. We used to send him provocative temptations all day. We inflamed him so terribly that in the end he fell into sin. And while we registered his defeat with a lot of pride, he repented at the same instant and started reproaching himself and weeping: 'Oh! For this body that the worms will eat, I yielded to my evil desire. Woe to me, it is this that will throw me into the fire.' And saying this he became like a maniac. We laughed at his expense. But he who was very foxy and knew our tricks shouted to us: 'Now I'll show you, corrupt demons!' He got up at once, and with his hand he traced the sign of the Nazarene on us. Oh! It was as if fire passed through our hearts immediately. Terrorized we dispersed instantly. Only one of us dared to stand far off, to see what he was going to do. He saw him enter the church quickly. He prostrated himself to God three times and said: 'Lord, I am a sinful man, young in age, still struggling with my passions and the fire of the flesh. Therefore, do not count this fall of mine as a sin. You are Lord and have authority to forgive my offenses with only Your word.'

"As soon as he said these words, an angel crowned him for his repentance and contrition. In spite of all this," the demon continued, "furious with his flesh, he began to strike his face with all the strength he had. Later, he lifted his hands again to heaven and beseeched God, saying: 'You, the fearful God, Who gave birth to the fearful Son, and rule everywhere with Your fearful Spirit, hear me, the filthy one. And torture those abominations who roar with laughter at my expense. *For against Thee only have I sinned* (Pss 50:4), I, the filthy and corrupt one.'

"At once the angel who had crowned him threw a rope and tied us all together. Then taking us out one by one, he gave us each a thousand blows. With our cries and woes we raised the roof. As he was hitting us he was saying: 'So that you may never be the reason again for the servants of God to hit their bodies!' And after that compassionless angel tortured us greatly, we barely got away. From that

time on whenever I see that Nephon I vanish, because I fear the beatings!..."

When the demon finished his tale, the others started making fun of him and calling him wretched, unfortunate and a coward.

In the meantime in his vision Nephon was following everything the evil spirits were saying about him and laughed at them.

After a little while he saw an angel descending toward Constantinople, the seven-hilled city. He was holding a terrible flaming sword. Someone, tormented pitifully, was dying at that hour. He was a compassionless usurer. In addition, he used to gossip scandalously about Nephon: he called him a heretic, a hypocrite, etc. "Why is he this and that? Why does he do this or that?" The miserable one didn't look at himself but concerned himself with others.

Well, the angel of fire came and stood by his bed looking toward heaven, as if waiting for something. Indeed a voice was heard: "Quickly, punish the antichrist severely and cut the prodigal soul from the bonds of the body. While he lived, this good-for-nothing never did My will. And not only that, but he also judged My servant Nephon. Hit him fiercely! May he never again choke the poor by lending them gold."

As soon as the punishing angel heard the voice, he heartily struck the miserable usurer with all the strength he had, and he gave up the spirit at once, gnashing his teeth and groaning from the depths of his soul. The angel took his soul which was terribly tormented and turned toward the abyss...

Then St. Nephon came to himself. Dumbfounded and sad for all he had seen, he thought and said: "Ah, how much misery we, humble and sinful, hide! And then Judgment and the terrible fire come wherever we go for all eternity. We must aim for salvation at all costs, forcing ourselves to do good. Only in this way we will please God and not violate His commandments." And immediately he prayed:

"O Lord, my God, I've placed my hope in You: deliver me from those who pursue me and save me. The treacherous prince of darkness, like a roaring lion, will snatch my miserable soul, if You, my Christ, do not deliver it and save it by Your Holy Spirit... Blessed is he who obeys You, Who became poor and destitute for our salvation; because at the time of his death You will redeem him from the corrupt spirits of wickedness who, like evil censors, shameless accusers, compassionless overseers, stand and seek to devour his poor soul. O fearful and Almighty Master, Who shake everything and they tremble, deliver the race of Christians from those tyrants. Have mercy on all those who have placed their hopes in You, O Holy One, and forgive them who grievously transgress Your law and ceaselessly embitter Your compassion."

He was still tearful from the thought of that poor usurer whose soul was taken by the avenging angel with the flaming sword. He was thinking how bitter his death was

without any pity from God—even though he occasionally gave something to the poor from the interest he collected!... Because, as Nephon said, at the time his miserable soul was being tormented, he cried out: “Remember, O Lord, the alms I gave to the poor.” But a voice was heard saying: “Yes, wretch! You drank the blood of the poor and watered other poor men with it!... Shall I be merciful to you for that, or because you slandered the one I love? Night and day he prays for the sinners. He wouldn’t stop beseeching even for you. Then, why did you speak evil of him? Learn now that you should not have judged anyone...”

Nephon related all this to his acquaintances and advised them. “Be careful, my children, not to judge anyone, especially if he is a man of God. I beg you, guard yourselves from this sin. Look after yourselves and be conscious of your own faults. With this consciousness we will be able to repent. Some of the servants of God show and some hide their virtue. Certain people criticize those who have the courage to be seen. However, these will be punished harshly on Judgment Day. For God has placed before all men those who scorn human glory, so that they may confess their faith with courage, and thus benefit many. *Let your light so shine before men, He commanded them, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* (Mt 5:16). And conversely, to those who lean toward conceit He says: *Those who do the works of righteousness openly to be pleasing to people and not to Me, truly, truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.* (Mt 6:1) For he who willfully is vain will not receive mercy. Keeping this in mind, then, my children, let us not judge anyone, and let us not pay attention to the slanderers, whether they criticize a righteous person or anyone else. *Judge not, that ye be not judged* (Mt 7:1), the Lord commands. You who sit on the throne do not scorn your servant, for he may hide within him the Spirit of God and, without realizing it, you find yourself the enemy of God.”

The saint said this to them and begged them once more to look to themselves and not judge anyone. But also they should not lend money with interest, for how does it profit a man to say he is a Christian when he has stored up gold and lends it out with interest? First of all, he does not have his hope in God. Second, he is an idolater. Third, he suffers of avarice and drowns night and day in cares. He doesn’t even get enough sleep! Finally, death comes, too. Oh, what foolishness!...



A man in this world must solve a problem: to be with Christ, or to be against Him. And every man decides this, whether he wants to or not. He will either be a lover of Christ or a fighter of Christ. There is no third option.

St. Justin Popovich (+1979)

ON HOLY SCRIPTURES

Source: “*The Truth of Our Faith, Discourses from Holy Scripture on the Tenets of Christian Orthodoxy*,” by Elder Cleopa of Romania, translated from Greek by Fr. Peter A. Heers, Uncut Mountain Press, Thessaloniki, Greece (2000), pp. 45-51.



INQUIRER: What do we mean by the term *Holy Scripture*?

ELDER CIEOPA: The term *Holy Scripture* denotes the sum of holy books that were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit within a time period of close to 1,500 years, namely, from Moses (some 1,400 years before Christ), until the writer of the Apocalypse (Revelations, *Ed.*), nearly 100 years after Christ.

INQ: Why don’t the bishops and priests sanction Christians, who are members of the Church, to interpret and preach publicly the word of God from the Scriptures?

EC: Each Christian has the need to read Holy Scripture, yet each Christian does not also have the authority or ability to teach and interpret the words of Scripture. This privileged authority is reserved for the Church via its devout holy clergy and Orthodox theologians, men who are instructed in and knowledgeable of the true faith. When we consider how our Savior gave the grace of teaching to His Holy Apostles and not to the masses it is easy for us to see that the prerogative to teach is held only by the devout bishops, priests and theologians of our Church. It was the Apostles who were sent by Christ to teach and to celebrate the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments).

Our holy Apostle Paul says: *How shall they preach, except they be sent?* (Rom 10:15). Accordingly, the bishops are the lawful successors to the Apostles and those sent for the preaching to the people. Paul entrusts the heavy burden of the instruction of the people to Timothy and not to the faithful. He speaks of this elsewhere: *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?* (1 Cor 12:29). Again he says to Timothy that the clergy must be *apt to teach* others (2 Tim 2:24). He does not, however, say the same thing for the faithful. He makes a distinction between shepherd and sheep, between teacher and those taught. Still, the teachers cannot teach whatever they would like, but that which the Church teaches universally. They teach in the name of the Church and of Christ.

Not everyone has the intellectual ability and the requisite divine grace necessary to expound Holy Scripture correctly.

The Apostle Peter also says this in his second epistle, referring to the epistles of the Apostle Paul. He says the following: *There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.* (2 Pet 3:16).

INQ: Some say that it is not right that members of the Church don't have the right to interpret and expound upon Scripture. As this excerpt says, each Christian knows how to render Holy Scripture: *But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things* (1 Jn 2:20), and *the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you.* (1 Jn 2:27).

EC: Holy Scripture is like a very deep well wherein is comprised the infinite wisdom of God. If someone thirsty dives into this well to drink of all its water, he will be drowned within. If, however, he will fetch the water with a bucket and from there will drink with a cup, then there is no fear of being engulfed. What man is so crazed as to wish to plunge into such an abyss of water without knowing how to swim?

Holy Scripture, according to the Fathers, is *bone* and no one will venture with teeth fit for milk to break the strong bones of Holy Scripture—for those teeth will be crushed.

Have you read in Scripture about the eunuch of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians? He was reading the Prophet Isaiah when the Apostle Philip asked him if he understood that which he read, to which he replied: *How can I, except some man should guide me?* (Acts 8:31).

You realize also that the word *unction*, or *anointing* that you mentioned above means the effusion of the Holy Spirit in the Mystery of Holy Chrism, directly after Baptism.

The phrase *you know all things* signifies everything that contains Christian truth and salvation, as well as everything that is related to the antichrist and his adherents, to whom the subsequent verse of the epistle of the holy John the Theologian refers. One must not, therefore, teach according to one's own understanding and perception, for one will surely be deceived.

INQ: All the same, it is said that each Christian has the right and obligation to read Holy Scripture on his own, as the Savior admonishes us: *You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me.* (Jn 5:39).

EC: Be careful, because many heretics of earlier eras made bold to immerse themselves in the fathomless sea of Scrip-

ture and drowned spiritually, thus perishing together with as many as followed them. They don't have all the same spiritual maturity. They aren't all able to understand the mystery of Holy Scripture.

Holy Scripture is understood and explained in three ways: (1) according to its literal meaning, namely the nominal, grammatical, verbal and historical, (2) allegorically or metaphorically, which is superior to the former, and (3) spiritually.

According to the Holy Orthodox Fathers, the simplest of senses to alight upon is the first meaning, according to the letter of Scripture; to penetrate with discretion to the nature of Scripture requires modest learning, while to explain the depth of the meanings of Scripture is of the highest spiritual advancement and in need of the most divine grace. The perfect wisdom of Scripture belongs, according to Saint Paul, to the perfect: *Howbeit we speak wisdom among them*

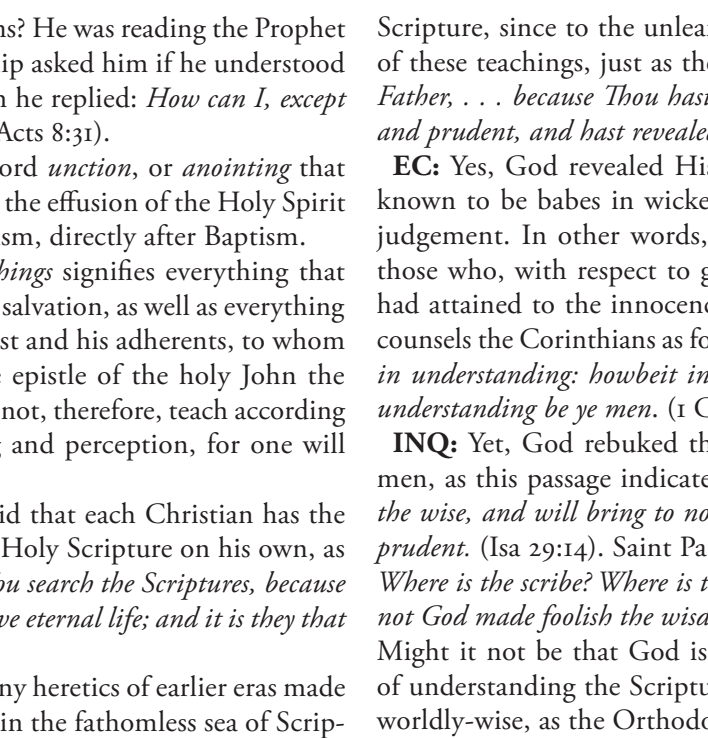
that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory. (2 Cor 2:6-7).

INQ: There are those who contend that it is not necessary for someone to have much learning to be able to understand the teachings of

Scripture, since to the unlearned He revealed the wisdom of these teachings, just as the Savior says: *I thank Thee, O Father, . . . because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*(Mt 11:25).

EC: Yes, God revealed His wisdom to those that were known to be babes in wickedness but not in mind^[1] and judgement. In other words, He revealed His wisdom to those who, with respect to good works, were perfect and had attained to the innocence of infants. That's why Paul counsels the Corinthians as follows: *Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be ye men.* (1 Cor 14:20).

INQ: Yet, God rebuked the wisdom and knowledge of men, as this passage indicates: *I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.* (Isa 29:14). Saint Paul also says: *Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* (1 Cor 1:20). Might it not be that God is not able to give the wisdom of understanding the Scriptures to certain people who are worldly-wise, as the Orthodox maintain?



EC: You should know that God does not condemn just any wisdom and knowledge, but that which kills man spiritually. If He were to censure every wisdom, He would have to reject also the wisdom of Solomon, the wisdom of Joshua, son of Sirach, the wisdom of Christ the Savior, of the Prophets and Apostles, to those whom He gave commandment to be *wise as serpents, and harmless doves*. (Mt 10:16). Yet it isn't like this to the least. Hence, take care not to resemble those to whom the Savior said: *You do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God*. (Mt 22:29).

INQ: Is Holy Scripture sufficient in order to guide man to salvation?

EC: No, it is not sufficient to guide man to salvation,^[2] inasmuch as, firstly, it wasn't given to man from the beginning and, secondly, when it was given it wasn't the only authentic text, with regard to the salvation of human souls, because before it there was the Holy Tradition. Many years before Moses began writing the first books of the Old Testament, there was sacred piety in the community of the people of Israel. Similarly, the books of the New Testament began to be written ten years after the formal foundation of the Church, which took place on the day of Pentecost. The Church chose and sealed as inspired by God the books of the two Testaments over one hundred years later.^[3] These then comprised the declared Canon of the books of Holy Scripture. Thereafter the Church maintained this Canon of Truth, inasmuch as it is the very *pillar and ground of truth*. The Holy Spirit operates within all of this for the preservation of the truth about salvation. *Where the Church is, says Saint Jerome, there also is the Spirit of God and where the Spirit of God is, there also is the Church and all grace—since the Spirit is truth.*



[1] νοῦς, νοός, νοί, νοῦν: mind, thought, reason; attitude, intention, purpose; understanding, discernment: The English word that best conveys the meaning of the Greek word is probably the word mind, however, it also has other meanings as well. The Holy Fathers refer to the *nous* as the soul (the “*spiritual nature*” of a man, St. Isaac the Syrian) and the heart (or the “*essence of the soul*”). More particularly, it constitutes the innermost aspect of the heart (St. Diadochos). Yet, it is also referred to as the “*eye of the soul*” (St. John of Damascus) or the “*organ of theoria*” (St. Macarius of Egypt) which is “*engaged in pure prayer*” (St. Isaac the Syrian). In this book the words mind and intellect have been used most often when rendering the Greek word νοῦς.

[2] “We cannot assert that Scripture is self-sufficient; and this is not because it is incomplete, or inexact, or has any defects, but because Scripture in its very essence does not lay claim to self-sufficiency... If we declare Scripture to be self-sufficient, we only expose it to subjective, arbitrary

interpretation, thus cutting it away from its sacred source. Scripture is given to us in tradition. It is the vital, crystalizing center. The Church, as the Body of Christ, stands mystically first and is fuller than Scripture. This does not limit Scripture, or cast shadows on it. But truth is revealed to us not only historically. Christ appeared and still appears before us not only in the Scriptures; He unchangeably and unceasingly reveals Himself in the Church, in His own Body. In the times of the early Christians the Gospels were not yet written and could not be the sole source of knowledge. The Church acted according to the spirit of the Gospel, and, what is more, the Gospel came to life in the Church, in the Holy Eucharist. In the Christ of the Holy Eucharist Christians learned to know the Christ of the Gospels, and so His image became vivid to them.”

[3] By the end of the first century... the Church possessed the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Although they were not perhaps as yet collected into one volume, each had been accepted by the group of churches for which it was written. Very soon afterward they were combined in one quadripartite Gospel, and in the middle of the second century the Christian apologist Tatian composed the first harmony, or code, of the Gospels. . . The appearance of the New Testament in the Church as a book, as Scripture, was therefore not a new factor, but a record of the founding tradition. Just because it **was identical** with the original Tradition as the Church already knew it, there appeared at first no need of a canon, or precisely fixed list of accepted records of Scripture. In fact, for the western Church it was not until 419 AD at the Council of the 217 Blessed Fathers assembled at Catharge that the entire New Testament as we know it today was irrevocably canonized (Canon XXIV).



How mistaken are those people who seek happiness outside of themselves, in foreign lands and journeys, in riches and glory, in great possessions and pleasures, in diversions and vain things, which have a bitter end! It is the same thing to construct the tower of happiness outside of ourselves as it is to build a house in a place that is consistently shaken by earthquakes. Happiness is found within ourselves, and blessed is the man who has understood this. Happiness is a pure heart, for such a heart becomes the throne of God. Thus says Christ of those who have pure hearts: *I will visit them, and will walk in them, and I will be a God to them, and they will be my people*. (2 Cor 6:16) What can be lacking to them? Nothing, nothing at all! For they have the greatest good in their hearts: God Himself!

St. Nektarios of Aegina

PRAXIS AND THEORIA

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, from "Orthodox Spirituality," translated from Greek by Efi Mavromichali, *Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, Levadia, Greece (1994), pp. 60-65*.

In the teachings of the Holy Fathers, the three stages of the spiritual life are characterized by use of the terms "*praxis*" and "*theoria*." I think we should dwell upon this subject also, in order, on the one hand, to understand more clearly what is meant by repentance and purification of heart; and, on the other hand, to ascertain the misinterpretation of the terms *praxis* and *theoria* by contemporary individuals. I would like to begin with an analysis of the latter.

When reading texts from the Holy Fathers, many people behold these terms without being aware of their deeper meaning. They interpret them within the perspective of Western thought: *Theoria* is termed as speculative, is based on theory not on practice, in other words, dealing simply with logic theoretically. Whereas *praxis* is the teaching and application of these intellectual concepts. Still others see *theoria* as the reflection on things divine, and *praxis* as its missionary thrust, i.e., the teaching of these rational concepts.

However, in the Patristic tradition other meanings are attached to the terms *praxis* and *theoria*, which shall be referred to briefly in the following passages.

St. Gregory the Theologian says that *theoria* and *praxis* are beneficial, because *theoria* elevates man's *nous* above earthly things; it guides him to the holy of holies and restores him to his original nature; whereas *praxis* receives and serves Christ and tests love with actions. Clearly, *theoria* is the vision of God—the *nous*' restoration and return to God; *praxis* is whatever deeds it takes to lead to this love.

In another text, St. Gregory the Theologian, in making reference to the last and the most dreadful of the seven plagues of the Egyptians—i.e., the death of their first-born children—states that in order for a person to escape the angel of death, he must anoint the guardians of his *nous*—*praxis* and *theoria*—with the blood of Christ. Thus *praxis* and *theoria* are linked with the *nous*. They are *nous*' guardians and are cured by the blood of Christ. And this, for certain, is our identification with and participation in Christ's crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension.

Within the whole of patristic tradition it is clear that *praxis* is the purification of the heart's passions and *theoria* is both the illumination of the *nous* and the vision of the uncreated glory of God. According to St. Gregory the Theologian, *praxis*

is the cause of *theoria*. According to Elias the Elder, *praxis* is fasting and all-night vigil; psalm-singing and prayer; and silence which is more precious than words; also *praxis* is whatever is done patiently without complaint. St. Isaac the Syrian says that *theoria* is the vision of the *nous*. It must be noted, of course, that there is no *praxis* independent of *theoria*, neither does *theoria* exist independently of *praxis*. This means that man is led to the *theoria* of God through purification; and when *theoria* ceases, then *praxis* begins again.

St. Gregory Palamas is more analytical on the subject of *praxis* and *theoria*. He teaches that *theoria* of God is nothing else but the vision of God. Therefore *theoria* is not speculation on what is said or what is seen, but it is the vision of God. If this is in fact *theoria*, then it follows that *praxis* is nothing less than the cleansing of the heart, and repentance, the complete hesychastic way of life, instruction on *hesychia*. Thus, according to St. Gregory Palamas, *praxis* is equated with *hesychasm*, a method of prayer (holy silence) which necessitates



stillness of the *nous*; the halting of the world, and the forgetting of earthly things. It is an initiation into the things from above and the putting aside of all concepts of goodness. Through *praxis*—sacred hesychia—“we are liberated from what is worldly and direct ourselves toward God”. This is the path and manner of ascent towards God which the Most Holy Mother of God followed; she attained to *theosis* thus and became the mother of the Word of God.

Praxis, therefore, is the purification of the heart; this constitutes genuine repentance, as proclaimed by St. John the Baptist, Christ Himself and, of course, by all of His Apostles, because repentance is the indispensable prerequisite for one to experience the Kingdom of God.

Thus, purification of the heart, i.e., of our inner world, is the first stage of the spiritual life, through which we must pass in order to attain to salvation. In the following, the meaning attached to “purification of heart” by the Holy Fathers must be ascertained. They intend primarily three things.

Firstly, purification of the heart is the cure of the soul's faculty, so as to function in accordance with nature and above nature—not contrary to nature. Man's soul is both unified and manifold. She has primarily three faculties: the intelligent, the appetitive and the incentive. All three faculties, when functioning normally, are directed towards God. The intellect seeks God; the desire longs for God, and the will must do everything to achieve this communion and union with God.

Secondly, purification is man's deliverance from pleasure and pain, in other words a person's liberation from the oppression

exerted by pleasure and pain. When man is cleansed, he is freed from their domination. It is the spiritual pleasures which primarily are cultivated within him; and he does not become distressed or afflicted when diverse people or problems and adversities in life cause him pain.

Thirdly, purification is the cleansing of the heart from the various thoughts—*logismoi* existing therein. They are called *logismoi* because they must dwell in the reason and not within the heart. What does this mean? When a “*logismos*” comes and a person is not sufficiently attentive, it then becomes a desire which wants to be fulfilled, i.e., realized. This means that the *logismos* proceeds from the intelligent faculty of the soul to the passible faculty, that is the faculties of the appetitive and the incentive. Being realized and developing into a passion the *logismos* enters, in fact, into the heart and remains all powerful there.

The Fathers say that the heart can be cleansed of *logismoi* through repentance and by means of the ascetic method of the Church. And this ascetic method is inspired by divine grace. A simple thought may enter the reason but not find its way within the heart. When all *logismoi* are dismissed and the heart is cleansed, only one word-prayer prevails. For this reason the prayer *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me* is called the one-word-prayer (μονολόγιστη). Thus, the simple remembrance within the heart helps retain the unceasing prayer while reason accommodates the simple *logismoi*—the plain concept of a thing disengaged from passion.

These three states are what the Fathers call purification of the heart. When a person's heart is cleansed he becomes more sociable, more balanced. He behaves properly within society, because his selfishness has given way to love for God and love for man. Selfish love is transformed into unselfish love. Formerly, he would love selfishly, with a love which seeks its own. Now, however, he loves with a pure love. He loves others without expecting anything in return. He loves independently of whether others love him. There is no self-seeking in his actions. Thus, when selfish love is changed into unselfish love, one speaks of the person as having become a real human being. And it is this transformation which is considered the cure of man.

In patristic tradition *praxis* is also called ethics. St. Gregory Palamas speaks of ethics in his texts, he is actually developing the theme of purification of heart. Therein the entire way of man's cure is described. In Orthodox tradition ethics is not an abstract condition, neither is it a pharisaical outward behavior; rather it is asceticism. Therefore, when the Fathers speak of ethics, they mean asceticism. And since asceticism is a person's passage from impurity of the *nous* to its cleansing and on to its illumination, orthodox ethics, therefore, is man's purification.

If *praxis* is the purification of heart in patristic tradition, *theoria* is on the one hand the illumination of the *nous* and

on the other the vision of the uncreated Light. Thus, in the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas, it appears that *theoria* of God is man's union with God. It is effected through divinization (*theosis*) and bestows upon him the knowledge of God. *Theoria*, union, *theosis*, and knowledge of God are synonymous terms in patristic tradition.

This is the path leading to a person's cure. Just as every science has a specific way of guiding a person to knowledge, so also does the Church have a method to lead man to God. And this method consists of purification of the heart, illumination of the *nous* and divinization (*theosis*)—also called *praxis* and *theoria*.



Fasting, prayer, alms, and every other good Christian deed is good in itself, but the purpose of the Christian life consists not only in the fulfillment of one or another of them. The true purpose of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. But fasting, prayer, alms and every good deed done for the sake of Christ is a means to the attainment of the Holy Spirit. Note that only good deeds done for the sake of Christ bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Everything else that is not done for the sake of Christ, even if it is good, does not bring us a reward in the life to come, not does it bring the grace of God in this life. This is why our Lord Jesus Christ said, *Whoever gathereth not with me scattereth.* (Mt 12:30).

St. Seraphim of Sarov

All that you lose in the name of God, you keep. All that you keep for your own sake, you lose. All that you give in the name of God, you will receive with interest. All that you give for the sake of your own glory and pride, you throw into the water. All that you receive from people as from God will bring you joy. All that you receive from people as from people will bring you worries.

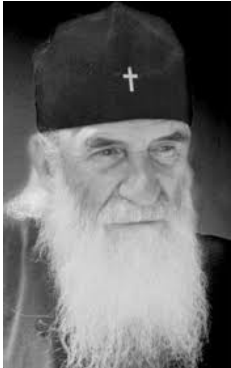
St. Nicholas of Serbia



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Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἡ Ἀνάσταση καὶ ἡ Ζωή

Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς.



Ἐὰν ὑπάρχει μιὰ ἀλήθεια στὴν ὁποία θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ συνοψισθοῦν ὅλες οἱ εὐαγγελικὲς ἀλήθειες, ἡ ἀλήθεια αὐτὴ θὰ ἦταν ἡ ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ ἀκόμη, ἐὰν ὑπάρχει μιὰ πραγματικότητα στὴν ὁποία θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ συνοψισθοῦν ὅλες οἱ καινοδιαθηκικὲς πραγματικότητες, ἡ πραγματικότητα αὐτὴ θὰ ἦταν ἡ ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Μόνο στὴν ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐξηγοῦνται ὅλα τὰ θαύματά Του, ὅλες οἱ ἀλήθειές Του, ὅλα τὰ λόγια Του, ὅλα τὰ γεγονότα τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης.

Μέχρι τὴν ἀνάστασή Του ὁ Κύριος δίδασκε γιὰ τὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν ἀνάστασή Του ἔδειξε ὅτι ὁ ἴδιος ὄντως εἶναι ἡ αἰώνια ζωὴ. Μέχρι τὴν ἀνάστασή Του δίδασκε γιὰ τὴν ἀνάσταση τῶν νεκρῶν, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν ἀνάστασή Του ἔδειξε ὅτι ὁ ἴδιος εἶναι πράγματι ἡ ἀνάσταση τῶν νεκρῶν. Μέχρι τὴν ἀνάστασή Του δίδασκε ὅτι ἡ πίστις σ' Αὐτὸν μεταφέρει ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν ἀνάστασή Του ἔδειξε ὅτι ὁ ἴδιος νίκησε τὸ θάνατο καὶ ἔτσι ἐξασφάλισε στοὺς θανατωμένους ἀνθρώπους τὴ μετάβαση ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου στὴν ἀνάσταση.

Μὲ τὴν ἁμαρτία ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐγίνε θνητὸς καὶ πεπερασμένος μὲ τὴν ἀνάσταση τοῦ Θεανθρώπου γίνεται ἀθάνατος καὶ αἰώνιος. Σ' αὐτὸ δὲ ἀκριβῶς ἐγκρίεται ἡ δύναμη καὶ τὸ κράτος καὶ ἡ παντοδυναμία τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀναστάσεως. Καὶ γιὰ αὐτὸ χωρὶς τὴν ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν θὰ ὑπῆρχε κἄν ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς. Μεταξὺ τῶν θαυμάτων ἡ ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου εἶναι τὸ μεγαλύτερο θαῦμα. Ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα θαύματα πηγάζουν ἀπὸ αὐτὸ καὶ συνοψίζονται σ' αὐτό. Ἀπ' αὐτὸ πηγάζουν ἡ πίστις καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη καὶ ἡ ἐλπίδα καὶ ἡ προσευχὴ καὶ ἡ θεοσέβεια. Αὐτὸ εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὁποῖο καμιά ἄλλη θρησκεία δὲν ἔχει· αὐτὸ εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὁποῖο ἀνυψώνει τὸν Κύριο ὑπεράνω ὅλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν θεῶν. Αὐτὸ εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὁποῖο κατὰ τρόπο μοναδικὸ καὶ ἀναμφισβήτητο δείχνει καὶ ἀποδεικνύει ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ μόνος ἀληθινὸς Θεὸς καὶ Κύριος σὲ ὅλους τοὺς ὁρατοὺς καὶ ἀόρατους κόσμους.

Τὸ ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος πιστεύει ἀληθινὰ στὸν Ἀναστάντα Κύριο τὸ ἀποδεικνύει μὲ τὸ νὰ ἀγωνίζεται κατὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τῶν παθῶν καὶ ἐὰν μὲν ἀγωνίζεται, πρέπει νὰ γνωρίζει ὅτι ἀγωνίζεται γιὰ τὴν ἀθανασία καὶ τὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ. Ἐὰν ὅμως δὲν ἀγωνίζεται, τότε μάταιη ἡ πίστις του! Διότι, ἐὰν ἡ πίστις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου δὲν εἶναι ἀγώνιας γιὰ τὴν ἀθανασία καὶ τὴν αἰωνιότητα, τότε τί

εἶναι; Ἐὰν μὲ τὴν πίστιν στὸ Χριστὸ δὲν φθάνει κανεὶς στὴν ἀθανασία καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ θανάτου νίκη, τότε πρὸς τί ἡ πίστις μας; Ἐὰν ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἀναστήθηκε, τοῦτο σημαίνει ὅτι ἡ ἁμαρτία καὶ ὁ θάνατος δὲν ἔχουν νικηθεῖ. Ἐὰν δὲ δὲν ἔχουν αὐτὰ τὰ δύο νικηθεῖ, τότε γιατί νὰ πιστεύει κανεὶς στὸ Χριστό; Ἐκεῖνος ὅμως ὁ ὁποῖος μὲ τὴν πίστιν στὸν Ἀναστάντα Χριστὸ ἀγωνίζεται ἐναντίον κάθε ἁμαρτίας του, αὐτὸς ἐνισχύει σιγὰ-σιγὰ μέσα του τὴν αἴσθησις ὅτι ὁ Κύριος πραγματικὰ ἀναστήθηκε, ἄμβλυσε τὸ κέντρο τοῦ θανάτου, νίκησε τὸ θάνατο σὲ ὅλα τὰ μέτωπα τῆς μάχης.

Χωρὶς τὴν ἀνάσταση δὲν ὑπάρχει οὔτε στὸν οὐρανὸ οὔτε κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ τίποτε πρὸς παράλογο ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον αὐτὸ οὔτε μεγαλύτερη ἀπελπισία ἀπὸ τὴν ζωὴ αὐτὴ, δίχως ἀθανασία. Σ' ὅλους τοὺς κόσμους δὲν ὑπάρχει περισσότερο δυστυχισμένη ὑπαρξὴ ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ δὲν πιστεύει στὴν ἀνάσταση τῶν νεκρῶν. Γι' αὐτό, γιὰ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ὑπαρξή, ὁ Ἀναστημένος Κύριος εἶναι τὰ «*πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν*» σ' ὅλους τοὺς κόσμους: ὅ,τι τὸ Ὠραῖο, τὸ Καλό, τὸ Ἀληθινό, τὸ Προσφιλέ, τὸ Χαρμόσυνο, τὸ Θεῖο, τὸ Σοφόν, τὸ Αἰώνιο. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὅλη ἡ Ἀγάπη μας, ὅλη ἡ Ἀληθείά μας, ὅλη ἡ Χαρά μας, ὅλο τὸ Ἀγαθὸ μας, ὅλη ἡ Ζωὴ μας, ἡ Αἰωνία Ζωὴ σὲ ὅλες τὶς αἰωνιότητες καὶ ἀπεραντοσύνες.



Μὴ λές ὅτι τὸ σῶμα εἶναι αἰτία τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Γιατί, ἂν τὸ σῶμα εἶναι αἰτία τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τότε γιατί ὁ νεκρὸς δὲν ἁμαρτάνει; Βάλε στὸ δεξιὸ χέρι κάποιου νεκροῦ, ποὺ μόλις πέθανε, ἓνα ξίφος. Φόνος δὲν θὰ γίνε. Ἄς περάσουν πλάι ἀπὸ νεκρὸ νέο, μόλις πεθάνει, χίλιες καλλονές. Δὲν πρόκειται νὰ τοῦ δημιουργηθεῖ καμιά ἐπιθυμία πορνείας. Γιατί; Ἐπειδὴ τὸ σῶμα δὲν ἁμαρτάνει ἀπὸ μόνο του, ἀλλὰ ἁμαρτάνει ἡ ψυχὴ, ἐνεργώντας μὲ τὸ σῶμα. Τὸ σῶμα εἶναι ἐργαλεῖο καὶ μοιάζει μὲ ροῦχο καὶ στολὴ τῆς ψυχῆς. Κι ἂν παραδοθεῖ ἀπὸ αὐτὴ στὴν πορνεία, γίνεται ἀκάθαρτο. Ἄν ὅμως συζηήσει μὲ ἅγια ψυχὴ, γίνεται ναὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Δὲν τὰ λέω ἐγὼ αὐτά, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἔχει πεῖ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «*Δὲν ξέρετε ὅτι τὰ σώματά σας εἶναι ναὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ποὺ βρίσκεται μέσα σας;*» (Α΄ Κορ. 6:19). Νὰ φροντίζεις λοιπὸν τὸ σῶμα σὰν νὰ εἶναι ναὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Μὴ φθείρεις μὲ πορνείες τὴν σὰρκα σου. Μὴ μολύνεις τὴν ὁμορφὴ αὐτὴ στολὴ σου. Κι ἂν ἔτυχε καὶ τὴ μόλυνες, πλύνε τὴν τώρα μὲ τὴ μετάνοια, ἐπειδὴ τώρα εἶναι καιρὸς λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας.

Ἅγιου Κυρίλλου Ἱεροσολύμων

Χαρακτηρισμοί Αίρετικών

Τοῦ μακαριστοῦ καὶ κορυφαίου Ὁρθόδοξου θεολόγου, ἱεροκήρυκος καὶ συγγραφέα, τοῦ Ὁμολογητοῦ κ. Νικ. Ἰω. Σωτηροπούλου (+2014).

Τὸ παρὸν ἄρθρο γράφεται γιὰ τοὺς αἰρετικούς γενικῶς, καὶ γιὰ τοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς εἰδικῶς. Οἱ διδάσκαλοι καὶ οἱ ὄπαδοι τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ εἶναι οἱ χειρότεροι ἀποστάτες ἀπὸ τὴν Πίστι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, διότι ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς δὲν εἶναι μία μόνον αἴρεσι, ἀλλ' εἶναι παναίρεσι, προχωρεῖ δὲ πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν αἰρέσει καὶ γίνεται καὶ πανθηρησκεία. Ἀρχαιοκουμενιστὴς μὲ πολὺ μεγάλα ράσα δήλωσε ὅτι καὶ οἱ ἄλλες Θρησκείες εἶναι σεβαστὲς καὶ σεβάσιμες καὶ δρόμοι σωτηρίας!

Θέμα τοῦ παρόντος ἄρθρου εἶναι τὸ πῶς ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη, τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, χαρακτηρίζει τοὺς αἰρετικούς, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον τοὺς παναιρετικούς καὶ πανθηρησκειακοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς.

Ἄν οἱ Οἰκουμενισταὶ ἔχουν τὴν αἴσθησι, μᾶλλον ψευδαίσθησι, ὅτι πιστεύουν στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη, ἅς διαβάσουν τὸ ἄρθρο, γιὰ νὰ ἰδοῦν πόσο πλανῶνται, καὶ μὲ πόσους καὶ πόσο βαρεῖς χαρακτηρισμοὺς τοὺς χαρακτηρίζει τὸ θεόπνευστο κείμενο, καὶ ἅς ἀνησυχήσουν γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τους μὲ τὴ μεγαλύτερη ὄλων τῶν ἀνησυχῶν, καὶ ἅς ἀλλάξουν φρονήματα, ἅς γίνουν ὄντως πιστοί, γιὰ νὰ τύχουν ἐλέους καὶ σωτηρίας παρὰ τοῦ Ἀρχηγοῦ τῆς Πίστεως, τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Στὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς δημοσίας δράσεώς του ὁ Χριστὸς κήρυξε: «Μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεῦτε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ». (Μάρκ. 1:15). Καὶ πρὸς τὸ τέλος, μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασί Του, εἶπε στοὺς μαθητὰς Του: «Κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάση τῇ κτίσει. Ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται». (Μάρκ. 16:15-16). Ἡ πίστι στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο τοῦ Χριστοῦ σώζει, ἡ ἀπιστία καταδικάζει.

Ἡ αἴρεσι εἶναι «ἔτερον εὐαγγέλιον», διαστροφή τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ (Γαλ. 1:6,7) καὶ δὲν σώζει, ἀλλὰ καταδικάζει. Οἱ διδάσκοντες κάτι διαφορετικὸ ἀπὸ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ἀπὸ τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀναθεματίζονται (Γαλ. 1:8-9).

Ἄν οἱ Οἰκουμενισταὶ εἶναι ἐνσυνειδήτως ἄπιστοι, ἄν, μὲ ἄλλες λέξεις, δὲν πιστεύουν στὸ Χριστὸ καὶ στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ διαβάσουν τὸ παρὸν ἄρθρο. Ἄς τὸ διαβάσουν ὅμως οἱ πιστοί, γιὰ νὰ αἰσθανθοῦν πόσο τρομερὸ καὶ βδελυκτὸ εἶναι τὸ φαινόμενο τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ποὺ ὀνομάζεται Οἰκουμενισμὸς, καὶ νὰ τηροῦν ἀποστάσεις ἀπὸ τοὺς χειρότερους ἀποστάτες ἀπὸ τὴν Πίστι, τοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς, καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἐλέγχουν καὶ νὰ διαμαρτύρωνται κατ' αὐτῶν, μάλιστα ἂν αὐτοὶ κατέχουν ἐκκλησιαστικὲς θέσεις ἢ ἔχουν θεολογικοὺς

τίτλους. Εἶναι ἔλλειψι στοιχειώδους τιμιότητος νὰ παρουσιάζονται Οἰκουμενισταὶ ὡς ἐκπρόσωποι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἢ τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Θεολογίας.

Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε στοὺς ἰδικούς του: «Προσέχετε ἀπὸ τῶν ψευδοπροφητῶν, οἵτινες ἔρχονται πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ἐνδύμασι προβάτων, ἔσωθεν δὲ εἰσι λύκοι ἄρπαγες». (Ματθ. 7:15). Συμφώνως πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο οἱ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοπροφῆται». Στὴν Ἁγία Γραφὴ «προφῆται» μὲ τὴν ἀληθινὴ ἐννοια τῆς λέξεως εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι, οἱ ὅποιοι διδάσκουν μὲ ἔμπνευσι τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἱ δὲ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοπροφῆται», διότι δὲν διδάσκουν τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ἰδικὰ τους λόγια, ἢ μᾶλλον λόγια τοῦ Διαβόλου, καὶ ἰσχυρίζονται ψευδῶς ὅτι διδάσκουν τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Οἱ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται ἐπίσης «λύκοι ἄρπαγες» «ἐν ἐνδύμασι προβάτων». Ἄπ' ἔξω ἐμφανίζονται ὡς πρόβατα, φρόνιμοι, γλυκεῖς καὶ μελιστάλακτοι. Καὶ ἀπὸ μέσα εἶναι αἰμοβόροι λύκοι, ἔτοιμοι ν' ἀρπάξουν καὶ νὰ κατασπαράξουν τὰ λογικὰ πρόβατα τῆς ποιμνῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἐφιστᾷ τὴν προσοχή μας νὰ φυλασσώμεθα ἀπὸ τοὺς ψευδοπροφῆτες καὶ προβατοσχήμους λύκους, οἱ ὅποιοι στὸν ἐπόμενο στίχ. 16 χαρακτηρίζονται «ἄκανθα» καὶ «τριβόλοι», ἀγκάθια καὶ τριβόλια, ἀπὸ τὰ ὅποια δὲν περιμένουμε ἐκλεκτοὺς καρπούς.

Στὸ Ματθ. 24:11 ὁ Χριστὸς προλέγει ὅτι θὰ ἐμφανισθοῦν «πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφῆται», καὶ ὅτι «πλανήσουσι πολλούς». Καὶ στὸ Ματθ. 24:24 λέγει ὅτι θὰ ἐμφανισθοῦν «ψευδοπροφῆται», οἱ ὅποιοι θὰ κάνουν «σημεῖα μεγάλα καὶ τέρατα, ὥστε πλανήσαι, εἰ δυνατόν, καὶ τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς». (Βλέπε καὶ Μάρκ. 13:22).

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος στὸ Β' Πέτρ. 2:1-2 γράφει: «Ἐγένοντο δὲ καὶ ψευδοπροφῆται ἐν τῷ λαῷ, ὡς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσονται ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι, οἵτινες παρεισάξουσιν αἰρέσεις ἀπωλείας». Ἐδῶ προλέγεται ἡ ἐμφάνισι αἰρετικῶν, οἱ ὅποιοι χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι» συνωνύμως πρὸς τὸ «ψευδοπροφῆται». Οἱ δὲ αἰρέσεις τους χαρακτηρίζονται «αἰρέσεις ἀπωλείας». Οἱ αἰρέσεις ὀδηγοῦν σὲ ἀπώλεια, καταστροφή, κόλασι. Ὁ δὲ Ἀπόστολος Ἰωάννης στὸ Α' Ἰωάν. 4:1 γράφει, ὅτι «πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφῆται ἐξεληλύθασιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον». Καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰωάννη λοιπὸν οἱ αἰρετικοὶ χαρακτηρίζονται «ψευδοπροφῆται».

Στὴν Ἀποκάλυψι ἀναφέρεται «ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης» (Ἀποκ. ἰστ' 13, ιθ' 20, κ' 10), ὁ ὑπασπιστὴς τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου, ὁ ὅποιος περιγράφεται ὡς «θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς γῆς», ἔχει «κέρατα δύο ὅμοια ἀρνίῳ» καὶ ὁμιλεῖ «ὡς δράκων». (Ἀποκ. ιγ' 11). Θεωροῦμε εὐστοχη τὴν ἐρμηνεία, ὅτι μὲ τὸ χαρακτηρισμὸ

«ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης», ἐνάρθρως, ὁ κατ' ἐξοχὴν ψευδοπροφήτης, χαρακτηρίζεται ὁ μεγαλύτερος τῶν αἰρεσιαρχῶν, ὁ Πάπας. Τὰ δύο κέρατά του σημαίνουν τὶς δύο ἐξουσίες του, τὴ θρησκευτικὴ καὶ τὴν πολιτικὴ. Καὶ ἡ ὁμοιότης του πρὸς τὸ ἄρνιον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὸν δράκοντα, σημαίνει τὴ μεγάλη ὑποκρισία του. Φαίνεται ὡς χριστιανὸς ἡγέτης, ἀλλ' εἶναι σατανικός.

Στὶς ἡμέρες μας ὁ Πάπας συγκαλεῖ συνέδρια ὄχι μόνο διαχριστιανικὰ καὶ παναιρετικὰ, ἀλλὰ καὶ διαθρησκειακὰ καὶ σατανιστικά, καὶ συμπροσεύχονται γιὰ τὴν εἰρήνῃ τοῦ κόσμου! Συμμετέχουν δὲ σὲ τέτοια συνέδρια καὶ λεγόμενοι Ὁρθόδοξοι! Ὁ δὲ Πάπας, ἀφοῦ καὶ συγκαλεῖ τὰ συνέδρια καὶ κατέχει τὴν πρώτη θέσι σ' αὐτά, ἤδη ἀναγνωρίζεται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἡμετέρους Οἰκουμενιστὰς ὡς ἔχων τὸ περιβόητο πρωτεῖο, καίτοι στὴν πραγματικότητα, ἀφοῦ εἶναι αἰρετικός, δὲν ἔχει ἱερωσύνη, δὲν εἶναι ἐπίσκοπος.

Τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου «ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης», ὁ Πάπας, ἐπειδὴ ὁ Ἀντίχριστος θὰ εἶναι ἰσχυρότερος ἀπ' αὐτὸν καὶ δὲν θὰ δύναται νὰ διεκδικήσῃ πρωτεῖο, κοσμικῶς καὶ διπλωματικῶς σκεπτόμενος θὰ γίνῃ ὑπάσπιστῆς τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου, γιὰ νὰ ἔχη τὰ δευτερεῖα τῆς ἐξουσίας. Νὰ τὸν χαίρωνται οἱ Οἰκουμενισταί, οἱ σφόδρα φιλοπαπικοί.

Ὁμοίως πρὸς τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος χαρακτηρίσε τοὺς αἰρετικούς «λύκους βαρεῖς μὴ φειδομένους τοῦ ποιμνίου» λύκους φοβερούς, ποὺ δὲν λυποῦνται τὸ ποῖμνιο. Προφήτευσε δὲ ὅτι καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ποιμένες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας θὰ προέλθουν αἰρετικοί, τοὺς ὁποίους ἐπίσης χαρακτηρίσε «ἄνδρας λαλοῦντας διεστραμμένα». (Πράξ. κ' 29, 30). Ἀνέφερε δὲ καὶ πρόρρησι τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος γιὰ τὴν ἐμφάνισι ἀποστατῶν ἀπὸ τὴν Πίστι, τῶν γνωστῶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία αἰρετικῶν Ἐγκρατιτῶν. Οἱ διδάσκαλοι τῆς αἰρέσεως αὐτῆς ἐμπόδιζαν τὸ γάμο καὶ κήρυτταν ἀποχὴ ἀπὸ τροφῆς ὡς διήθεν ἀκάθαρτα πράγματα. Χαρακτηρίζονται δὲ «πνεύματα πλάνα» μὲ δαιμονικὲς διδασκαλίαι, «ἐν ὑποκρίσει ψευδολόγοι» καὶ «κεκαυτηριασμένοι τὴν ἰδίαν συνείδησιν». (Α' Τιμ. 4:1-3).

Ὁ ἀδελφός Θεὸς Ἰούδας στὴν Καθολικὴ Ἐπιστολὴ του, τὸ δυνατώτερο ἀντιαιρετικὸ κείμενο τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, αἰρετικούς τῆς ἀποστολικῆς ἐποχῆς, τοὺς Νικολαίτες, χαρακτηρίζει μὲ τοὺς ἐξῆς ἐκτὸς ἄλλων χαρακτηρισμοὺς: «Σπιλάδες», δηλαδὴ κηλίδες, δημωδῶς λέρες: «ἐαυτοὺς πομαίνοντες», ἰδιοτελεῖς, ποὺ βόσκουν καὶ τρέφουν τοὺς ἐαυτοὺς των «νεφέλαι ἄνυδροι ὑπὸ ἀνέμων παραφερόμενοι», σύννεφα ἄνυδρα, ποὺ παρασύρονται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνέμους: «δένδρα φθινοπωρινά, ἄκαρπα, δις ἀποθανόντα, ἐκρὶζωθέντα», δένδρα φθινοπωρινά, χωρὶς καρπούς,

δύο φορές ξεραμμένα, ξερριζωμένα: «κύματα ἄγρια θαλάσσης ἐπαφρίζοντα τὰς ἐαυτῶν αἰσχύννας», κύματα ἄγρια τῆς θάλασσας, ποὺ ἀφρίζουν καὶ φέρουν στὴν ἐπιφάνεια τὶς ἀσχημίες τους: «ἀστέρες πλανῆται, οἷς ὁ ζόφος τοῦ σκοτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τετήρηται», ἄστρα σκοτεινά, στὰ ὁποῖα τὸ βαθὺ σκοτάδι διατηρεῖται παντοτινὸ (Ἰουδ. 12-13): «ἐμπαίχται κατὰ τὰς ἐαυτῶν ἐπιθυμίας πορευόμενοι τῶν ἀσεβειῶν», ἐμπαίχτες βαδίζοντες συμφώνως μὲ τὶς ἀσεβεῖς ἐπιθυμίες τους: «ἀποδιορίζοντες», διακρίνοντες τοὺς ἐαυτοὺς των ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ παρουσιαζόμενοι ὡς ἀνώτεροι: «ψυχικοί, Πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες», ἄνθρωποι ποὺ κυριαρχοῦνται ἀπὸ φυσικὰ ἔνστικτα, ποὺ στεροῦνται Πνεύματος Ἁγίου (Ἰουδ. 18-19).

Δύο ἀκόμη χαρακτηρισμοὶ τῶν αἰρετικῶν, φοβερότεροι τῶν προηγουμένων. «Κατάρας τέκνα!», λέγει μὲ πολὺ μεγάλη ἔμφασι ὁ Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος. Καταραμένοι ἄνθρωποι! (Β' Πέτρ. 2:14). Καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Ἰωάννης λέγει, «Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασι». Ἀκούσατε ὅτι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ τὴν ὥρα πολλοὶ ἀντίχριστοι ἔχουν ἔλθει (Α' Ἰωάν. 2:18). Ὁ ἀναμενόμενος Ἀντίχριστος εἶναι ὁ χειρότερος καὶ ὁ ἀπαισιώτερος ὅλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Μὲ τὸ ὄνομα δὲ ἐκείνου ὁ Ἀπόστολος ὀνομάζει τοὺς αἰρετικούς τῆς ἐποχῆς του, καὶ ὅλων βεβαίως τῶν ἐποχῶν. Καὶ «ἀντίχριστοι» λοιπὸν χαρακτηρίζονται οἱ αἰρετικοί. Naί, ἀντίχριστοι, διότι φρονοῦν καὶ πράττουν ἀντίθετα πρὸς τὸ Χριστό, καὶ προετοιμάζουν τὸ ἔδαφος γιὰ τὸν κατ' ἐξοχὴν Ἀντίχριστο.

Γιὰ τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη ἐκφράζεται μὲ συμπάθεια. Ἀλλὰ γιὰ τοὺς αἰρετικούς ἐκφράζεται μὲ τὰ φοβερότερα λόγια, λόγια θεόπνευστα καὶ ἀρμόζοντα σ' αὐτοὺς, καὶ μάλιστα στοὺς παναιρετικούς καὶ πανθρησκειακοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς. Δὲν φοβοῦνται αὐτοὶ ἀπὸ τὰ φοβερὰ καὶ θεόπνευστα λόγια, ἔστω καὶ ἂν φοροῦν μεγάλα ράσα καὶ ἐγκόλπια καὶ ἔχουν τὶς μεγαλύτερες εὐθύνες;

Οἱ πιστοί, οἱ συνειδητοὶ Ὁρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοὶ φοβοῦνται καὶ ἀγωνίζονται καὶ θὰ ἀγωνίζονται μέχρι τέλος γιὰ «τὴν ἅπαξ παραδοθεῖσαν τοῖς ἁγίοις πίστιν». (Ἰουδ. 3). Εἶναι βεβαίως πάντοτε ὀλίγοι οἱ ἀγωνισταί, ἀλλὰ τελικῶς αὐτοὶ νικοῦν, διότι Ἀρχηγός τους εἶναι ὁ Χριστός, ὁ ὁποῖος διακήρυξε: «Ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον» (Ἰωάν. ιστ' 33). Ἡ ἱστορία ἀποδεικνύει τοῦ λόγου τὸ ἀληθές. Παρὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν αἰρέσεων καὶ τὴν ὅλη πολεμικὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ, τοῦ μεγάλου ἐχθροῦ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἡ ὀρθὴ πίστι ἐφθάσε μέχρι σήμερα. Καὶ θὰ φθάσῃ μέχρι τὴ συντέλεια τοῦ κόσμου. Διότι αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ θέλησι τοῦ Χριστοῦ γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῶν πιστῶν.

Ὁ ἔχων ὅρα ἀκούειν, ἀκουέτω. (Ματθ. 11:15).

Τὸ Γραικεύω Εἶναι Σχεδὸν Ταυτὸν μὲ τὸ Φραγκεύω

Σημαίνει σήμερον ἀμερικανεύω, ρωσεύω, φραντσεύω, γερμανεύω—δηλαδή γίνομαι πνευματικὸς δοῦλος τῶν ἔξω τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης...

Γράφει ὁ π. Ἰωάννης Σ. Ρωμανίδης, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίου του «Ρωμηοσύνη», Ἀριστοτέλειον Πανεπιστήμιον Θεσσαλονίκης, 14^η Σεπτεμβρίου 1974.



Κατὰ παράκληση φίλων ἠτοίμασα δι' ἐκτύπωσιν τὸ παρὸν δοκίμιον χάριν ἐκείνων ποὺ συγκινοῦνται μὲ τὴν Ρωμηοσύνην μας, παρ' ὅλην τὴν ὀργανωμένην καὶ ἔντονον πλύσιν ἐγκεφάλου ποὺ ὑφιστάμεθα, διὰ νὰ τὴν ἐγκαταλείψωμεν καὶ τὴν ἀντικαταστήσωμε μὲ τὸν Γραικισμόν, τὸν ὁποῖον

προσπαθοῦν οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι νὰ μᾶς ἐπιβάλλουν ἀπὸ τὸν Θ' αἰῶνα καὶ οἱ Ρῶσοι μετὰ τὴν Ἄλωσιν, ὡς περιγράφομεν ἐν τῷ δοκιμίῳ τούτῳ. Τὸ πόνημα οὗτο εἶναι περίληψις τῶν ὄσων διδάσκω περὶ τῶν ἱστορικῶν καὶ ἰδεολογικῶν πλαισίων καὶ θεμελίων τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς ὑποστάσεως τοῦ Γένους.

Ὁ ἀναγνώστης θὰ διαπιστώσει ὅτι πολλὰ ἐκ τῶν ἐπιθέμενων ἐνταῦθα, ἐρμηνευτικά ἀλλὰ καὶ ἱστορικά, ἀπουσιάζουν ἀπὸ τὰ ἐν χρήσει ἐγχειρίδια τῶν ἐκπαιδευτικῶν ἐν Ἑλλάδι ἰδρυμάτων ὡς καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπίσημον ἐμφάνισιν τοῦ Ἔθνους καὶ τῆς Ἑλλαδικῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Τὰ ἐν λόγῳ ἐρμηνευτικά καὶ ἱστορικά στοιχεῖα ὡς ἐμφανίζονται ἐν Ἑλλάδι εἶναι πιστὴ παραλλαγή τῆς εὐρωπαϊκῆς, ρωσικῆς καὶ ἀμερικανικῆς περὶ τῶν... ἐν προκειμένῳ θεμάτων ἐπιστήμης. Τὰ περισσότερα ἐν τῷ δοκιμίῳ τούτῳ ἀναφερόμενα γεγονότα ὡς γεγονότα δὲν δημοσιεύονται διὰ πρώτην φοράν. Ἔχουν σχεδὸν ὅλα δημοσιευθῆ καὶ ὑπάρχουν κατεσπαρμένα εἰς παλαιὰ καὶ νέα βιβλία, ξένα καὶ Ἑλληνικά.

Ἡ προσφορὰ τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου εἶναι ἡ Ρωμαϊκὴ σύνθεσις καὶ ἐρμηνεία τῶν ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον γνωστῶν στοιχείων. Ἀκριβῶς εἰς τὸ σημεῖον τοῦτο ἡ μελέτη αὐτὴ εἶναι ἀντίθεσις καὶ διαμαρτυρία κατὰ τῆς εὐρωπαϊκῆς, ρωσικῆς, καὶ ἀμερικανικῆς συνθέσεως καὶ ἐρμηνείας, εἰς τὴν ὁποῖαν ὑπεδουλώθη ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη μὲσω τοῦ ἐν Ἑλλάδι ἐπικρατοῦντος Νεογραικισμοῦ.

Μὲ Γραικισμόν καὶ Νεογραικισμόν ἐννοοῦμεν ὄχι τὸν Νεοελληνισμόν, ἀλλὰ μόνον τὸ μὴ Ρωμαϊκόν

μέρος τοῦ Νεοελληνισμοῦ. Ὁ Νεογραικισμὸς ὡς καὶ ὁ πρὸ τῆς Ἀλώσεως Γραικισμὸς εἶναι ἐκ τῆς φύσεώς των δουλεῖα χειροτέρα τῆς Φραγκοκρατίας καὶ τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας.

Ἡ Φραγκοκρατία καὶ ἡ Τουρκοκρατία ἦσαν ὑποδούλωσις τοῦ σώματος. Ὁ Γραικισμὸς καὶ Νεογραικισμὸς εἶναι ὑποδούλωσις τοῦ πνεύματος. Οἱ Ρωμηοὶ τῆς Φραγκοκρατίας καὶ τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας εἶναι ὅσοι δὲν ἠκολούθησαν τὸ παράδειγμα ἐκείνων ποὺ ἐφράγκευσαν καὶ ἐτούρκευσαν. Οἱ σημερινοὶ ἀπομειναντες Ρωμηοὶ ἀσφαλῶς δὲν τουρκεύουν ἀλλ' οὔτε φραγκεύουν οὔτε γραικεύουν.

Ὅπως οἱ Γραικοὶ πρὸ τῆς Ἀλώσεως εἶναι ἐκείνοι ποὺ ἐφράγκευσαν, οὕτω καὶ οἱ Νεογραικοὶ ἐγραικεύσαν γενόμενοι οἱ σημερινοὶ Γραικύλοι τῶν Εὐρωπαϊῶν καὶ Ρώσων καὶ τῶρα τῶν Ἀμερικανῶν, τῶν ἐξαδέλφων τῶν Εὐρωπαϊῶν. Τὸ γραικεύω εἶναι σχεδὸν ταυτὸν μὲ τὸ φραγκεύω. Σημαίνει σήμερον ἀμερικανεύω, ρωσεύω, φραντσεύω, γερμανεύω, δηλαδή γίνομαι πνευματικὸς δοῦλος τῶν ἔξω τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης. Ὁ Ρωμηὸς γνωρίζει σαφῶς ὅτι ὑπάρχει μεγάλη διαφορὰ μεταξὺ συμμαχίας καὶ δουλείας. Γίνεται σύμμαχος μὲ ὁποινδήποτε, ἐφ' ὅσον συμφέρει εἰς τὸ Ἔθνος, ἀλλὰ ποτε δούλος τῶν συμμάχων.

Ὁ Γραικύλος ὅμως νομίζει ὅτι συμμαχία σημαίνει πνευματικὴ δουλείαν, δηλαδή συγχώνευσιν πολιτισμῶν καὶ σύγχυσιν ἰδεολογικῶν. Ὁ Γραικύλος δὲν γίνεται μόνον σύμμαχος, ἀλλὰ γίνεται καὶ θέλει νὰ γίνῃ ἓνα πράγμα μὲ τὸν σύμμαχον. Νομίζει ὅτι συμμαχία εἶναι τὸ νὰ προσφέρεται δι' ἔρωτα ὡς δούλη πρὸς κύριον ἵνα ἀποκτήσῃ ἰσχυρὸν προστατήν, ὁ ὁποῖος θὰ σώσῃ τὴν Ἑλλαδίτσαν του. Ὁ Νεογραικύλος εἶναι συνεχιστὴς τῆς παραδόσεως τῶν Γραικύλων πρὸ τῆς Ἀλώσεως, οἱ ὁποῖοι μᾶς ἐκήρυττον τὴν ἀνάγκην τῆς φραγκεύσεως τοῦ πνεύματος, διὰ νὰ σωθῶμεν ἀπὸ τὴν δουλείαν τοῦ σώματος. Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια, ὁ Γραικύλος φοβεῖται καὶ ἄρα οὔτε εἶναι οὔτε μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι Ρωμηὸς, ἐφόσον φοβεῖται. Φοβεῖται τὴν πνευματικὴν ἀνεξαρτησίαν καὶ ἐλευθερίαν. Θέλει ἐλευθερίαν τοῦ σώματος μόνον. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο δὲν ἠμπορεῖ καν νὰ φαντασθῇ ὅτι ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη ὄχι μόνον δὲν ὑποδουλώνεται πνευματικῶς, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ πολιτιστικὴ δύναμις ἡγετική. Πῶς ἠμπορεῖ ὁ Γραικύλος νὰ ἔχῃ αἰσθήματα καὶ πεποίθησιν ἡγέτου, ὅταν εἶναι δούλος;

Ὁ Ρωμηὸς ἔχει ἡγετικὰ αἰσθήματα ἀπὸ τὴν Ρωμηοσύνην του. Ὁ Γραικύλος τὸν ἡγέτην κάμνει μόνον ἐντὸς τῆς Ἑλλαδίτσας του, ἀφοῦ τὰ ἡγετικά του αἰσθήματα καὶ τὴν πολιτικὴν του δύναμιν ἀντλεῖ ἀπὸ πηγὴν ἔξω τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης καὶ ἐκτὸς τῆς Ἑλλαδίτσας του. Ὁ Ρωμηὸς εἶναι ἀπὸ τὴν Ρωμηοσύνην

του αετός. Οί Ρωμηοί είναι πρὸς ἀλλήλους αἰετοὶ καὶ πρὸς ξένους αἰετοί. Ὁ Γραικύλος κάμνει τὸ λεοντάρι εἰς τοὺς Ρωμηοὺς μὲ τὴν βοήθεια τῶν ξένων, ἀλλὰ εἶναι φρόνιμον ποντικάκι εἰς τοὺς ξένους.

Δὲν ἐνδιαφέρει τὸν Ρωμηὸν τί λέγουν οἱ ξένοι δι' αὐτόν, διότι τὰ κριτήρια του εἶναι ρωμαϊκά. Ὁ Γραικύλος ἀγωνίζεται νὰ βρεθῆ εἰς θέσιν νὰ διατυμπανίζει τί καλὰ λέγουν οἱ ξένοι δι' αὐτόν, διὰ νὰ ἀποδείξη τὴν ἀξίαν του, διότι τὰ κριτήριά του δὲν εἶναι ρωμαϊκά ἀλλὰ εὐρωπαϊκά, ρώσικα καὶ ἀμερικάνικα.

Ὁ Ρωμηὸς εἶναι σκληρὸς καὶ ἐλεύθερος καὶ οὐδέποτε ἀφελής. Καὶ ὅταν τὸ σῶμα του ἢ τὰ συμφέροντά του σκλαβωθοῦν, κάμνει ἐλιγμοὺς καὶ ὑποκρίνεται ἀναλόγως τῶν περιστάσεων, διὰ νὰ παραμείνῃ μὲ τὴν εὐφυΐαν του ὅσον τὸ δυνατὸν πλέον ἐλευθέρῃ ἢ Ρωμηοσύνη του. Μὲ ὑπερηφάνειαν τὸν Καραγκιόζη κάμνει καὶ πάντοτε ἀδούλωτος αἰετὸς τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης παραμένει.

Ὁ Νεογραιοκισμὸς ἀρκετὰ ἐξημίωσε τὸ Ρωμαϊκὸν μὲ τὴν γεγόμενην ξενομανίαν του, ἢ ὅποια εἶναι εἰς τὴν πραγματικότητα δουλοπρέπεια εἰς τὰ ἀφεντικά του. Ἀκριβῶς ἐπειδὴ οἱ Νεογραιοκοὶ εἶναι διηρμένοι μεταξὺ τῶν ἀφεντικῶν των, συμπεριφέρονται ὁ ἕνας Γραικύλος πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον Γραικύλον ὡσὰν τὰ ἀφεντικά των. Οἱ Γραικύλοι τῶν Ρώσων φέρονται πρὸς τοὺς Γραικύλους τῶν Ἀμερικανῶν ὡς οἱ Ρῶσοι πρὸς Ἀμερικανοὺς καὶ τανάπαλιν. Τὸ ἴδιον κάμνουν οἱ Γραικύλοι τῶν Φρατσέζων, Ἀγγλῶν, Γερμανῶν, κλπ. Δια τοῦτο παρατηρεῖται τὸ περίεργον φαινόμενον νὰ ἐρωτεύεται ὁ Γραικύλος τὸν Ρῶσον φίλον του καὶ νὰ μισῇ τὸν Γραικύλον τῶν Ἀμερικανῶν καὶ τανάπαλιν. Τὸ παράδοξον εἶναι ὅτι ἕκαστος θεωρεῖ τὸν ἄλλον Γραικύλον ἐχθρὸν καὶ προδότην τοῦ Ἔθνους. Ἐξ ἀπόψεως ὅμως Ρωμηοσύνης οἱ Γραικύλοι εἶναι ὅλοι προδόται.

Τοῦτο ὅμως δὲν σημαίνει πάλιν ὅτι δέχεται ὅτιδήποτε τὸ ἀκλὸν καὶ τὸ κάμνει ρωμαϊκόν. Ὅπως γίνεται σύμμαχος μὲ ὅποιον συμφέρει ἐθνικῶς, κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον τρόπον ἀποκτᾷ ὅλα ὅσα χρειάζονται ἀπὸ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν ἐπιστημόνων τοῦ κόσμου, ἀλλὰ τὰ προσαγάγει εἰς τὸν ρωμαϊκὸν πολιτισμὸν του. Οὐδέποτε συγγέει τὰς θετικὰς ἐπιστήμας μὲ τὸν πολιτισμὸν, ἀφοῦ γνωρίζει ὅτι καὶ ὁ βάρβαρος δύναται νὰ ἔχη ἢ νὰ ἀποκτήσῃ καὶ νὰ προαγάγῃ τὰς θετικὰς ἐπιστήμας, διὰ νὰ χρησιμοποίησῃ αὐτὰς εἰς ὑποδούλωσιν καὶ καταστροφὴν ἀνθρώπων.

Διὰ τοῦτο ὁ Ρωμηὸς γνωρίζει ὅτι εἶναι πνευματικὸς ἡγέτης καὶ εἰς αὐτοὺς ποὺ εἶναι ὡς τεχνοκράται καὶ ὡς οἰκονομικὴ δύναμις ἡγεῖται. Ἀλλὰ οἱ Νεογραιοκοὶ ἔχουν τόσον πολὺ συνηθίσει νὰ συγγέουν τὸ τεχνοκρατικὸν καὶ οἰκονομικὸν στοιχεῖον μὲ τὴν πνευματικὴν ἡγεσίαν, ὥστε δὲν ἀντολαμβάνονται πλέον τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη εἶναι σήμερον πολιτιστικὸς ἡγέτης ἑκατομμυρίων ἀνθρώπων ἐκτὸς τῆς Ἑλλάδος των.

Ὁ Γραικύλος νομίζει ὅτι τοιαύτη ἡγεσίαν εἶχον μόνον οἱ ἀρχαῖοι Ἕλληνες καὶ φαντάζεται τὸν ἑαυτὸν του ὡς τὸν φύλακα τῶν ἐρειπίων αὐτῶν. Θεωρεῖ συνεχιστὰς καὶ ἡγέτας τοῦ πολιτιστικοῦ ἔργου τῶν ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων τοὺς Εὐρωπαίους. Δὲν εἶναι εἰς θέσιν νὰ καταλάβῃ ὅτι μόνον ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη εἶναι συνεχιστὴς καὶ ἡγέτης τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ πολιτισμοῦ. Διὰ τοῦτο ὁ Γραικύλος εἶναι ὁ κύριος συντελεστὴς εἰς τὴν καλλιέργειαν τοῦ δουλοπρεποῦς φρονήματος τοῦ νεογραιοκισμοῦ ἐν Ἑλλάδι πνεύματος. Ὁ Γραικύλος ἔχει ἐμπιστοσύνην

ὄχι εἰς τὸν ἑαυτὸν του ἀλλὰ μόνον εἰς τὰ ξένα ἀφεντικά του.

Ναὶ μὲν Ρωμηὸς ἔχει ἀπόλυτον πεποίθησιν εἰς τὴν Ρωμηοσύνην του, ἀλλὰ οὔτε φανατικὸς οὔτε μισαλλόδαξος εἶναι καὶ οὔτε ἔχει καμμίαν ξενοφοβίαν. Ἀντιθέτως ἀγαπᾷ τοὺς ξένους οὐχ

ὅμως ἀφελῶς. Τοῦτο διότι γνωρίζει ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς ἀγαπᾷ ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ ὅλας τὰς φυλάς καὶ ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη χωρὶς διάκρισιν καὶ χωρὶς προτίμησιν. Ὁ Ρωμηὸς γνωρίζει ὅτι ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη του κατέχει τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ εἶναι ἡ ὑψηλὴ μορφή τῶν πολιτισμῶν. Ἀλλὰ κατανοεῖ ἄριστα τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Ρωμηὸν ὄχι ὅμως περισσότερον ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους. Ὁ Θεὸς ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κάτοχον τῆς ἀλήθειας ἀλλ' ἐξ ἴσου ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κήρυκα τοῦ ψεύδους. Ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Ἅγιον ἀλλ' ἀγαπᾷ ἐξ ἴσου ἀκόμη καὶ τὸν διάβολον. Διὰ τοῦτο ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη εἶναι αὐτοπεποίθησις, ἰταμότης καὶ ἐγωϊσμός. Ὁ ἡρωϊσμὸς τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης εἶναι ἀληθὴς καὶ διαρκὴς κατάστασις τοῦ πνεύματος καὶ ὄχι ἀγριότης, βαρβαρότης καὶ ἀρπακτικότης.

Οἱ μεγαλύτεροι ἥρωες τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης συγκαταλέγονται μεταξὺ τῶν Ἁγίων. Ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη διαφέρει τῶν ἄλλων πολιτισμῶν, διότι ἔχει τὸ ἴδιον θεμέλιον διὰ τὸν ἡρωϊσμόν της ὡς καὶ διὰ τὴν ἀγιοσύνην της, δηλαδὴ τὸ ρωμαϊκὸν φιλότιμον τὸ ὅποιον δὲν ὑπάρχει εἰς τὸν εὐρωπαϊκὸν πολιτισμὸν. Παρὰ ταῦτα οἱ Γραικύλοι ἀπὸ τὸ 1821 μέχρι σήμερον προπαγανδίζουν ὅτι ὀφειλόμενον



νά ἐγκαταλείψωμεν τὴν Ρωμοσύνην καὶ νά γίνωμεν Εὐρωπαῖοι, διότι δῆθεν ὁ εὐρωπαϊκὸς πολιτισμὸς εἶναι ἀνώτερος ἀπὸ τὴν Ρωμοσύνην. Τὸ δοκίμιον τοῦτο δὲν προσπαθεῖ νά ἀποδείξῃ τίποτε. Ἡ Ρωμοσύνη δὲν ἀποδεικνύεται. Περιγράφεται. Δὲν χρειάζεται ἀπολογητὰς. Εἶναι ἀπλῶς αὐτὸ ποῦ εἶναι. Τὸ δέχεται κανεὶς ἢ τὸ ἀπορρίπτει. Διὰ τοῦτο τὰ παιδιά τῶν Ρωμῶν ἢ παραμένουν πιστοὶ καὶ σκληροὶ Ρωμηοὶ ἢ ἐφράγκευον ἢ ἐτούρκευον.

Καὶ σήμερον ἄλλοι παραμένουν Ρωμηοί, ἄλλοι ὅμως ἀμερικανεύουν, ρωσεύουν, φραντσεύουν, ἀγγλεύουν, δηλαδὴ Γραικεύουν.

Εἰς τὸ παρελθὸν οἱ Ρωμηοὶ εἶχον τὴν ἡγεσίαν καὶ ἦσαν ὀργανωμένοι μὲ ρωμαϊκὴν ἐπιστήμην καὶ παιδείαν καὶ ἐπικρατοῦσαν εἰς τὸ Ρωμαϊκόν. Μετὰ τὴν ἴδρυσιν τῆς Ἑλλαδίτσας τῶν ἐλλαδιστῶν ὅμως οἱ Ρωμηοὶ ἐξετοπίσθησαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἡγεσίαν καὶ ἀνέλαβον αὐτὴν οἱ Γραικύλοι τῶν Μεγάλων Δυνάμεων καὶ ἴδρυσαν τὸν Νεογραικισμὸν μὲ ἐπίσημον πρόγραμμα νά μὴ εἴμεθα πλέον Ρωμηοὶ ἀλλὰ τὰ ταπεινὰ καὶ φρόνιμα γραικύλα παιδιά τῶν Εὐρωπαίων καὶ Ρώσων.

Ἦξι μόνον ἔγινε τοῦτο ἀλλὰ οὔτε προεσπάθησαν οἱ Νεογραικύλοι νά τὸ ἀποκρύψουν. Ἦσαν ὑπερήφανοι διὰ τὴν ὑποδοῦλωσίν των εἰς τὸν πολιτισμὸν τῶν Εὐρωπαίων καὶ Ρώσων καὶ τὴν διευτυπᾶνίζαν εἰς ὅλας τὰς πολιτιστικὰς ἐκδειλώσεις, τὴν μουσικὴν, τοὺς χορούς, τὴν ἀρχιτεκτονικὴν, τὰς ἐνδυμασίας κ.λ.π.

Τὰ πρῶτα κόμματα τῆς «ἐλευθέρας» Ἑλλάδος δὲν ἦσαν τὸ φραντσεξικὸν κόμμα, τὸ ἀγγλικὸν κόμμα καὶ τὸ ρώσικον κόμμα; Καὶ ἕως σήμερον ποῦ τὰ ὑπουργεῖα παιδείας καὶ ἐξωτερικῶν ἀποτελοῦν μέρος τῆς κομματικῆς πολιτικῆς, δὲν συνεχίζετο ἡ ἴδια κατάστασις;

Ἡ παιδεία καὶ ἡ ἐξωτερικὴ πολιτικὴ πρέπει νά εἶναι τὸ ἴδιον δι' ὅλους τοὺς Ρωμηοὺς καὶ ἐκτὸς κομματικῶν διαμαχῶν. Τοῦτο ὅμως δύναται νά ἐπιτευχθῇ μόνον ὅταν ἡ ἔχουσα σχέσιν μὲ θέματα πολιτισμοῦ ἐπιστήμης τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐπανεύρῃ τὰ Ρωμαϊκὰ κριτήρια καὶ βάση αὐτῶν ἀναδημιουργήσῃ ἢ ἀναστήσῃ τὴν ἀδέσμευτον ἀπὸ τὰς περὶ Ρωμοσύνης πλαστογραφίας τῶν ξένων ἐπιστήμην.

Ἐνώπιόν τοῦ μεγέθους τοῦ ἐν προκειμένῳ θέματος τὸ παρὸν μελέτημα εἶναι μία προσπάθεια ὅχι λύσεως ἀλλ' ἀπλῶς ἀποκαλύψεως σημαντικῶν προβλημάτων ἢ θεμάτων τὰ ὁποῖα ἐμποδίζουν εἰς τὴν ἀνάπτυξιν μίας ρωμαϊκῆς θεωρήσεως τῆς ἱστορικῆς πραγματικότητος τοῦ Γένους.

Οὐσιαστικῶς τὸ πόνημα τοῦτο εἶναι προσκλητήριο εἰς τοὺς Ρωμηοὺς καὶ τὰς Ρωμαίγισσας (ὡς τὶς ὀνομάζει ὁ Μακρυγιάννης) νά ἀναλάβουν τὸν ἐπιστημονικὸν ἀγῶνα, νά ἀναστήσουν τὴν Ρωμοσύνην ἀπὸ τὸν ἐπιστημονικὸν θάνατον, τὸν ὁποῖον ἐπεξεργάσθησαν

δι' αὐτὴν (1) οἱ Φράγκοι ἀπὸ τὸν 9ον αἰῶνα, (2) οἱ Ρῶσοι μετὰ τὴν Ἄλωσιν, (3) οἱ Γραικοὶ πρὸ τῆς Ἀλώσεως καὶ (4) οἱ Νεογραικοὶ τῆς δούλης εἰς τοὺς Εὐρωπαίους καὶ Ρώσους Ἑλλαδίτσας τοῦ 19^{ου} αἰῶνος, οἱ ὁποῖοι μετέτρεψαν τὴν ρωμαϊκὴν Ἐπανάστασιν τοῦ 1821 εἰς ἦτταν τῆς Ρωμοσύνης καὶ θρίαμβον τοῦ Γραικισμοῦ τοῦ Καρλομάγνου καὶ τοῦ Νεογραικισμοῦ τῶν «Φιλλελήνων» τῶν Μεγάλων Δυνάμεων.

Τὰ χρώματα τοῦ ἐξώφυλλου εἶναι τὰ χρώματα τῆς Ρωμοσύνης ποῦ διασώζονται μέχρι σήμερον εἰς τὰ λάβαρα τῶν Πατριαρχείων Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ Ἱεροσολύμων. Ὁ χρυσοῦς ἀετὸς εἶναι ἡ Ρωμοσύνη τῶν ρωμαϊκῶν τραγουδιῶν καὶ ἡ καρδιὰ τοῦ ἀετοῦ εἶναι ὁ χρυσοῦς σταυρὸς. **Ἡ σημαία τῆς Ρωμοσύνης εἶναι ὁ χρυσοῦς σταυρὸς ἐπάνω εἰς κόκκινον πανί.**

Κάποτε οἱ Ρωμαῖσες ἔβαφαν τὰ μαλλιά των κόκκινα καὶ ἐφοροῦσαν φουστάνια μὲ τὰ ἐθνικὰ χρώματα. Διὰ τοὺς Ρωμηοὺς τὰ ἐθνικὰ χρώματα καὶ σύμβολα δὲν εἶναι συζητήσιμα. Εἶναι ρωμαϊκά. Οἱ Γραικύλοι οὐδέποτε θὰ τὰ ἐπαναφέρουν χωρὶς τὴν ἄδειαν τῶν ἀφεντάδων των. Ὁ Ρωμηὸς ἀφεντάδες δὲν ἔχει καὶ θὰ τὰ ἐπαναφέρῃ μαζί μὲ τὸ προγονικόν τοῦ Γένους σύνθημα: **«Ἡ Ρωμανία Νικᾷ»!**



Νὰ ξέρουμε ὅμως ἐμεῖς, οἱ εὐσεβεῖς, ὅτι ὅσο βρισκόμαστε στὴν ἁμαρτία, δηλαδὴ στὴν παράβαση τῶν θεῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀκόμη καὶ ἂν διαβάζουμε ὅλες τὶς προσευχὰς τῶν ὁσίων, τὰ τροπάρια, τὰ κοντάκια καὶ τοὺς κανόνες κάθε μέρα καὶ κάθε ὥρα, δὲν θὰ καταφέρουμε μὲ αὐτὸ τίποτα. Ἐπειδὴ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Κύριος, ὁ Χριστός, σὰν μὲ μομφὴ καὶ παράπονο, λέγει σέ μᾶς: **«Τί δὲ μὲ καλεῖτε Κύριε, Κύριε, καὶ οὐ ποιεῖτε ἃ λέγω;»**, δηλαδὴ ὅσο ζεῖτε παραβαίνοντας τὶς ἐντολὰς μου, μέχρι τότε μάταια μὲ καλεῖτε μὲ πολλὰ καὶ πολὺ ὡρες προσευχῆς. Μία μόνον ὑπάρχει εὐχάριστη σ' Αὐτὸν προσευχή: εἶναι ἡ ἔμπρακτῃ προσευχή, ποῦ συνίσταται στὸ νά ἀπομακρυνθοῦμε μὲ ὅλη τὴ ψυχὴ μας διὰ παντὸς ἀπὸ κάθε παράβαση τῶν ἀγίων ἐντολῶν Του καὶ νά στερεωθοῦμε μὲ αὐτὸ στὸ φόβο Του ἐκτελώνοντας κάθε δίκαιο ἔργο μὲ πνευματικὴ χαρὰ καὶ εἰλικρινῆ ἀγάπη.

Ἁγίου Μαξίμου τοῦ Γραικοῦ

«Ἀνελήφθης ἐν Δόξῃ Ὁ τά Σύμπαντα Πληρῶν...»

Αρχ. Παύλου Δημητρακοπούλου, πρ. Ιεροῦ Ναοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ Πειραιῶς.

Ἡ ἐν δόξῃ ἀνάληψις τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ ἡ ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Πατρὸς καθέδρα εἶναι τὸ τελευταῖο γεγονός στὴν ἐπὶ γῆς ζωὴ καὶ δράση Του, εἶναι τὸ τέρας τῆς συγκαταβάσεώς Του καὶ τῆς ἐνσάρκου Του θείας οἰκονομίας. Ἀποτελεῖ ὁμως ταυτόχρονα καὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴ τῆς ἀνυψώσεώς Του, τῆς ἀνυψώσεως τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεώς Του σὲ Θεία ἐξουσία καὶ δόξα καὶ βασιλεία.

Ἐὰν ἡ ἐξ' οὐρανοῦ κατάβασίς Του ἦταν κένωσις καὶ πτώχευσις καὶ ἄκρα ταπεινώσις, ἡ ἀνάληψις Του στοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἐσήμανε τὴν ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Πατρὸς καθέδρα καὶ σ' αὐτὴν βρίσκουν τὴν πλήρη πραγματοποίησή τους οἱ λόγοι τοῦ Κυρίου, τοὺς ὁποίους εἶπε κατὰ τὴν ἀρχιερατικὴ Του προσευχὴ ὀλίγον πρὸ τοῦ πάθους: «Καὶ νῦν δόξασόν με σύ πάτερ παρὰ σεαυτῶ τῇ δόξῃ ἣ εἶχον πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον εἶναι παρὰ σοί.» (Ἰω. 17:5).

Τὴν ἐνδοξὴ αὐτὴ ἀνοδο τοῦ Κυρίου προφητικῶς προανήγγειλε ὁ προφήτης Δαυὶδ στοὺς ψαλμοὺς του: «Ἀνέβη ὁ Θεὸς ἐν ἀλαλαγῶ, Κύριος ἐν φωνῇ σάλπιγγος». (Ψαλμ. 46:6). Ὁ Κύριος, μετὰ τὴν ἐνδοξὴ νίκη Του κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ διαβόλου ἀνέβη στοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἐν μέσῳ ἀλαλαγῶν χαρᾶς καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσεως ἐκ μέρους τῶν ἀγγελικῶν δυνάμεων, ὑμνούμενος καὶ δοξαζόμενος ὑπ' αὐτῶν. Ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος σχολιάζοντας τὸν παρὰ πάνω στίχο, παρατηρεῖ, ὅτι «οὐκ εἶπεν ἀνεβιβάσθη, ἀλλ' ἀνέβη, δεικνύς, ὅτι οὐχ ἑτέρου τινὸς χειραγωγούμενος ἀνέβη, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ταύτην ὁδεύων τὴν ὁδόν». Ὁ Ἰησοῦς δὲν ἀνέβη στοὺς οὐρανοὺς χειραγωγούμενος ἀπὸ κάποιον ἄλλον, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν ἰδική Του Θεϊκὴ δύναμη καὶ ἐξουσία, ἀποδεικνύοντας ἔτσι, ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ ἴδιος ὑπῆρξε ὁ αὐτουργὸς τῆς ἀναβάσεως.

Τὴν χαρὰ καὶ ἀγαλλίαση τῶν ἀγγελικῶν δυνάμεων ἐπὶ τῇ ἐνδόξῳ ἀναλήψει τοῦ Κυρίου ἐκφράζει ὁ Δαυὶδ σὲ ἄλλο ψαλμὸ σαφέστερα: «Ἄρατε πύλας οἱ ἄρχοντες ὑμῶν καὶ ἐπάρθητε πύλαι αἰώνιοι καὶ εἰσελεύσεται ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης. Τίς ἐστὶν οὗτος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης; Κύριος κραταῖος καὶ δυνατὸς Κύριος δυνατὸς

ἐν πολέμῳ.» (Ψαλμ. 23:7-8). Ὅπως ἐρμηνεύει ὁ ἅγιος Ἀθανάσιος, οἱ ἐπὶ γῆς ἄγγελοι, διακονοῦντες τὸν Κύριον, προτρέπουν τὶς ἀνώτερες ἀγγελικὲς δυνάμεις, ποὺ βρίσκονται στοὺς οὐρανοὺς, καθὼς Αὐτὸς ἀναλαμβάνεται, νὰ ἀνοίξουν τὶς ἐπουράνιες πύλας γιὰ νὰ εἰσέλθῃ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης. Στὴ συνέχεια ἐρωτοῦν αἱ ἄνω δυνάμεις, «τὸ παράδοξόν τῆς οἰκονομίας ἐκπληττόμεναι», ποῖος εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης; Καὶ ἀπαντοῦν οἱ ἐπὶ γῆς ἄγγελοι: Δὲν εἶναι κάποιος συνηθισμένος ἄρχων, ἀλλὰ ὁ παντοδύναμος καὶ πανίσχυρος Θεός, ὁποῖος ἐπέτυχε ἐνδοξὴ νίκη στὸν πόλεμόν του πρὸς τοὺς ἐχθροὺς του, δηλαδὴ πρὸς τὸν διάβολο καὶ τὸν θάνατο.

Περὶ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀνόδου ὁμιλῶν καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, καθὼς ἐρμηνεύει τὸν ψαλμικὸ στίχο «ἀνέβης εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσας αἰχμαλωσίαν» (Ψαλμ. 67:19), στὴν πρὸς Ἐφεσίους ἐπιστολὴν του, λέγει: «ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν καὶ ἔδωκε δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.» (Ἐφ. 4:8). Ὅταν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνέβη μὲ τὴν ἀνάληψίν του στοὺς οὐρανοὺς, ἔδωσε αἰχμαλώτους τοὺς ἐχθροὺς του, δηλαδὴ τὸν σατανᾶ καὶ τὸν θάνατο καὶ ἔδωσε χαρίσματα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους, δηλαδὴ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς.

Ὡς Θεὸς ὁ Κύριός μας, ὡς ἄναρχος Λόγος καὶ Υἱὸς Μονογενῆς καὶ Ὁμοούσιος πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα, ἦταν πάντοτε συνθρόνος καὶ ὁμότιμος πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ προτοῦ νὰ σαρκωθῆ. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅταν ἐσαρκώθη καὶ ἐγίνε ἀνθρωπος, οὐδέποτε ἐχωρίσθη ἀπὸ τὸν Πατέρα. Ὅπως λέγει ὁ ὑμνογράφος, «Ὁλος ἦν ἐν τοῖς κάτω, καὶ τῶν ἄνω οὐδόλως ἀπὴν ὁ ἀπερίγραπτος Λόγος». Καὶ τοῦτο διότι «συγκατάβασις γὰρ Θεϊκὴ, οὐ μετάβασις τοπικὴ γέγονε». Ἀνελήφθη καὶ ἐκάθισε στὰ δεξιὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Πατρὸς ὡς αἰώνιος ἀρχιερεὺς καὶ μεσίτης πάντων ἡμῶν, σύμφωνα μὲ τὸν λόγον τοῦ Παύλου στὴν πρὸς Ἐβραίους ἐπιστολὴ του: «Τοιοῦτον ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα, ὃς ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. (Ἐβρ. 8:1). Καὶ ὅπως οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης εἰσήρχοντο στὰ ἅγια τῶν ἀγίων τοῦ ναοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἡμέρα τοῦ ἐξίλασμοῦ μὲ αἷμα τράγων καὶ μόσχων, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ ἀληθινὸς καὶ μέγας ἀρχιερεὺς μας ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, «ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν», ὅπως τὸν ὀνομάζει ὁ Παῦλος,



είσηλθε στα ἀληθινὰ ἅγια των ἁγίων, δηλαδή στὸν οὐρανό, μιὰ φορὰ γιὰ πάντα, ὄχι πλέον μὲ αἷμα τράγων καὶ μόσχων, ποὺ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἐξαλείψουν ἁμαρτίες, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὸ ἰδικὸ Του πολῦτιμο καὶ πανάγιο αἷμα, τὸ ὁποῖον ἔχυσε πάνω στὸ σταυρό. Διότι ὅπως λέγει ὁ Παῦλος στὴν ἴδια ἐπιστολὴ του «οὐ γὰρ εἰς χειροποίητα ἅγια εἰσηλθεν ὁ Χριστὸς ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν, ἀλλ' εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανὸν νῦν ἐφανισθῆναι τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν» (Ἐβρ. 9:24). Ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν εἰσηλθε σὲ χειροποίητα ἅγια ἁγίων, ποὺ εἶναι ἀπομίμηση καὶ εἰκόνα τῶν ἀληθινῶν ἁγίων, ἀλλὰ σ' αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανόν, γιὰ νὰ παρουσιασθῆ τώρα εἰς τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ πρεσβεύει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.

Ἡ εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ὁμῶς ἄνοδος τοῦ Κυρίου δὲν ἦταν μόνον δόξα τῆς ἰδικῆς Του ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἰδικῆς μας. Διότι ὅπως λέγει ὁ ἀπόστολος στὴν πρὸς Ἐφεσίους ἐπιστολὴν του, «συνήγειρε καὶ συνεκάθισε ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ» (Ἐφ. 2:6), δηλαδή ὅλους ἐμᾶς, ποὺ πιστεύομε σ' αὐτὸν καὶ διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος γίναμε μέλη τοῦ σώματός Του, συνανέστησε ἀπὸ τὰ μνήματα τῆς ἁμαρτίας μὲ τὴν ἀνάστασή Του καὶ μᾶς ἔβαλε, νὰ καθίσουμε μαζί του στὰ ἐπουράνια μὲ τὴν ἀνάληψή Του. Καὶ τοῦτο εἶναι πολὺ φυσικό, διότι ἐφ' ὅσον ἀνυψώθη αὐτός, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἐπόμενο εἶναι, νὰ ἀνυψωθῆ καὶ τὸ σῶμα. Ἐφ' ὅσον ἐδοξάσθη ἡ κεφαλὴ, θὰ δοξασθῆ καὶ τὸ σῶμα. Τοῦτο δὲ θὰ πραγματοποιηθῆ κατὰ τὴν Δευτέρα Παρουσία Του, ὅποτε σύμφωνα μὲ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Παύλου, ὅλοι ἐμεῖς «ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ Κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα καὶ οὕτω πάντοτε σὺν Κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα» (Α' Θεσ. 4:17). Τὴν ἀλήθεια αὐτὴ ἐπισημαίνει καὶ ὁ ἱερὸς ὑμνογράφος σ' ἓνα τροπάριο: «Ἀνέβη ὁ Θεὸς ἐν ἀλαλαγμῷ, Κύριος ἐν φωνῇ σάλπιγγος, τοῦ ἀνυψῶσαι τὴν πεσοῦσαν εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἀδάμ». Ἄλλοι δὲ πάλιν λέγει, «κατελθὼν οὐρανόθεν εἰς τὰ ἐπίγεια καὶ τὴν κάτω κειμένην ἐν τῇ τοῦ ἄδου φρουρὰ συναναστήσας ὡς Θεὸς ἀδαμιαίαν μορφήν τῇ ἀναλήψει σου Χριστέ εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἀναγαγὼν τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ πατρικῷ σου συγκάθεδρον ἀπειργάσω ὡς ἐλεήμων καὶ φιλόανθρωπος».

Ἡ ἀνάληψις τοῦ Κυρίου ἦταν καὶ μιὰ ἀναγκαιότητα. Ἦταν ἡ ἀναγκαία προϋπόθεσις, γιὰ νὰ ἔρθῃ ὁ Παράκλητος στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Τὸ ἐτόνισε ὁ Κύριος ὀλίγον πρὸ τοῦ Πάθους Του πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὲς του: «Συμφέρει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐγὼ ἀπέλθω, ἐὰν γὰρ ἐγὼ μὴ ἀπέλθω ὁ Παράκλητος οὐκ ἐλεύσεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς. Ἐὰν δὲ πορευθῶ, πέμψω αὐτὸν πρὸς ὑμᾶς.» (Ἰω. 16:7). Ἐπρεπε δηλαδή νὰ προηγηθῆ ἡ ἄνοδος Του πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα, προκειμένου νὰ μεσιτεύσῃ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ὥστε νὰ στείλῃ τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα. Ἐπειδὴ δηλαδή οἱ μαθητὲς

ἐλυποῦντο, διότι θὰ ἔστεροῦντο τὸν ἀγαπημένο τους διδάσκαλο, μόλις ἔμαθαν, ὅτι θὰ ἀποχωρισθῆ ἀπὸ αὐτούς, ἔρχεται τώρα ὁ Κύριος, νὰ τοὺς παρηγορήσῃ μὲ τὴν ὑπόσχεση τῆς ἐλεύσεως τοῦ Παρακλήτου, στὴν παρουσία τοῦ ὁποίου θὰ αἰσθάνονται μέσα τους τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Χριστό.

Κατανοοῦντες λοιπὸν καὶ ἐμεῖς τὸ μέγεθος τῆς συγκαταβάσεως καὶ τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς φιλανθρωπίας τοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν παθόντος καὶ ταφέντος καὶ ἀναστάντος καὶ εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἀναληφθέντος Κυρίου μας, ἅς ἀνυψώσωμεν τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὴν καρδίαν μας πρὸς τὰ ἄνω, ἐκεῖ ὅπου τώρα βρίσκεται ὁ Χριστός, καθήμενος στὰ δεξιὰ του Πατρὸς. «Τὰ τῆς γῆς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καταλιπόντες, τὰ τῆς τέφρας τῷ χοί παραχωροῦντες δευτε ἀνανήψομεν καὶ εἰς ὕψος ἐπάρομεν ὄμματα καὶ νοήματα», ἔτσι ὥστε ἡ ἔορτὴ αὐτὴ νὰ γίνῃ ἀφορμὴ πνευματικῆς ἀνανεώσεως καὶ ἀνανήψεως, ἀφορμὴ ἀπαγγιστρώσεώς μας ἀπὸ τὴν ἐμπαθῆ προσκόλλησι στὰ μάταια καὶ πρόσκαιρα καὶ φθαρτὰ πράγματα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου καὶ ἀδιάληπτης εὐχαριστίας καὶ δοξολογίας πρὸς τὸν Κύριον. Ἀμήν.



Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι σωτήρας, ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶναι ὁδοστρωτήρας. Δὲν ἰσοπεδώνει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, δὲν ἰσοπεδώνει τὴν ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἡ ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, εἶναι δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ ἡ ἐλευθερία εἶναι καὶ πτῆση πρὸς τὰ πάνω καὶ πτώση πρὸς τὰ κάτω.

Γι' ἄλλους ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ἡ μεγάλη ἀγάπη, γι' ἄλλους εἶναι τὸ μῖσος. Ἄλλοι τὸν προσκυνᾶνε κι ἄλλοι τὸν βρίζουν. Κι ὁ Ἰούδας ἄκουσε τὸν ἴδιο λόγο ποὺ ἄκουσε κι ὁ Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος. Ἐκεῖνος ὁμῶς κρεμάστηκε καὶ χάθηκε. Ἐνῶ ὁ Πέτρος ἔκλαψε γιὰ τὴν πτώση του κι ἔγινε ὁ κορυφαῖος Ἀπόστολος.

Γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι διάλογος. Γιὰ τοὺς ἀπίστους εἶναι ἀντίλογος. Γιὰ τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ὁ Λόγος εἶναι ὁμολογία καὶ ἀπολογία. Γιὰ τοὺς ἀπίστους ὁμῶς ὁ Λόγος εἶναι ἀντιλογία. Ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀπευθύνεται καὶ στὶς μέρες μας. Εἶναι ὁ Λόγος τῆς ἀλήθειας, εἶναι ὁ Λόγος ὁ αἰώνιος, ὁ Λόγος ὁ ἀλάθητος.

Ἀλλά, ... δὲν συμφέρει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὁ Χριστός. Χριστὸς σημαίνει ἀγάπη, σημαίνει ἀγκάλιασμα, κοινωνία, ἐντιμότητα, καθαρότητα. Κι ὅλα αὐτὰ δὲν συμφέρουν αὐτοὺς ποὺ θέλουν μιὰ διεφθαρμένη κοινωνία.

Ἀρχιμ. Δανιὴλ Ἀεράκης
Ἱερός Ναὸς Εὐαγγελίστριας, Πειραιᾶς

THE POWER OF THE CROSS THE DEMONIC HOSTS TREMBLE WHEN THEY SEE THE CROSS...

By St. John Maximovitch.

In the prophet Ezekiel (9:6) it is said that when the Angel of the Lord was sent to punish and destroy the sinning people, it was told him not to strike those on whom the "mark" had been made. In the original text this mark is called "tau," the Hebrew letter corresponding to the letter "T," which is how in ancient times the cross was made, which then was an instrument of punishment.

And so, even then was foretold the power of the Cross, which preserves those who venerate it. Likewise, the power of the Cross was indicated by many other events in the Old Testament. Moses, who held his arms raised in the form of a cross during the battle, gave victory to the Israelites over the Amalekites. He also, dividing the Red Sea by a blow of his rod and by a transverse blow uniting the waters again, saved Israel from Pharaoh, who drowned in the water, while Israel crossed over on the dry bottom (Exodus, Chapters 14, 17).

Through the laying on of his hands in the form of a cross on his grandsons, Jacob gave a blessing to his descendants, foretelling at the same time their future until the coming of the "expectation of the nations." (Genesis, Ch. 48).

By the Cross, the Son of God having become man, accomplished our salvation. *He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.* (Phil 2:8). Having stretched out His hands upon the Cross, the Saviour with them, as it were, embraced the world, and by His blood shed on it, like a king with red ink, He signed the forgiveness of the human race.

The Cross of the Lord was the instrument by which He saved the world after the fall into sin. Through the Cross, He descended with His soul into hell so as to raise up from it the souls who were awaiting Him. By the Cross, Christ opened the doors of Paradise which had been closed after our first ancestors had been banished from it. The Cross was sanctified by the Body of Christ which was nailed to it when He gave Himself over to torments and death for the salvation of the world, and it itself was then filled with life-giving power. By the Cross on Golgotha, *the prince of this world was cast out* (Jn 12:31) and an end was put to his authority. The weapon by which he was crushed became the sign of Christ's victory.

The demonic hosts tremble when they see the Cross, for by the Cross the kingdom of hell was destroyed. They do not dare to draw near to anyone who is guarded by the Cross.

The whole human race, by the death of Christ on the Cross, received deliverance from the authority of the devil,

and everyone who makes use of this saving weapon is inaccessible to the demons.

When legions of demons appeared to St. Anthony the Great and other desert-dwellers, they guarded themselves with the Sign of the Cross, and the demons vanished.

When they appeared to Saint Symeon the Stylite, who was standing on his pillar, what seemed to be a chariot to carry him to heaven, the Saint, before mounting it, crossed himself; it disappeared and the enemy, who had hoped to cast down the ascetic from the height of his pillar, was put to shame.

One cannot enumerate all the separate examples of the manifestation of the power of the Cross in various incidents. Invisibly and unceasingly there gushes from it the Divine grace that saves the world.

The Sign of the Cross is made at all the Mysteries and prayers of the Church. With the making of the Sign of the Cross over the bread and wine, they become the Body and Blood of Christ. With the immersion of the Cross, the waters are sanctified. The Sign of the Cross loosens us from sins. When we are guarded by the Cross, we oppose the enemy, not fearing his nets and barking. Just as the flaming sword in the hands of the Cherubim barred the entrance into paradise of old, so the Cross now acts invisibly in the world, guarding it from perdition.

The Cross is the unconquerable weapon of pious kings in the battle with enemies. Through the apparition of the Cross in the sky, the dominion of Emperor Constantine was confirmed and an end was put to the persecution against the Church. The apparition of the Cross in the sky in Jerusalem in the days of Constantius the Arian proclaimed the victory of Orthodoxy. By the power of the Cross of the Lord, Christian kings reign and will reign until Antichrist, barring his path to power and restraining lawlessness (Saint John Chrysostom, *Commentary on 2 Thes 2:6-7*).

The *sign of the Son of Man* (Mt 24:30), that is, the Cross, will appear in the sky in order to proclaim the end of the present world and the coming of the eternal Kingdom of the Son of God. Then all the tribes of the earth shall weep, because they loved the present age and its lusts, but all who have endured persecution for righteousness and called on the name of the Lord shall rejoice and be glad. The Cross then will save from eternal perdition all who conquered temptations by the Cross, who crucified their flesh with its passions and lusts, and took up their cross and followed their Christ.

However, those who hated the Cross of the Lord and did not engrave the Cross in their soul will perish forever. For *the Cross is the preserver of the whole universe, the Cross is the beauty of the Church, the Cross is the might of kings, the Cross is the confirmation of the faithful, the Cross is the glory of angels and the scourge of demons.* (Monday Matins). Amen.

A TRUE PRIEST OF GOD: ELDER EPIPHANIOS (+1989)

Source: "Precious Vessels of the Holy Spirit: The Lives and Counsels of Contemporary Elders of Greece," by H. Middleton, *Protection Veil Press* (2003), pp.63-71.

On December 27, 1930, in the small town of Vournazion in the southwestern Peloponnese, the blessed Elder Epiphanius (Theodoropoulos) was born into the world. His pious parents John and Georgia gave the name Eteoklis to this their first of six children. Despite all the attention he received as the first-born child, Eteoklis spurned worldly attention from an early age. He focused his attention on Christ, following the pious example of his mother and particularly of his aunt. (His aunt, Alexandra, had an especially important influence on his life, a fact that Fr. Epiphanius referred to many times. In addition to playing an important role in his early education and upbringing, she also helped him during his years as an *archimandrite* (in Athens).

As a child of two he would tell people of his desire to become a priest, and donning a sheet, would play priest. From the tender age of five he attended all the services of the local church, fasting and preparing for Holy Communion in the same way as the Church prescribes for adults. One Sunday, in fact, concerned for the boy's health (he was particularly thin at the time), his aunt tried to get him to drink a glass of milk before leaving for the liturgy. The boy was visibly upset and responded, "Shall we go to church with a full stomach? How will we pray? How will we take *antidoron*?" Are we going just to listen to the service?"

Eteoklis would arrive early for church, often before the priest. Early one Sunday morning, the village priest went to prepare things for the liturgy. On arriving at the church, he could just make out a pair of eyes looking at him in the darkness from the doorway of the church. Afraid that the person might be dangerous, he went to Eteoklis' house to see if he had left for church yet. On hearing the story his aunt Alexandra laughed, "Ah! My dear father, what are you afraid of?! It's Eteoklis waiting for you with lit charcoal for the censer."

One evening, on learning that his aunts would be going to an early morning liturgy in one of the many chapels that dot the countryside, Eteoklis begged them to take him with them. Despite their assurances that they would wake him, the young Eteoklis sensed that they would not follow through on their word, as they had done in the past. In his zeal for the Church's services, he decided to hide his aunts' shoes so that they would be forced to wake him, and take him with them!

When he was old enough, Eteoklis was sent to the school in the nearest large town, Kalamata. He was a good student and enjoyed his studies, except for mathematics. His remark to his aunt is characteristic: "What do I need math for? Am I

going to become a merchant? I'm going to become a priest!" From early on in his academic career he distinguished himself by his love for study and his fine character. Both his fellow students as well as his teachers recognized this, and he was thus sought after to serve in various positions of authority and responsibility.

Eteoklis did not spend his time and energies in many of the normal pursuits of young people, but rather in reading Holy Scripture as well as the works of the Fathers. He began his theological training on his own while he was in junior high school and thus developed his belief, oft-repeated, that it is not the university that creates the scholar, but rather one's commitment to a "study-chair," that is to say, his personal study. In addition to his academic studies, Eteoklis did not neglect his spiritual development and thus spent a great deal of time not only in the Church's services, but also visiting what he called the "aristocracy" of Orthodoxy, the monasteries. In particular he would often visit the Voulcanou Monastery, located near Kalamata.

In 1949 Eteoklis moved to Athens, having successfully completed his studies in Kalamata. He enrolled at the Theological School of the University of Athens, but, having a great appetite for knowledge, he didn't limit himself to the study of theology. Following the example of the Cappadocian Fathers and other great Fathers of the Church, Eteoklis threw himself into the study of Greek and foreign authors, philosophers, poets, historians, scholars, and apologists from ancient times to the present. In addition to his personal study, he would also attend lectures at the Schools of Law, Philosophy and Medicine, among others, so as to broaden his knowledge. Many of his professors, recognizing his intellectual gifts, encouraged him to continue his studies abroad so as to return and follow the path of university teaching. Eteoklis refused however, unwilling to sacrifice the grandeur of the priesthood for the lower path of scholarship. Instead of going abroad for graduate studies, he preferred to specialize in the "science" of the spiritual life at the "university" of the monastery. He believed that it is necessary for each candidate to the priesthood (and especially celibate priests) to spend time in monasteries so as to better prepare spiritually for pastoral service. During his years in Athens, Eteoklis frequently visited the Monastery of Longovarda on the island of Paros. The abbot of the monastery there, the blessed Elder Philotheos (Zervakos), was his spiritual father until his repose in 1980.

In the sphere of academics Eteoklis' greatest love was the study of Holy Scripture. He would study the whole of the Old and New Testament from the ancient text, three times each year. He referred to Scripture frequently, using it as his main source in speaking and writing. When asked what he would have studied had theological studies not been an option, he replied, medicine or law: medicine, as it is the most philanthropic science, and law, as the lawyer has the possibility

of greatly affecting society by championing the cause of the good and by protecting the innocent.

In November 1956, Eteoklis' childhood dream was realized when he was ordained to the diaconate by Metropolitan Ierotheos of Aitolia and Akarnania, and was given the new name Epiphanius. That same year he also published his first book, *Holy Scripture and the Evil Spirits*. The years of his diaconate were spent mostly in Kalamata where he had the opportunity to continue his study of the Fathers as well as to spend time with important ecclesiastical personalities of his day.

Elder Epiphanius had patiently waited until after his twenty-fifth birthday to be ordained to the diaconate, so as to remain faithful to the precision of the Church's canons regarding the age at which men may be ordained deacon. Though he never disregarded the need and use of Economy as regards the canons, and made use of it in his pastoral service, when it came to himself, he was very strict and insisted on keeping them precisely. He was accused, at various times, of having a pharisaical attachment to the holy canons. His answer, however, was that many people in the Church today, by seeking ways to reject them, are in fact rejecting gifts which the Holy Spirit has given the Church. His insistence on the keeping of the canons was inspired by his reverence and obedience toward the Holy Spirit Who inspired them and the Holy Fathers who wrote them.

In 1961 Elder Epiphanius was ordained to the priesthood by Metropolitan Ambrose of Eleftheroupolis. The Elder followed the example of the Apostle Paul in serving the Church without pay or benefits. In order to survive, he worked as an editor of the publications of the *Asir* publishing house. One of his spiritual children once suggested that he get on the Church's payroll, not to earn money, but to ensure insurance and pension. He refused, insisting that God, as a good and faithful "Employer" does not leave His "employees" without pay.

Elder Epiphanius' desire was to serve the Church in a quiet and invisible way. He was granted his wish with a position as priest of the little chapel of the Three Great Hierarchs, in downtown Athens. It was here that he zealously served the suffering people of God as confessor. Despite the strictness of his approach to spiritual counsel, crowds of people from all walks of life flocked to him for guidance and spiritual comfort. Although he suffered along with those who came to him, at the same time his work brought him the greatest peace.

In addition to his work as priest and confessor, he also served the Church through the twenty-two books and many articles he authored. His opinion was sought after by bishops, priests, monks and laymen, to help them answer many of the complex theological and ethical problems of the contemporary world. Because of the great respect the faithful had for him, he was asked many times to become bishop, an honor that he refused.

Although Elder Epiphanius lived most of his life in the heart of Athens, he managed to keep a strict rule of prayer. First

thing in the morning, having said morning prayers, he would read the service of Matins along with the canons from the *Menaion* and from the *Paraklitiki*. When his morning rule of prayer had ended he would spend time in study or writing and then begin his pastoral work, receiving guests, or visiting people, according to the needs of the day. His work would barely stop for lunch, during which he would meet with people or speak with them on the telephone. At about five o'clock in the afternoon he would begin the evening services with Vespers followed by a Supplicatory Canon. He would then leave for the chapel of the Three Great Hierarchs, where he would receive people for confession, after which he would visit the sick and suffering in the hospitals. On his return home there would usually be people waiting for him or telephone calls to receive. He would have a late dinner, read Small Compline and the *Akathist* to the Mother of God, and then attempt to sleep, as he suffered from insomnia.

The Elder's insomnia eventually grew so bad that he prayed for divine assistance. During one such sleepless night, he picked up the New Testament and looked for some understanding of his struggle. His eyes immediately fell upon St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, verse 12:7, "*there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*" Elder Epiphanius was grateful for God's answer to his prayer, that at least he knew his suffering was allowed by God. On two other occasions, having reached the limits of his strength, he asked God for His assistance and, opening the New Testament, immediately received the same response. Not so bold as to ask the same thing a fourth time, he simply suffered on.

In 1976, at the urging and with the help of his spiritual children, Elder Epiphanius founded the *Holy Hesychasterion* of the *Kecharitomeni* ("Most Graceful") Mother of God in Trizina, in the Peloponnese, a few hours from Athens. His hope of providing a place of monastic struggle for those of his spiritual sons who sought the monastic life was thus realized. He continued his service in the world as well, however, dividing his time between Athens and his monastery.

Not long after the foundation of the monastery, the Elder's health began to deteriorate. His demanding regime had taken its toll, and in December 1982 he was operated on in Athens. He had been suffering from stomach ailments and was diagnosed with *gastrorrhagia* (severe stomach ulcers), which in his case had the danger of developing into cancer. The operation was very taxing on him and the surgeon ended up removing three-quarters of his stomach. The Elder's health continued to plague him and eventually left him in such a state that he was completely confined to his bed, unable to sit up. Having arranged for his funeral and burial he prepared himself spiritually for his repose. At four o'clock on November 10, 1989, at the age of 58, he gave his soul into the hands of God.

THE VISION OF ST. JOHN OF KRONSTADT

Translated by priestmonk Orestes, Christ the Saviour Orthodox Seminary.



The Holy and Righteous John of Kronstadt recalled this vision which he had in January of 1901:

After evening prayers I laid down to rest a little in my dimly lit cell since I was fatigued. Hanging before the icon of the Mother of God was my lit *lampada*. Not more than a half-hour had passed when I heard a soft rustle. Someone touched my left shoulder, and in a tender voice said to me, “Arise servant of God John, and follow the will of God!”

I arose and saw near the window a glorious *Staretz* (elder) with frosty gray hair, wearing a black *mantia*, and holding a staff in his hand. He looked at me tenderly, and I could scarcely keep from falling because of my great fear. My hands and feet trembled, and I wanted to speak, but my tongue would not obey me. The *Staretz* made the sign of the cross over me, and calm and joy soon came over me. Then I made the sign of the cross myself. He then pointed to the western wall of my cell with his staff in order that I should notice a certain spot. The *Staretz* had inscribed on the wall the following numbers: 1913, 1914, 1917, 1922, 1924, and 1934. Suddenly the wall vanished, and I walked with the *Staretz* toward a green field and saw a mass of crosses—thousands of them—standing as gravemarkers. They were wooden, clay, or gold. I asked the *Staretz*, “What are these crosses for?” He softly answered, “They are for those who suffered and were murdered for their faith in Christ and for the Word of God and have become martyrs!” And so we continued to walk.

Suddenly I saw an entire river of blood and asked the *Staretz*, “What is the meaning of this blood? How much has been spilled?” The *Staretz* looked around and replied, “This is the blood of true Christians!” The *Staretz* then pointed to some clouds, and I saw a mass of burning white lamps. They began to fall to the ground one after another by the tens and by the hundreds. During their descent they grew dim and turned to ashes. The *Staretz* then said to me, “Look!” I saw on a cloud seven burning lamps. I asked, “What is the meaning of the burning lamps which fell to the ground?” He said, “Those are the churches of God which have fallen into heresy, but these seven lamps on the clouds are the seven Catholic and Apostolic Churches which will remain until the end of the world!”

The *Staretz* then pointed high into the air and I saw and heard angels singing, *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth!* Then a large crowd of people with candles in their hands rushed by with joy on their shining faces. They were archbishops, monks, nuns, groups of laymen, young adults, and even children and babies. I asked the wonderworking *Staretz*, “What is the meaning of these people?” He responded, “These are all the people who suffered for the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church, for the holy icons at the hands of the wicked destroyers.” I then asked the great *Staretz* if I could sit down next to them. The *Staretz* said, “It is too early for you to suffer, so joining them would not be blessed by God!” Again I saw a large group of infants who had suffered for Christ under Herod and had received crowns from the Heavenly King.

We walked further and went into a large church. I wanted to make the sign of the cross, but the *Staretz* said, “It is not necessary to cross yourself because this is a place of abomination and desolation!” The church was very gloomy. On the altar was a star and a Gospel book with stars. Candles made of tar were burning and crackling like firewood. The chalice was standing there covered by a strong stench. There was *prospora* with stars. A priest stood before the altar with a face like pitch and a woman was under the altar covered in red with a star on her lips and she screamed and laughed throughout the church saying, “I am free!” I thought “Oh, Lord, how awful!” The people, like madmen, began to run around the altar, scream, whistle, and clap their hands. Then they began to sing lecherous songs. Suddenly, lightning flashed, a frightening thunderbolt resounded, the earth trembled, and the church collapsed, sending the woman, the people, the priest, and the rest into the abyss. I thought “Oh Lord, how awful, save us!”

The *Staretz* saw what had happened as did I. I asked, “Father, tell me, what is the meaning of this frightening church?” He responded, “These are the earthly people, heretics who have abandoned the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church and recognized the newly innovated church which God has not blessed. In this church they do not fast, do not attend services, and do not receive Holy Communion!” I was frightened and said, “The Lord has pity on us, but curses those with death!” The *Staretz* interrupted me and said, “Do not mourn, but just pray!” Then I saw a throng of people, each of whom had a star on the lips and was terribly exhausted from thirst, walking here and there. They saw us and yelled loudly, “Holy Fathers, pray for us. It is very hard for us because we ourselves cannot. Our fathers and mothers did not teach us the Law of God. We do not even have the name of Christ, and we have received no peace. We rejected the Holy Spirit and the sign of the cross!” They began to cry.

I followed after the *Staretz*. “Look!” he said, pointing with his hand. I saw a mountain of human corpses stained in

blood. I was very frightened, and I asked the *Staretz*, “What is the meaning of these dead bodies?” He replied, “These are people who lived the monastic life, were rejected by the Antichrist, and did not receive his seal. They suffered for their faith in Christ and the Apostolic Church and received martyrs crowns dying for Christ. Pray for these servants of God!”

Without warning, the *Staretz* turned to the north and pointed with his hand. I saw an imperial palace, around which dogs were running. Wild beasts and scorpions were roaring and charging and baring their teeth. And I saw the Tsar sitting on a throne. His face was pale and masculine. He was reciting the Jesus Prayer. Suddenly he fell like a dead man. His crown fell. The wild beasts, dogs, and scorpions trampled on the anointed Sovereign. I was frightened and cried bitterly. The *Staretz* took me by my right shoulder. I saw a figure shrouded in white—it was Nicholas II. On his head was a wreath of green leaves, and his face was white and somewhat bloodied. He wore a gold cross around his neck and was quietly whispering a prayer. And then he said to me with tears, “Pray for me, Fr. John. Tell all Orthodox Christians that I, the Tsar-martyr, died manfully for my faith in Christ and the Orthodox Church. Tell the Holy Fathers that they should serve a *Panahida* for me, a sinner, but there will be no grave for me!”

Soon everything became hidden in the fog. I cried bitterly praying for the Tsar-martyr. My hands and feet trembled from fear. The *Staretz* said, “Look!” Then I saw a throng of people scattered about the land who had died from starvation while others were eating grass and vegetation. Dogs were devouring the bodies of the dead, and the stench was terrible. I thought, “Oh Lord, these people had no faith. From their lips they expelled blasphemy, and for this they received God’s anger.”

I also saw an entire mountain of books and among the books worms were crawling, emitting a terrible stench. I asked the *Staretz*, “What is the meaning of these books?” He said, “These books are the Godlessness and blasphemy which will infect all Christians with heretical teachings!” Then the *Staretz* touched his staff to some of the books, and they ignited into flames. The wind scattered the ashes.

Further on, I saw a church around which was a large pile of prayer intentions for the departed. I bent over and wanted

to read them, but the *Staretz* said, “These prayer requests for the dead have been lying here for many years, and the priests have forgotten about them. They are never going to read them, but the dead will ask someone to pray for them!” I asked, “Who will they get to pray for them?” The *Staretz* answered: “The angels will pray for them!”

We proceeded further, and the *Staretz* quickened the pace so that I could hardly keep up with him. “Look!” he said. I saw a large crowd of people being persecuted by demons, who were beating them with stakes, pitchforks, and hooks. I asked the *Staretz*, “What is the meaning of these people?” He answered, “These are the ones who renounced their faith and left the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church and accepted the new innovative church. This group represents priests, monks, nuns, and laymen who renounced their vows or marriage, and engaged in drinking and all sorts of blasphemy and slander. All of these have terrible faces and a terrible stench comes from their mouths. The demons beat them, driving them into the terrible abyss, from where hellfire comes forth.” I was terribly frightened. I made the sign of the cross while praying, “Lord deliver us from such a fate!”

I then saw a group of people, both old and young, all of whom were terribly dressed, and who were raising a large, five pointed star. On each corner were twelve demons and in the middle was satan himself with terrifying horns and a straw head. He emitted a noxious foam onto the people while pronouncing these words, “Arise you accursed ones with the seal of ...” Suddenly many demons appeared with branding irons and on all the people they placed the seal on their lips, above the elbow and on their right hands. I asked the *Staretz*, “What is the meaning of this?” He responded, “This is the mark of the Antichrist!” I made the sign of the cross and followed after the *Staretz*.

He suddenly stopped and pointed to the east with his hand. I saw a large gathering of people with joyous faces carrying crosses and candles in their hands. In their midst stood a large altar as white as snow. On the altar was the cross and the Holy Gospel and over the altar was the aer with a golden imperial crown on which was written in golden letters, “For the short term.” Patriarchs, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, and laymen stood around the altar. They were all singing, *Glory to God in the highest and peace*



on earth. Out of great joy I made the sign of the cross and praised God.

Suddenly the *Staretz* waved his cross upwards three times, and I saw mountain of corpses covered in human blood and above them angels were flying. They were taking the souls of those murdered for the Word of God to heaven while they sang *Alleluia!*

I observed all this and cried loudly. The *Staretz* took me by the hand and forbade me to cry. "What is pleasing to God is that Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and shed His precious blood for us. Such ones will become martyrs who do not accept the seal of the Antichrist, and all who shed their blood will receive heavenly crowns." The *Staretz* then prayed for these servants of God and pointed to the east as the words of the Prophet Daniel came true, *Abomination of desolation*.

Finally, I saw the cupola of Jerusalem. Above it was a star. Within the church millions of people thronged and still many more were trying to enter. I wanted to make the sign of the cross, but the *Staretz* grabbed my hand and said, "Here is the abomination of desolation!" So we entered into the church, and it was full of people.

I saw an altar on which tallow candles were burning. On the altar was a king in red, blazing, porphyry. On his head was a golden crown with a star. I asked the *Staretz*, "Who is this?" He replied, "The Antichrist!" He was very tall with eyes like fire, black eyebrows, a wedge-shaped beard, a ferocious, cunning, evil, and terrible face. He alone was on the altar and he reached his hands out to the people. He had claws as those of a tiger for hands and he shouted, "I am King. I am God. I am the Leader. He who does not have my seal will be put to death."

All the people fell down and worshipped him, and he began to place his seal on their lips and on their hands in order that they should receive some bread and not die from hunger and thirst. Around the Antichrist his servants were leading several people whose hands were bound as they had not bowed down to worship him. They said, "We are Christians, and we all believe in our Lord Jesus Christ!" The Antichrist ripped off their heads in a flash and Christian blood began to flow. A child was then led to the altar of the Antichrist to worship him, but he boldly proclaimed, "I am a Christian and believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, but you are a minister, a servant of satan!" "Death to him!" exclaimed the Antichrist. Others who accepted the seal of the Antichrist fell down and worshipped him.

Suddenly, a roar of thunder resounded and a thousand lightning flashes began to sparkle. Arrows began to strike the servants of the Antichrist. Then a large flaming arrow flashed by and hit the Antichrist himself on the head. As he waved his hand, his crown fell and was crushed into the ground. Then millions of birds flew in and perched

on the servants of the Antichrist. I felt the *Staretz* take me by the hand.

We walked further on, and I again saw much Christian blood. It was here that I remembered the words of Saint John the Theologian in the book of Revelation that blood would *be up to the horse's bridle*. I thought, "Oh my God, save us!" At that time I saw angels flying and singing, *Holy, Holy, Holy. Lord of Sabbaoth!* The *Staretz* looked back and went on to say, "Do not grieve, for soon, very soon, will come the end of the world! Pray to the Lord. God be merciful to His servants!"

Time was drawing near to a close. He pointed to the east, fell to his knees and began to pray so I prayed with him. Then the *Staretz* began to quickly depart from the earth to the heights of heaven. As he did so, I remembered that I did not know his name, so I cried out loudly, "Father, what is your name?" He tenderly replied, "Seraphim of Sarov!"

That is what I saw, and this is what I have recorded for Orthodox Christians.

A large bell rang above my head, and I heard the sound and arose from bed. "Lord, bless and help me through the prayers of the great *Staretz*! You have enlightened me, the sinful servant, the priest John of Kronstadt."



There is a huge difference between Buddhist and Orthodox asceticism. In Buddhism they try to make a disclaimer and they reach *nirvana*. They confuse a reflection with mystical vision. They see created light with their mind. This was best done with Plotinus, in Neo-Platonism. The Fathers know this, and we can call it the "cloud of unknowing," but they went beyond this and reached the **vision of the uncreated Light**. Then they experience that the Light comes from a Person and not from an idea, and they feel a personal relationship with God and, at the same time, there develops a great love for God and the whole world until martyrdom and "self-hatred."

Some say that meditation brings them a certain peace. Externally this appears good, but these people are possessed by conceit and this results in carnal warfare. Even if they leave Buddhism, they again have carnal warfare. This shows the satanism of this method.

Others say that Buddhism has nothing to do with demonism. However, those who speak thus know Buddhism only from books and speak theoretically. Action is different.

Elder Sophrony of Essex (+1993)

THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTED STATE:

Source: "Marriage and Virginitly according to St. John Chrysostom," by Archpriest Josiah B. Trenham, *St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood* (2013), pp. 233-242. NOTE: Footnote 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.

The Continuity of the Resurrected State

If the Resurrection of Christ Himself is the main clue to discerning the nature of glorified humanity, what conclusion about that future state can we draw from Christ's Resurrection? Much of St. John's teaching on the future resurrected body occurs in his commentary on chapter 15 of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. St. John devoted five extended homilies to expounding the Holy Apostle's teaching in this chapter. In these homilies St. John labored to emphasize the reality that the resurrected body maintains *both* a continuity with our present fallen bodies and a discontinuity. The Resurrection is a transfiguration of our earthly and mortal bodies, not an eradication thereof nor an entirely new creation.

St. John's whole approach to explaining the nature of the resurrected body is a careful theological exposition designed to avoid two heretical poles that plagued the early Christian communities. On the one hand, Chrysostom sought to distance himself from a *Gnostic* conception of the resurrected state. It was widely believed that the influential Origen had taught that the *spiritual body* vouchsafed to mankind in the coming Kingdom was entirely immaterial and was *not* the continuation of the earthly body in a transfigured state. Origen taught that *the original embodiment* of man took place as a result of the fall of pure souls. The body is thus thought to be given for the perfection of the soul. Once the body has accomplished its purpose and the soul is perfected, there no longer remains a need for this material body at all. What Origen actually taught concerning this matter is not at all clear.

This theology of Origen is expressed in his interpretation of the "garments of skin" given to Adam and Eve as *bodies themselves*. This interpretation was not accepted by the Fathers of the Church and Origen found a vigorous opponent and instrument of censure in St. Methodius of Olympus. In his *On the Resurrection*, St. Methodius attacked many aspects of the original *Origenism*. The hierarch of Olympus opens his discourse on the Resurrection by stating: "Now the question has already been raised, and answered that the 'garments of skin' are not bodies. Nevertheless, let us speak of it again, for it is not enough to have mentioned it once." Chrysostom demonstrates in his homilies his profound awareness of the diverse heretical teachings surrounding notions of the

resurrected body. Commenting on St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, where is found the verse *For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan ... not for that we would be unclothed. but that we would lie clothed upon* (2 Cor 5:4), Chrysostom says: "Here again he has utterly and manifestly stopped the mouths of the heretics, showing that he is not speaking absolutely of a body differing in identity, but of corruption and incorruption."

In articulating an Orthodox position on the subject, Chrysostom relied heavily upon St. Methodius of Olympus. In a number of homilies touching on the Resurrection, St. John frequently quotes *verbatim* or *near verbatim* from St. Methodius. The human *essence* remains the same in the Resurrection, but the attributes are changed. Human nature remains human nature in the Resurrection.

On the other hand, Chrysostom in his teaching on the future resurrected state labored against a *Jewish* conception, which conceived of a sensual heaven and Resurrection. For Chrysostom, the next life is not simply a continuation of this life without its unfortunate negatives such as sickness, pain, and sorrow. Instead, it will encompass another mode of life altogether: "In the kingdom there will be no more marriage, no more labor pains, or pleasure or intercourse, or plenty of money, or management of possessions, food or clothing, or agriculture and sailing, or arts and architecture, or cities or houses, but some other condition and way of life. All these things will pass away."

The continuity of the resurrected body with the earthly body is demonstrated in the Resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ. In these appearances Jesus clearly bears the nail prints from His Crucifixion. This reality served to prove that the resurrected body of Jesus was the very same body that was crucified.

Chrysostom notes that the heretical teaching of radical discontinuity between the resurrected body and the fallen earthly body is also untenable since St. Paul says we want not to *take off the body* but to put on the heavenly body and to have the mortal swallowed up by life (cf. 2 Cor 5:4). If God leaves the original body in the grave and creates another new body, then corruption is not swallowed up by life, but remains with the old body. In this case there would be no victory over death. And again, in another place (in his *Homilies on First Corinthians*, no. 39), St. John says: "The nature that was cast down must itself also gain the victory."

The Discontinuity of the Resurrected State

While St. John labors the importance of the continuity of the resurrected body with our present fallen bodies, he does not fail to elucidate the great transformation that shall take place. Our future bodies are *the same* and *not the same* (καὶ γὰρ αὐτός ἐστι, καὶ οὐκ αὐτός). Commenting on 1 Cor 15:37-38 (...and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may

chance of wheat, or of some other grain; but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body...), Chrysostom teaches that the sameness is a sameness of essence, but that essence will be more glorious, beautiful, and improved. God would not destroy and raise our bodies if He did not intend to raise them better and more glorious. The future body possesses a great superiority over our present one. That body is as superior to this one as the heavenly is to the earthly, and as a permanent house is to a temporary tabernacle. The *habitation which is from heaven* (2 Cor. 5:2) is the incorruptible body. At the heart of this discontinuity and greater glory is the body's reception of imperishability and immortality.

In this glorified condition, resurrected man will throw off earthly gifts such as prophecy and tongues, gifts given by God for earthly effect, and the atmosphere of mankind in the next life will be one of intense love comparable to nothing on this earth. "For here, there are many things that weaken our love; wealth, business, passions of the body, disorders of the soul; but there, none of these." Again commenting on the next life, St. John states that grief, concern, desire, stumbling, anger, lust for possessions, poverty, wealth, and dishonor will not exist, but "everything will be joy, everything peace, everything love, everything happiness, everything that is true, unalloyed and stable."

When he speaks about man's knowledge, Chrysostom speaks of resurrected man in a manner reminiscent of Adam in the Garden. Commenting on the teaching of St. Paul that, *when that which is perfect is come... knowledge shall vanish away* (1 Cor 13:10, 8), St John explains: "What then? Are we to live in ignorance? Far from it. Nay, then especially it is probable that our knowledge is made intense. Wherefore also he said, *Then shall I know, even as I also am known* (1 Cor 13:12) ... It is not therefore knowledge that is done away with, but the circumstance that our knowledge is in part. For we shall know not only as much, but even a great deal more."

Contrary to the teaching of the *Anomoean* heretics, who filled Chrysostom's church when he began his public preaching as a priest, this passage does not teach that man can or will ever see and know God's *essence*. [The *Anomoeans* were a sect that upheld an extreme form of Arianism, that Jesus Christ was not of the same nature (*consubstantial*) as God the Father nor was of like nature (*homoiousian*), Ed.].

"Where are those who say they have attained and possess the fullness of knowledge? The fact is that they have really fallen into the deepest ignorance... I urge you, then, to flee from the madness of these men. They are obstinately striving to know what God is in His essence ... the prophets know neither His essence nor His wisdom, and His wisdom comes from His essence... Let us, therefore, listen to the angels so that you may know—and know abundantly—that

not even in heaven does any created power know God in His essence."

Glorified man will perceive God as do the angels, who have to cover their eyes and who behold not the essence of God itself but a fitting condescension (*συγκατάβασις*). When St. John the Theologian writes that *no one has ever seen God*, this means that no one has ever had or ever will have an exact grasp (*ἀκριβῆ κατάληψιν*) or perfect comprehension (*τετρανωμένην γνώσιν*) of God.

To illustrate the fundamental ontological distance between God and man, Chrysostom puts before his listeners the question: "For what distance do you suppose there is between God and man? As great as between men and worms? Or as great as between angels and worms? But when I have mentioned a distance even thus great, I have not at all expressed it."

To express the real distance between God and man is, in fact, impossible. Driving home his point, Chrysostom asks his hearers if they would be at all interested in having a great reputation among worms! If humans, who love glory in their pride, are not interested in the praise of worms, how much less is God, Who is far above the passion of pride, in need of or interested in any human praise. **Only in His great condescension toward man does God say that He desires man's praise, and this is solely to promote man's salvation.** This teaching on the *unknowability of God's essence* should not disturb any reasonable person, for it is clear that we humans do not even know *our own essences*, let alone God's!...

Though not seeing God's essence, resurrected man will perceive all things with greater clarity (*σαφέστερον*) and perspicuity (*τρανότερον*). So great will be the advancement and transformation of human perception that it can only be compared to the difference between a child and an adult, or between seeing darkly through a glass versus seeing face to face. To illustrate the nature of this immersing clarity, St. John uses the development of sacred rites in redemptive history. Examining the Holy Passover, Chrysostom shows that the Jews celebrated their rite "as in a mirror and darkly" (*ὡς ἐν ἑσόπτρῳ καὶ ἐν αἰνίγματι*). They could not see Christ clearly in the slaughtered lamb, in the Sprinkled blood, and in the door posts.

These Old Testament sacramental types became clear when the antitype appeared. The same will occur at the Resurrection. In this light the future state of man, as radical an alteration as it is, is nevertheless a *natural process* of increasing clarity. Not being capable of beholding the essence of God does not mean that glorified man will not see God. Glorified man will not only see God, but he will *gaze* intently upon Him and in perfect silence will *continually commune* (*διὰ παντὸς δὲ τῷ Θεῷ διαλεγομένην*) with Him. These realities, in fact, are what constitute the unspeakable pleasure of heaven.

COME UNTO ME...

By St. John of Kronstadt, from "My Life in Christ," extracts from the diary of the saint, translated by E. E. Goulaeff, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY (1994), pp. 60-67.

The greatest gift of God, which we mostly need and which we very often obtain from God, through our prayers, is peace or rest of heart. As the Lord Himself says: *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* (Mt 11:28). Therefore, having obtained this rest, rejoice, and consider yourself as rich and possessing all things.

Let everybody remember constantly that he is God's—soul and body—and that he depends on God for all his spiritual and bodily wants every moment of his life; and therefore let him turn to God every time that he feels a want of anything (either for the soul or for the body): when, for instance, he is oppressed in body or soul—that is, when he is stricken by sorrows (spiritual sickness) or by passions (bodily sickness); also when he is threatened by the inconstancy of the elements (of fire, water, air, storm); likewise when he is about to undertake anything. Let him then remember the Author of all things, Who created everything from nothing, and Who has bestowed various powers upon His creatures, so that they may accomplish many and various works.

Every good thought presupposes the existence within us of a good and higher origin, instructing our soul in holiness. This is evident, because it seems as if everything good were somehow hidden in us, and that we endeavor in vain to introduce into our heart that which was its former inheritance. How true are the words of the Apostle: *What hast thou that thou didst not receive [every good thought, all natural gifts]? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?* (1 Cor 4:7).

We notice in ourselves the struggle between faith and unbelief, between the good power and the evil one; and in the world, between the spirit of the Church and the spirit of the world. There, through the spirit, you will distinguish two clearly antagonistic sides: the side of light and the side of darkness; of good and evil; the spirit of the Church and of religion, and the spirit of worldliness and unbelief. Do you know why it is so? It is owing to the struggle of two antagonistic forces: of the power of God and the power of the Devil. The Lord works in the sons who are obedient to Him, and the Devil in the sons of disobedience [*the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.* (1 Eph 2:2)]. And I, too, often feel within me the struggle of the same two antagonistic forces. When I stand up to pray, the evil force sometimes painfully oppresses and weighs down my heart, so that it cannot raise itself to God.

The surer and stronger are the means that unite us to God (prayer and repentance), the more destructive are the actions brought to bear against them by God's opponent and ours, who makes use of every means to attain this end: our body, so inclined to laziness; the weakness of our soul, its attach-

ment to earthly goods and cares; doubt, so near to everyone; incredulity, unbelief; impure, evil, and blasphemous thoughts; the oppression of the heart, the darkening of the mind—all these are brought to bear against the inattentive, through the action of the enemy, in order to put a stumbling-block in the way of their prayer, on the ladder that leads us up to God. This is the reason why so few pray sincerely and heartily; this is the reason why Christians so very seldom prepare themselves for Holy Communion—so seldom confess and receive the Sacrament.

Our strength, our soul, is invisible; the strength of animals is also invisible; in plants also, their strength, their life, is invisible; the whole material world exists and is moved by an invisible power (by the laws of nature). In the higher regions there are the heavenly powers, pure and free from everything material. Everything heavenly and earthly, the highest and the lowest, lead up to a single Almighty Power, which has produced every power in heaven and on earth. Thus, let every power praise the Only One Power in Three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And let all earth-born creatures praise It, especially through the all-binding power of love, everywhere diffusing life and blessedness.

For a long time I did not clearly understand how necessary it is that our soul should be strengthened by the Holy Ghost. But now, the Most Gracious Lord has granted me to know how indispensable this is. Yes, it is necessary every moment of our life, just as breathing is; it is necessary during prayer and throughout the whole of our life. Unless He strengthens our soul, it is constantly inclined to every sin, and, therefore, to spiritual death; it becomes enfeebled, loses all power, through the evil that enters into the heart, and incapable of any good. Without the strengthening of the Holy Ghost, one feels how the heart is undermined by various evils, and is ready to sink every moment into their abyss.

It is then that our heart must stand firm as upon a rock. And this rock is the Holy Ghost. He strengthens our powers; and when a man prays, He strengthens his heart by faith and by the hope of receiving that which he prays for. He inflames the soul with love to God; He fills the soul with bright, good thoughts, strengthening the mind and heart. If the man has any work to accomplish, He strengthens his heart by the conviction of the importance and the necessity of his labor, and by an invincible patience which overcomes all difficulties. He inspires in man, in his intercourse with people of various positions and both sexes, a respect for the human person, who is made after God's image—whoever it may be—and is redeemed by the Blood of Christ the Lord; and makes him disregard the sometimes very unsightly outer appearance of another man's body and dress, as well as his roughness of speech and manners. It is the Holy Ghost who unites us all through love, as the children of the same Heavenly Father, and in Jesus Christ teaches us to pray: *Our Father which art in Heaven...*

Imagine that you see the inaccessible Light from which the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars proceeded; that you see the infinite Love which sent into the world its only-begotten Son to save the world from eternal torment; that you see the Primeval Beauty from which are derived all the variety and beauty existing in the world—the variety and beauty of plants, stones, shells, fishes, birds, beasts, and all human beauty! Imagine that you see the Creator of heaven and earth, loving, resplendent with the inaccessible light of His perfections. What will you then feel? And the Christian faith prepares us all for this vision. Observe the plants: in them are evident (1) the wonderful Wisdom, appearing in every part of the plant; (2) the Life-giving Power, strengthening and maintaining every part of the plant in its proper condition, and (3) the Omnipotence, by which the Eternal Wisdom changes the aspect of formless matter so easily, making it answer His everlasting intentions and purposes. “*But Thou, Lord, art most high for evermore.* (Pss 92:8). *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.* (Pss 139:6).

In the same manner as objects situated at a great distance off on the earth, though they may be large, are quite invisible from afar if the sun is not reflected in them, whilst even small ones are visible a long way off if the sun is reflected in them, so it is also amongst men: those in whom the Eternal Sun of Righteousness, God, is not reflected in His perfections, are only noticeable when quite near by a very few; but if the Sun of Righteousness is reflected in them, then they are seen by all from a very great distance, they are glorified by all; they are people of all places and of all times (the saints); some of them shine like the sun, others like the moon, and others like the stars.

Gazing upon God’s creatures and seeing their infinite variety, I see myself exalted above all their multitudes by the likeness and image of God, by the understanding and by freedom, by the capability of being able to examine all of them by means of my intellect, and to wonder at the wisdom and graciousness of the Creator as manifested in them. O, how I ought to reverence my Creator! O, how I ought to honor the authors of my being—my father and my mother! They have given me existence for a time—for a time and for eternity; they have led me, in accordance with the will of God, Who created me in my mother’s womb, into the magnificent palace of the world, so that in due time the Creator may admit me into the palace of heaven.

The state or any society is a body. As in the body God has put all the members together, and each one separately in their proper places, so likewise is the social body. God has set each one in his proper place, the deeds of each one being the reason of his occupying this or that particular place.

Everyone sees that light is shed upon the earth from heaven, because the sun, the moon, and the stars light us from the heavenly circle. This shows that the uncreated wise Light, the Lord our God, dwells pre-eminently in the heavens; and from Him every light descends upon us, both material and spiritual—the

light of the intellect and of the heart. *That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* (Jn 1:9) *God is love.* (Jn 4:16). All thoughts, feelings, every disposition of the heart tending to destroy love and create enmity, proceed from the Devil. Let this be engraved in your heart, and hold fast in every way to love. *Follow after charity.* (1 Cor 14:1). Bear in mind: do that which is in opposition to the old carnal, sinful man; go all your life against the Devil’s will. This is the object of your life, and also your glory in Jesus Christ. *They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.* (Gal 5:24). Establish in your heart the following truth: one thing alone is worthy of all our hatred, that is, sin or vice; and towards men, nourish exclusively love. The royal law is plain: *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* (Mt 22:39).

When, during prayer, your heart is overwhelmed with despondency and melancholy, be sure that these proceed from the Devil endeavoring by every means to hinder you in your prayer. Be firm, take courage, and by the remembrance of God drive away the deadly feeling. Observe: if not in your thoughts, then in your heart, the enemy often endeavors to blaspheme the name of Almighty God. What constitutes blasphemy of the heart against God? Doubt, unbelief, despondency, impatience under God’s chastisements, murmuring, and all the passions. By unbelief in God’s truth and mercy, the enemy utters blasphemy against the truth, mercy, and omnipotence of God; by despondency, he blasphemes God’s goodness; in general, by the outburst of human passions, he blasphemes God’s all-merciful providence and truth.

Establish in your mind and heart this truth: that the invisible plays the first part in the whole world, in every being; and that when the invisible leaves a certain being, the latter loses life and is destroyed: so that the visible in beings, without the invisible, forms but a mass of earth. I and all men live through an invisible first cause—God.

Men are enveloped in the darkness of ignorance of God, of themselves, and of the enemies of their salvation, who can therefore easily rob the mental house of our soul—its mental wealth.

When it is said to the inner man: *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead* (Eph 5:14), the real sleep of the soul, very like the ordinary bodily sleep, is meant. Also, when it is said: *My heart, awake; why sleepest thou?* the real sleep of the heart is meant, and it is not said merely allegorically. When the body sleeps, it is weakened in every part and becomes insensible; so likewise the soul, sleeping the sleep of sin, becomes weakened in its powers, and insensible to everything that concerns faith, hope, and love. Tell it, for instance, that the Son of God came down upon earth for it and became man to save it from everlasting death; speak to it of His saving teaching, His miracles, His sufferings and death upon the Cross, His Resurrection, Ascension, and His second coming. The soul cannot understand or contain all this; it is unable to feel God’s benefits, but is asleep, perfectly asleep, to faith, hope, and love. It does not

fear the righteous Judge, future torments, the worm that never rests, the unquenchable fire. It sleeps—it neither hears, nor sees, nor feels. It is remarkable that bodily sleep begins with the heart; first of all the heart falls asleep, and afterwards the body. The sleeper's eyes are closed and do not see, neither do his ears hear; and it is the same with the soul that sleeps the sleep of sin. But the soul ought always to see through the eyes of the heart, even during sleep, as it is written: *I sleep, but my soul waketh.* (Songs 5:2).

You cannot have failed to notice that all our strength lies in the heart. When the heart is light, the whole man feels at ease and happy; whilst when the heart is heavy, he feels wretched. But this relief you can only find in faith, and therefore especially in the Church, as the place where faith predominates; here God touches your hearts through His cleansing grace, and gives you His easy yoke to bear. This is a great mystery, which is worth everyone's knowing. When the heart is light, the man is ready to run and leap. This is why David *danced when he played before the ark.* (1 Chr 13:8; 2 Sam 6:14).

When you are slandered, and therefore grow disturbed and sick at heart, it shows that pride is in you, and that it must be wounded and driven out by outward dishonor. Therefore do not be irritated by derision, and do not bear malice against those who hate you and slander you, but love them as your physicians, whom God has sent you to instruct you and to teach you humility, and pray to God for them.

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you. (Mt 5:44). Say to yourself, "It is not me that they slander, but my evil passions; not me that they strike, but that viper which nestles in my heart, and smarts when anybody speaks ill of it. I will comfort myself with the thought that, perhaps, these good people will drive it from my heart by their caustic words, and my heart will then cease to ache." Therefore, thank God for outward dishonor; those who endure dishonor here will not be subjected to it in the next world. *She hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.* (Isa 40:2). Lord, Thou wilt ordain peace for us; for Thou also hast wrought all our works for us. (Isa 26:12).

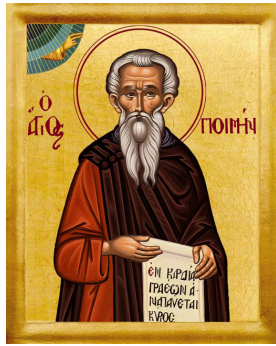
When you pray that your sins may be forgiven, strengthen yourself always by faith, and trust in God's mercy, Who is ever ready to forgive our sins after sincere prayer, and fear lest despair should fall on your heart—that despair which declares itself by deep despondency and forced tears. What are your sins in comparison to God's mercy, whatever they be, if only you truly repent of them? But it often happens that when a man prays, he does not, in his heart, inwardly hope that his sins will be forgiven, counting them as though they were above God's mercy. Therefore, he certainly will not obtain forgiveness, even should he shed fountains of involuntary tears; and with a sorrowful, straitened heart he will depart from the Gracious God: which is only what he deserves. *Believe that ye receive them,* says the Lord, *and ye shall have them.* (Mk 11:24). Not to be sure of receiving what you ask God for, is a blasphemy against God.

When there is unbelief in anything true and sacred, the mind is generally darkened, the unbelieving heart is oppressed with fear; whilst when there is sincere faith, it experiences joy, tranquility, breadth or expansion of life within it, so that the mind becomes bright and far-seeing. Is it not evident that truth triumphs over the heart's madness? Is not the deceitfulness of the heart manifest? Yes; the sufferings of the heart at the time of its unbelief in anything true and sacred are a sign of the truth of that in which it does not believe. The heart itself dies when it subjects the truth to doubt and attempts to destroy that which cannot be destroyed; whilst the expansion of the heart when it sincerely believes is also a true sign of the truth of that in which it believes, because the object in which we believe communicates life to our heart, and renews and strengthens this life. Our heart, corrupted by sin, is but a poor receptacle of life, for sin is death and not life, and the fullness of life is outside us. But as this spiritual life is invisible, and is communicated to us according to our faith in the invisible personal life in God, therefore it is our lively sincere faith in God that brings life into our heart. Without faith, the heart must naturally feel oppression and sorrow, as the result of the curtailing and diminution of life. But, besides faith, there must also be an accord of our spiritual activity with the object of our faith, for man is a moral being.

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Rom 8:6). Who will not agree with these words of the Apostle? The carnal mind is indeed death. Draw nigh, you who are mercenary, covetous, envious, selfish, proud, ambitious, and let us look upon you, upon your actions and your life! Disclose to us, if you will, the thoughts of your heart! We shall be convinced by you—a living example—that the carnal mind is death. You do not live the true life; you are spiritually dead; you that have freedom are inwardly bound; you that have intelligence are as the foolish, because *the light that is in thee is darkness.* (Mt 6:23). You have received from God a heart capable of delighting in everything that is true, holy, good, and beautiful; but by the carnal mind you have stifled in it all noble feelings, all noble impulses; you have become a corpse; ye have no life in you. (Jn 6:53). But *to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

Let any Christian man, leading the life of faith, destroying the passions within him, and thinking "*whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise*" (Phil 4:8), come to us, and tell us what he feels in his soul from the mind of the Spirit. He will say: *I feel in my heart continual peace and joy in the Holy Ghost* (Rom 14:17), my heart expands, I feel an abundance of life. I mock at everything carnal; I wonder how it can have such a great power over the hearts of carnal men, and I give myself up to the continual contemplation of the heavenly, spiritual, invisible blessings prepared for those who love God. Amen.

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“I’M GONNA TELL GOD EVERYTHING”

By His Eminence Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou. From *Ekklesiastiki Paremvasi*, “Θὰ Σὰς Μαρτυρήσω Ὅλους στὸν Θεό...,” February 2014. Translated by John Sanidopoulos.

Christ had great communication with children; He loved them, hugged them and encouraged His disciples to let them come near Him, teaching His listeners to become like children in order to be saved. He also worked many miracles for them, among other things. He saw in children the purity of their hearts, their immaculate sensitivity, the sincerity of their words, their search for truth, the manifestation of their love.

And they reciprocated this love to Christ, so that when He entered Jerusalem they cheered Him in the Temple, crying: *Hosanna to the son of David!* And to the indignation of the high priests and scribes Christ recalled the Psalm: *Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise.* (Mt 21:16).

These things I remembered when I read online the words of a three-year-old child from Syria, shortly before he died. He was fatally injured and a few minutes before his last breath he said with tears in his eyes, in the hospital where they cared for him: *“I will testify all of you to God ... I will tell Him everything ...”*

What awesome, true and frank words! It breaks hearts, it is a whipping against our cruel and callous society. He lived only three years on the earth, which God created to be “very good,” and he felt it to be inhospitable. The earth is not to blame, inanimate nature, but man, who rebelled against God and infects it

constantly. This child did not have time to rejoice in the creation of God, to create something in this world from which he came.

Truly, how soon did he see the hatred and evil of man? Unfortunately, in the short period of his life he witnessed the great passions of man concentrated, which take no account of anything and destroy everything. One moment is enough to know the eternal love of God and the eternal hatred of the evil one, through his instruments.

And as soon as this little child died, of course he testified everyone to God, their names and addresses, for the devastation they wreaked. And he told God everything about how much pain he went through in his short life, the pain of his body and soul. And the sighs of this small child united with the sighs of all those who suffer unjustly, as the Apocalypse says: *How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?* (Rev 6:10).

My child, “testify” them, reveal all of them to God, those who infect over all His creation, say it all to God. Otherwise, he knows their plans, the methods they use to implement them, and the crimes they carry. But you also tell Him, because He loves children and receives their pain.

If we listened to the hurting voice of this three-year-old child in Syria, as well as all the other children who are abused, tortured, raped and killed, we would be better people. One day, however, all will be revealed and we will understand that God knew about everything, and he listened to the pain of those who suffered unjustly, and the children in pain.